



УНИВЕРСИТЕТ  
ЛОБАЧЕВСКОГО

# Allusion and irony

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**Allusion** is an indirect reference to (a hint at) some historical or literary fact (or personage) expressed in the text.

It does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers. It is just a passing comment and the writer expects the reader to possess enough knowledge to spot the allusion and grasp its importance in a text. Therefore, allusions can be a test of cultural literacy.

**Function of allusion** - the use of allusions enables writers to simplify complex ideas and emotions. The reader becomes active by reflecting on the analogy and the message will stick in the reader' mind.



Many allusions on historic events, mythology or the bible have become famous idioms.

Examples:

- 1) “The software included a Trojan Horse” (allusion on the Trojan horse from Greek mythology)
- 2) “to meet one’s Waterloo” (allusion on Napoleons defeat in the Battle of Waterloo)
- 3) “to wash one’s hands of it” (allusion on Pontius Pilatus, who sentenced Jesus to death, but washed his hands afterwards to demonstrate that he was not to blame for it.)

Allusion Examples in Everyday Speech:

- 1) “Guess who the new Newton of our school is?” – a genius student, alludes to a famous scientist Isaac Newton.
- 2) "She's a good swimmer, but she's no Ariel." – This allusion is to the fairy tale "The Little Mermaid" about a mermaid named Ariel



**Irony** is based on the simultaneous realisations of two opposite meanings: the direct meaning of words and their contextual meaning. Usually the direct one expresses a positive evaluation of the situation, while the context contains the opposite, negative evaluation. Therefore, irony does not exist outside the context.

Though there are many forms of irony as a literary device, its three **main forms** are **verbal**, **dramatic**, and **situational**.

- **Verbal irony** sets forth a contrast between what is literally said and what is actually meant.
- In **dramatic irony**, the state of the action as far as what the reader knows is the reverse of what the characters suppose it to be.
- **Situational irony** refers to circumstances that turn out to be the reverse of what is expected or considered appropriate.



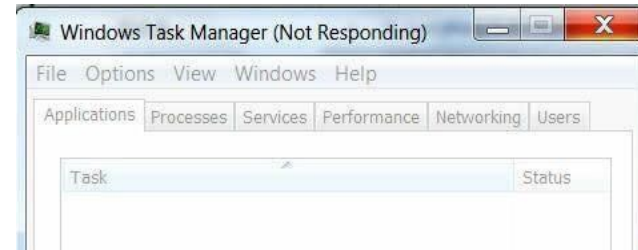
## Examples of irony

### **Verbal irony:**

- 1) Telling a quiet group, “don’t everybody speak all at once”
- 2) Stating during a thunderstorm, “beautiful weather we’re having”
- 3) “How delightful – to find yourself in a foreign country without a penny in your pocket!”

**Situational irony:** “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry  
 In this short story, a young, poor couple struggle with what to buy each other for Christmas. The woman cuts her hair and sells it to buy a watchband for her husband. Meanwhile, the husband sells his watch face to buy combs for his wife’s hair.

**Dramatic irony:** “The Little Mermaid” by Hans Christian Andersen  
 Though the prince is charmed by the mermaid he doesn’t realize that she saved him because she no longer has a voice. (the audience has more information than the prince).



**1. Choose the best allusion definition:**

- A. A false or misleading impression of reality
- B. Indirect reference in literature to a familiar person, place, or event
- C. An imitation of another work of literature

**2. Which of the following is NOT an allusion?**

- A. He lies so much, I'm surprised his nose doesn't grow like Pinocchio's
- B. She transformed her backyard to look like the Garden of Eden
- C. Her smile was as beautiful as my mother's
- D. His wife was his Achilles' heel

**3. What should you do if you come across an allusion you don't recognize in a work of literature?**

- A. Stop reading and find another book
- B. Look it up in another reference work
- C. Use context clues to make some sort of assumption
- D. Invent your own explanation

**4. Choose the best irony definition:**

- A. An unfortunate coincidence in which the worst possible ending comes to pass.
- B. A contrast between expectations for what is going to happen and what actually does happen.
- C. A biting comment meant to be both humorous and true.

**5. A chef who works at a barbecue restaurant doesn't eat meat.**

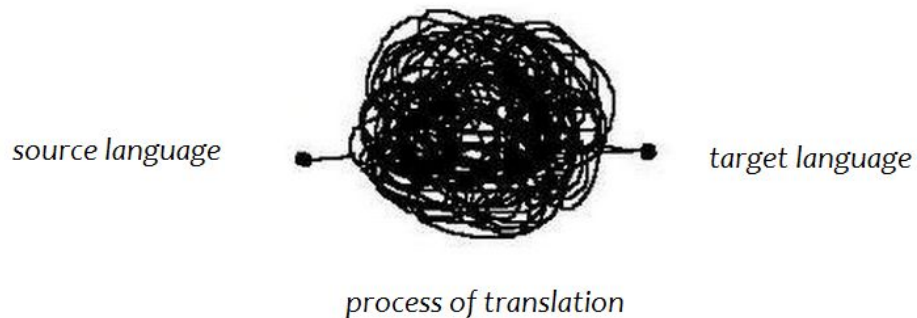
- A. Dramatic
- B. Situational
- C. Verbal
- D. Not ironic

**6. Your sister sneaks into the house after a party, and your mom says 'Glad you made it back on time!'**

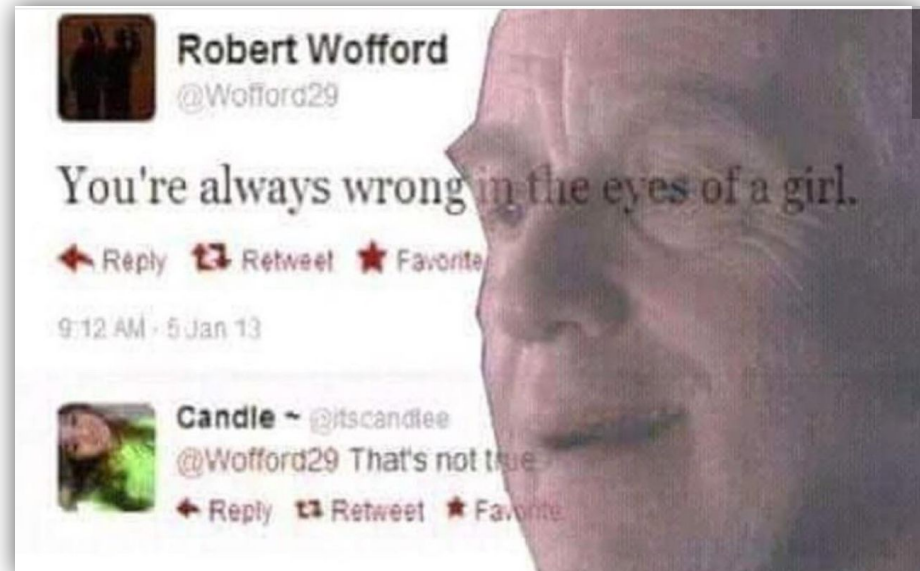
- A. Verbal
- B. Situational
- C. Dramatic

- **Do translators have any problems while translating allusions? Explain your opinion.**

Allusions are likely to become puzzles when they cross a cultural divide. People of one nation might not have enough background knowledge concerning some local historical events or literature of other nation.



- **Give your own example of irony. Have fun :)**



**Thank you for your attention!**