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SOI: [1.1/TAS](#) DOI: [10.15863/TAS](#)

## International Scientific Journal Theoretical & Applied Science

p-ISSN: 2308-4944 (print) e-ISSN: 2409-0085 (online)

Year: 2020 Issue: 04 Volume: 84

Published: 12.04.2020 <http://T-Science.org>

QR – Issue



QR – Article



**Ugilyov Khamdamovna Mavlonova**  
Bukhara State University  
Senior teacher of  
ESP for Natural Sciences Department  
[dagotys@mail.ru](mailto:dagotys@mail.ru)

**Dilfuza Salimboyevna Ruziyeva**  
Bukhara State University  
Teacher of  
ESP for Natural Sciences Department

## THE USE OF IRONY IN LITERATURE

**Abstract:** ironically, on the surface, it means something words and phrases that, when thought about more deeply, make the reader laugh the alarm has an internal meaning.

**Key words:** irony, satire, humor, comedy, phrases, internal meaning.

**Language:** English

**Citation:** Mavlonova, U. K., & Ruziyeva, D. S. (2020). The use of irony in literature. *ISJ Theoretical & Applied Science*, 04 (84), 362-364.

**Soi:** <http://s-o-i.org/1.1/TAS-04-84-63> **Doi:**  <https://dx.doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2020.04.84.63>

**Scopus ASCC:** 1208.

### Introduction

Irony in Mark Twain's Novel Pudd'nhead Wilson "David Wilson, the title character of Pudd'nhead Wilson, is a master of irony. In fact, his use of irony permanently marks him. When he first arrives in Dawson's Landing in 1830, he makes an ironic remark that the villagers cannot understand. Distracted by the annoying yelping of an unseen dog, he says, 'I wished I owned half of that dog.' When asked why, he replies, 'Because I would kill my half.' He does not really want to own half the dog, and he probably does not really want to kill it; he merely wants to silence it and knows killing half the dog would kill the whole animal and achieve the desired effect. His remark is a simple example of irony, and the failure of the villagers to understand it causes them immediately to brand Wilson a fool and nickname him 'pudd'nhead.' The very title of the novel is, therefore, based on irony, and that irony is compounded by the fact that Wilson is anything but a fool." — R. Kent Rasmussen, Bloom's How to Write About Mark Twain. Infobase, 2008

### II. Literature review

Irony in Shakespeare's Play Julius Caesar "A classic example of irony is Mark Antony's speech in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Although Antony declares, 'I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him,' and declares that the assassins are 'honorable men,' he means just the opposite." — Bryan Garner, Garner's Modern American Usage. Oxford University Press, 2009

*Uses and Characteristics of Irony.* "Irony may be used as a rhetorical device to enforce one's meaning. It may be used . . . as a satiric device to attack a point of view or to expose folly, hypocrisy, or vanity. It may be used as a heuristic device to lead one's readers to see that things are not so simple or certain as they seem, or perhaps not so complex or doubtful as they seem. It is probable that most irony is rhetorical, satirical, or heuristic. . . ."

### III. Analysis

"In the first place irony is a double-layered or two-story phenomenon. . . . In the second place, there is always some kind of opposition that may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility. . . . In the third place, there is in irony an element of

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'innocence'.'— D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*. Methuen, 1969

*An Age of Irony*. "It is sometimes said that we live in an age of irony. Irony in this sense may be found, for example, all throughout *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. Suppose you hear a political candidate give a terribly long speech, one that rambles on and on without end. Afterward, you might turn to a friend sitting next to you, roll your eyes, and say, 'Well, that was short and to the point, wasn't it?' You are being ironic. You are counting on your friend to turn the literal meaning of your expression, to read it as exactly the opposite of what your words actually mean. ..."

"When irony works, it helps to cement social bonds and mutual understanding because the speaker and hearer of irony both know to turn the utterance, and they know that the other one knows they will turn the utterance. ..."

"Irony is a kind of winking at each other, as we all understand the game of meaning reversal that is being played." — Barry Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading*. Sage, 2010

*Irony as Mass Therapy*. "Irony has always been a primary tool the under-powered use to tear at the over-powered in our culture. But now irony has become the bait that media corporations use to appeal to educated consumers. ... It's almost an ultimate irony that those who say they don't like TV will sit and watch TV as long as the hosts of their favorite shows act like they don't like TV, either. Somewhere in this swirl of droll poses and pseudo-insights, irony itself becomes a kind of mass therapy for a politically confused culture. It offers a comfortable space where complicity doesn't feel like complicity. It makes you feel like you are counter-cultural while never requiring you to leave the mainstream culture it has so much fun teasing. We are happy enough with this therapy that we feel no need to enact social change." — Dan French, review of *The Daily Show*, 2001.

