

Journal of English education  
Literature and linguistic

E-ISSN, 2621-3680  
P-ISSN, 2621-3672

## AN ANALYSIS OF IRONY IN “HARRISON BERGERON” BY KURT VONNEGUT.JR

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### Abstract

This paper concerns the analysis of Irony in Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut.JR. Kurt vonnegut.JR is an American writer, in that story he is willing to surprise the reader by providing many scenes of oppression carried out through equality and he likes to use ironic pictures to insinuate his criticisms. According to Gibbs (2008) in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, “irony emphasize the difference between two states of affairs, making plain which is true” (p.458). Overall the story, many of the sentences and events have meaning that he strongly opposes the government which adheres to a system of equality or egalitarianism. Descriptive qualitative research method was used in conducting the research. The technique of qualitative method are used to find and indetify the data. The types of irony that found in this research are verbal irony and situational irony. This paper intends to analyze the story from the angle of the use of irony in the story, to get clear description of the types of irony find in this story and implied the meaning of each irony in Kurt Vonnegut’s story “Harrison Bergeron”.

Keywords :, Irony, equality, figurative language verbal irony, situational irony

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### INTRODUCTION

This short story was written under the title Harrison Bergeron was published in America in October 1961. This story tells about equality. Every American is fully equal, meaning that no one is stupider, uglier, weaker, or slower than anyone else, all of which are arranged in Amendments 211, 212, and 213. The Handicapper General and a team of agents ensure that the laws of equality are enforced, and the law is enforced by Diana Moon Glampers. Someone beautiful must wear hideous masks, intelligent people must wear

headsets that jangle their brains and nerves with a series of loud, annoying sounds, and those with physical agility or physical strength must carry sacks or bird shoots to burden them. So, in the race of life, all Americans are handicapped so that no one must ever feel ugly, stupid, or “like something the cat dragged in.” Society has become so scary that no one dares question the increasing numbers of new laws that call for more handicaps and punishments. All those someones who want oppose the Handicapper General are arrested, thrown into mental institutions, or shot because they threaten the fabric of society. The effects of these governmental policies are appalling. Society being stagnant because those smart enough to develop new technology, medicine, and literature has been permanently handicapped, exiled, or killed.

The problem propounded in this study is the irony analysis, how the author gives imagine the real meaning that has been written. This analyzes using irony theoretical that focuses on analyze criticism, innuendo, or contradictory meaning in the short story. The irony is one part of the figurative language. Childs and Fowler (2006, p.123) say that “irony is a mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from, and usually opposite to, the professed or ostensible ones. There are some kinds of irony, though they fall into two main categories: situational and verbal”. Using this theory will be a way to understand the true meaning expressed by the writer in a story.

Through the study of analyzing irony, the researcher wants to describe how the author of Harrison Bergeron expresses his feelings, what the author really wants to convey in the story. The researcher chooses the language style especially the irony in this short story because to know and understand the contradictory meanings in the story. The researcher chose the short story "Harrison Bergeron" as the subject because this is one of the famous short stories by Kurt Vonnegut and the stories written are very interesting.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method of this research is descriptive. This research is qualitative research with textual methods. In qualitative research, descriptive data collection was tried which was then written in the report. The data obtained from this study are in the form of words, images, and not numbers. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the existence of certain words or concepts in the text. The researchers measured and analyzed the presence, meaning, and the relationship of the words and concepts then made conclusions about the message in the text. The researcher collects and records detailed data on matters that are considered related to the study problem. The data sources in this study is a short story from the work of Kurt Vonnegut "Harrison Bergeron". The researcher collects data from short stories by writing notes.

According to Bodgan and Taylor (2007:4):“The qualitative method is a research procedre that produces descriptive data in the form of words written or spoken of the people and bahviors that can be observed, This approach is directed at the individual’s background and holistic (whole)”.

A tool used to determine certain words or concepts in the text. The researchers measured and analyzed the meanings and words and concepts, then made conclusions about the messages in the text. The researcher collects and records data about matters relating to the study problem. The data sources in this study is a short story from the work of kurt vonnegut "harrison bergeron". Through this, irony analysis will be described, presented and given argument in accordance with the concepts and theories used. The final result of qualitative research is just not generating data and information, but should be able to produce meaningful information.

## **RESULT**

Irony is a literal evaluation which involves discrepancy to set forth the truth (Gibbs, 2008, p. 458). As Booth suggests, it provides a new perspective as

a reflection (as in Rocklife, 2006, p. 38). In analysing *Harrison Bergeron*, the researcher found the use of verbal and situational irony as follows.

### 1. Verbal Irony

Verbal irony is discrepancy of what the character says in the story which carry out different meaning intended by the speakers, (Colebrook, 2003). As what Booth (1974) states that verbal irony has the characteristics as it makes the receptor rejects literal meaning, the discussion is carried out. It is used to perceive literal evaluation that is implicitly either the opposite of or incongruous with the meaning of statement (Pettineo, 2012).

On the following discussion, the researcher would provide the intended meaning behind the following statement. The intended meaning in short story depends on interpretation, base on the characters and facts supporting the interpretation.

"That's all right-" Hazel said of the announcer, "he tried. That's the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get a nice raise for trying so hard." (Harrison Bergeron, p 3).

This quotation implicitly conveys a satire from Vonnegut to the country that applies the equality system. Commenting on it is clear that Vonnegut conveyed what he had been asked as a human being to better appreciate what God had given. We should use these talents. Maybe it can and has become the rights of individuals to exercise freedom.