### IV. Discussion

Alanis Morissette's "Ironic", "Alanis Morissette's 'Ironic,' in which situations purporting to be ironic are merely sad, random, or annoying (a traffic jam when you're late, a no-smoking sign on your cigarette break) perpetuates widespread misuse of the word and outrages irony prescriptivists. It is, of course, ironic that 'Ironic' is an unironic song about irony. Bonus irony: 'Ironic' is widely cited as an example of how Americans don't get irony, despite the fact that Alanis Morissette is Canadian." — Jon Winokur, *The Big Book of Irony*. St. Martin's, 2007

"Direct expression, with no tricks, gimmickry, or irony, has come to be interpreted ironically because the default interpretive apparatus says, 'He can't really mean THAT!' When a culture becomes ironic about itself en masse, simple statements of brutal fact, simple judgments of hate or dislike become humorous

because they unveil the absurdity, 'friendliness,' and caution of normal public expression. It's funny because it's true. Honestly. We're all upside down now." — R. Jay Magill, Jr., *Chic Ironic Bitterness*. University of Michigan Press, 2007.

Alan Bennett on Irony. "We're conceived in irony. We float in it from the womb. It's the amniotic fluid. It's the silver sea. It's the waters at their priest-like task, washing away guilt and purpose and responsibility. Joking but not joking. Caring but not caring. Serious but not serious." — Hilary in *The Old Country* by Alan Bennett, 1977

"Mobsters are reputedly huge fans of *The Godfather*. They don't see it as a tale of individual moral corruption. They see it as a nostalgia trip to better days for the mob." — Jonah Goldberg, "The Irony of Irony." *National Review*, April 28, 1999

"Irony deficiency is directly proportional to the strength of the political commitment or religious fervor. True believers of all persuasions are irony deficient. ..."

"Brutal dictators are irony deficient—take Hitler, Stalin, Kim Jong-il, and Saddam Hussein, a world-class vulgarian whose art collection consisted of kitsch paintings displayed unironically." — Jon Winokur, *The Big Book of Irony*. Macmillan, 2007

"Here is something ironic: We live at a time when our diets are richer in irony than ever before in human history, yet millions of us suffer from that silentcrippler, irony deficiency ... not so much a deficiency in irony itself, but an inability to utilize the abundance of irony all around us." — Swami Beyondananda, *Duck Soup for the Soul*. Hysteria, 1999

"Will people who detect a lack of irony in other cultures never stop to consider that this may be a sign of their own irony deficiency? Maybe it's defensible when the apes detect a lack of irony in Charlton Heston in *Planet of the Apes*, but not when, say, Brits detect it in, say, Americans as a race. ... The point of irony, after all, is to say things behind people's backs to their faces. If you look around the poker table and can't tell who the pigeon is, it's you." — Roy Blount, Jr., "How to Talk Southern." *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 2004

*The Lighter Side of Irony*. Rachel Berry: Mr. Schuester, do you have any idea how ridiculous it is to give the lead solo in "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat" to a boy in a wheelchair?

Artie Abrams: I think Mr. Schue is using irony to enhance the performance.

Rachel Berry: There's nothing ironic about show choir! — Pilot episode of *Glee*, 2009

### V. Conclusion

Woman: I started riding these trains in the '40s. Those days a man would give up his seat for a woman. Now we're liberated and we have to stand.

Elaine: It's ironic.

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Woman: What's ironic?

Elaine: This, that we've come all this way, we have made all this progress, but you know we've lost the little things, the niceties.

Woman: No, I mean what does ironic mean?

Elaine: Oh.

—“The Subway,” Seinfeld, Jan. 8 1992

“I'm aware of the irony of appearing on TV in order to decry it.” — Sideshow Bob, The Simpsons

“Math was my worst subject because I could never persuade the teacher that my answers were meant ironically.”— Calvin Trillin

Lyn Cassady: It's okay, you can “attack” me.

Bob Wilton: What's with the quotation fingers? It's like saying I'm only capable of ironic attacking or something.— The Men Who Stare at Goats, 200

Irony is the use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. Similarly, irony may be a statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.

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