As state in this story, all people are given mental disabilities to be equal so that they cannot develop their talents, cannot do activities optimally, are unable to think critically and are not even given the freedom to give their ideas. All of these tools have paralyzed them into bad, stupid, and timid humans. Therefore, Vonnegut insinuated a government that embraced the system, he poured in conversation with Hazel and George. This quote implicitly

conveys the insinuation that Vonnegut is destroying a country that applies the equality system. Commenting on it is clear that Vonnegut conveyed what was asked as a human being to better appreciate what God had given. We must use this talent. Maybe it can and has become the right of individuals to exercise freedom.

## 2. Situational Irony

Situational irony occurs when a character conducts different behaviours of what is appropriate according to the story. The use of it, thus, brings unexpected outcomes. It is also included as situational irony when events in the story turn out differently from what the events should be (van Thompson, 2016). It involves incongruity between appearance and reality and between expectation and fulfillment (Arp and Johnson, 2012).

This story reveals a society that is oppressed by a system of government that adheres to the equality system. All people must look the same, nothing has advantages. This story is set in 2081 where the 211th, 212th, and 213th amendments to the constitution states that all Americans must be fully equal, and no one is permitted to excel in any aspect of life for others, whether that is appearance, intelligence, physical ability, or even artistic talent; no one is allowed to be better than others.

People are made equal by tools which bring them down to the normalcy level in the story, which is actually below-average in intelligence, strength, and ability. These tools include weights to stunt speed and strength; masks, red rubber clown noses, or thick glasses to hide good looks and to make seeing difficult; and radio transmitters implanted in the ear of intelligent people, which emit sharp noises two or three times a minute to prevent sustained thought. In the story the Kurt considers that the equality system is something ridiculous. It can be seen in the following quotation:

She must have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous. And it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred pound men. (*Harrison Bergeron*, p 3).

This passage implicitly informs the reader that the dancer has a very beautiful face, but due to Amendment Number 211, 212, 213 dancers wear mask that are very ugly to cover their beauty. The body also uses a bag of weights worn by men. In the quote, there is also a sentence that says that the dancer is the most formidable and elegant dancer from other dancers. Kurt conveyed the meaning that actually no one could make such equality perfectly. And what happens is the opposite, that the more mentally handicapped tools are given, the easier it is to see the superiority that is in someone. To strengthen my analysis of the irony. Let's look at the following quotation:

The rest of Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware. Nobody had ever born heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses. The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him whanging headaches besides. (*Harrison Bergeron*, p 4).

The condition of Harrison Bergeron is clearly under pressure by the Handicapper General. He is a very smartest child, even above average. He is also a genius athlete. Therefore, he uses a pair of very sophisticated earphones, and glasses that is very thick and wavy to be able to blind some of his vision, also make a headache. But there is a sentence above which states that there is nothing more restrained than Harrison. From that sentence we can see that in fact the equality making by the general of equality varies greatly. He wants a

government system that is fair, equal and no one is superior. But because of the diversity of these tools that make them have more prominence. The more tools that are attached to a person's body, indicating that he has many advantages.

"All of a sudden you look so tired," said Hazel. "Why don't you stretch out on the sofa, so's you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honeybunch." She was referring to the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag, which was padlocked around George's neck. "Go on and rest the bag for a little while," she said. "I don't care if you're not equal to me for a while." . (*Harrison Bergeron*, p 2)

Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds. ( *Harrison Bergeron*, p 3).

The two quotations above have also proved very much that every individual in the country carries different means of disability. Harrison is a genius athlete, a handsome boy and has many advantages. So he carries a lot of disability devices, like the quote above, Harrison carried 300 pounds. While George (his father) has intelligence below the average who only uses a small radio in his ear and carries a forty-seven pounds of birdshot in his neck.

After the researcher repeatedly observes and understands the story, there is a sentence that makes me think of one thing. Let's look at the following quotation.

"Harrison Bergeron, age fourteen," she said in a grackle squawk, "has just escaped from jail, where he was held on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. He is a genius and an athlete, is under-handicapped, and should be regarded as extremely dangerous". (*Harrison Bergeron*, p 3).

There was said that the harrison was arrested with accusation of planning to overthrow the government. While he is a very genius athlete who has intelligence above the average. There is another meaning from the government other than to equalize the people. The government play a political role. Where the government believes that it can remove, jealousy, shame and hatred. The effect is cultural and community stagnation because no one is able to express new ideas. Harrison was later arrested by the government because he possessed intelligence that no one else had so that the government paralyzed its ability to weaken the economic community so that they did not become strong opponents of state managers. With other meanings, the government want to control the country greedily.

## **CONCLUSION**

This story tells about the equality. Nobody is stupider, uglier, weaker, or slower than anyone else. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. That equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General. The Handicapper General and a team of agents ensure that the laws of equality are enforced, and the law is enforced by Diana Moon Glampers. If there is someone who wants to fight the rules, they will be put to death. In the story there are many innuendos that are indirectly conveyed by the author.

This research has revealed how to analyze literature using all the details about irony. By trying to understand the story more deeply through its grammar, readers can get the meaning of the story. This irony short story analysis presents that literary works are rich in meaning. I saw the satire after repeatedly understanding the text. The author views equality as something that is ridiculous and impossible to do.



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