

“Inconceivable!”: Analysing irony in the cult  
classic movie 'The Princess Bride'

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämä kandidaatintutkielma tutkii kulttiklassikkoelokuvan 'The Princess Bride' sisältämää ironiaa kirjallisen analyysin ja multimodaalisuuden kautta. The Princess Bride on vuoden 1987 Rob Reinerin ohjaama elokuva, joka perustuu William Goldmanin samannimiseen romaaniin. William Goldman on myös käsikirjoittanut elokuvan. Elokuva on romanttinen seikkailu fantasia, joka on myöhemmin saanut kulttiklassikon maineen ja noussut populäärikulttuurin ilmiöksi.</p> <p>Ironia on retoriikan keino, joka yksinkertaisimmillaan tarkoittaa sanotun ja sanotun merkityksen välistä epäyhdenmukaisuutta. Tutkielmassani analysoin ironiaa Montgomeryn ja muiden tutkijoiden ironian määritelmien avulla. Tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, mitä ironian tyyppiä elokuva sisältää ja miten huumori välittyy ironian kautta. Tutkielmassani käytin teksti- ja multimodaalista analyysia analysoidessani elokuvasta poimittuja esimerkkejä ironiasta. Esimerkit koostuivat puhtaaksi kirjoitetuista kohtauksien keskusteluista ja kohtauksien taustatiedoista.</p> <p>Tutkimukseni mukaan The Princess Bride sisältää kuutta eri ironia tyyppiä (verbaalinen, tilanteellinen, dramaattinen, traaginen, romanttinen ja tunnistamaton ironia), joista lähempään tutkintaan valittiin neljä käytetyintä ja selkeintä ironia tyyppiä (verbaalinen, tilanteellinen, dramaattinen, ja traaginen ironia). Tutkielman mukaan ironia välitti huumoria monin eri tavoin. Huumori välittyi tavoista, jolla ironia esitettiin, hahmojen reaktioista ironiaan tai heidän reaktioidensa puutteesta, kontekstista, tilanteiden odottamattomuudesta sekä itse ironiasta. Ironia liittyi täten elokuvan sisältämään huumorin vahvasti.</p> <p>Mahdollisia jatkotutkimusaiheita ovat esimerkiksi elokuvan kirjallisuuden tehokeinojen yleinen tutkiminen, tai jonkin muun tehokeinon läheisempi tarkastelu. Elokuva on vahvasti parodinen, joten parodia voisi myös olla yksi mahdollinen tutkimiskohde.</p>	
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## 1 Introduction

“Oh, the irony” is a phrase one frequently hears or voices when encountering ironic occurrences or utterances. Irony is often present in our lives, whether it is in the movie we saw, the snide comment our co-worker made, or the fact that our unbreakable phone did in fact, break. Irony comes in many forms and it can be described as the incongruence between the uttered words and the stated meaning behind them (Beckson 1989:132). Irony can also be found in contradictive situations, like a shoeless shoe-salesman. Irony can be detected from tone of voice, nonverbal communication or context, or it might not be detected at all. Irony is an interesting and diverse phenomenon, and while a subjective concept, can be seen or heard all around us, which is why it is an opportune subject for research. Movies can also contain irony as they often use irony for its humoristic value, or to make a point. Movies are also a great subject for a literary study as they contain many elements that can be studied, such as narrative, use of language, or like in this case, irony. This study connects a cult classic, irony, and irony related humor, while examining them closely.

The Princess Bride (1987) is a critically acclaimed cult classic that did not achieve a notable success at the box office, but instead gained a cult following when the movie started to circulate in its VHS-form. The movie has become a pop-culture phenomenon, and it is known from its catchy phrases such as “inconceivable”, “as you wish”, and probably the most known one, “my name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father; prepare to die”. The Princess Bride is often described as a movie that is watched time and time again, and as a movie that is being passed on from one generation to another, as parents introduce it to their offspring. In 2016, the movie was taken in the National Film Registry, as it was deemed “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” (Library of Congress 2016). It also celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, so it is a good time to further study this cult classic and its irony.

The aim of the present study is to analyze the ironic occurrences in the Princess Bride movie and to discuss how irony conveys humor, and the nature of irony in the movie. The used method of study is literary analysis, together with text and multimodal analysis. While irony in movies in general (MacDowell, 2016) and William Goldman’s ironic screenplay writing in the Princess Bride and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Alfonso and Fargo, 2014) and the parody in the Princess Bride (Henry and Rossen-Knill 2009) have been studied, there is no existing

exhaustive study of irony in the *Princess Bride* movie, which leaves a gap that is now being attempted to be filled by this study.

In this thesis, I will first provide the relevant background theory by introducing the *Princess Bride*, defining irony and the four irony types that were used in the movie, and explaining the multimodal aspect of this study before briefly discussing the earlier studies on this subject (Chapter 2). The irony types were chosen for their clarity, and because they were used the most during the movie. Second, I will introduce the research questions, data, and analysis methods in Chapter 3. Third, I will analyze the chosen examples of irony taken from the movie in their own categories and answer the research questions (Chapter 4). Finally, I will conclude my study in the conclusion and summarize the findings of this study (Chapter 5).

## 2 Background

In this section, I will introduce the main concepts and theory related to my research. Irony in general will be discussed (Chapter 2.2), after which I will define the four irony types that are connected to *The Princess Bride* movie and to the analysis part of this research (Chapters 2.2.1-2.2.3). After the definitions, I will briefly discuss the multimodality aspect in relation to cinema and the previous research findings on the subject (Chapters 2.3 and 2.4).

I will use the descriptions of irony by Montgomery et al. (2007) as the basis for the definitions, and I will reinforce those definitions with other scholars' descriptions and theories to provide a comprehensive look on irony. Scholars such as Montgomery et al. (2007), Garber (1988), Barbe (1995), Gibbs and Colston (2007), Beckson (1989), Gaunt (1989), and Gurillo, Ruiz and Ortega (2013) are involved in linguistics, while MacDowell (2016), and Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala (2017) have studied the multimodal aspects: the former films in particular, and the latter, the multimodality in general.

### 2.1 The *Princess Bride*

*The Princess Bride* is a romantic fantasy adventure comedy film. Moreover, it is an enactment of a story that is read to a sick little boy, by his grandfather. The movie goes back and forth to the story itself and to the boy's reactions to the story that he first dismisses as a "kissing book". The main story is about a pair of lovers, Westley and Buttercup, who are briefly separated by

ill fortune. Westley is thought dead as a victim of Dread Pirate Roberts, and Buttercup is then chosen as Prince Humperdinck's bride, even though she has no love for him and still misses her true love. She is abducted by three men; Vizzini, Inigo Montoya and Fezzik, who were paid to kidnap and kill the Princess and frame the Gilderians for the crime. Inigo and Fezzik do not want to kill Buttercup but follow Vizzini who is the leader. They are pursued by a mysterious man in black, and all of them are chased after by Prince Humperdinck and his henchman, Count Rugen. It is revealed that Prince Humperdinck is behind the scheme and has plotted to kill Buttercup to start a war with Gilder, but his plan is overthrown in the end by the mysterious man who is revealed to be Westley, and his unexpected accomplices, Inigo and Fezzik.

## 2.2 What is irony?

Irony is a widely used term, but its precise defining is difficult, as it is a subjective phenomenon. According to Barbe (1995:5), "the recognition of irony is culturally dependent and not globally unified". Garber (1988:294-295) describes irony as follows: "...like beauty, irony may lie in the mind of the perceiver; ironies that strike one reader may wholly escape another". Irony and its comprehension thus depends on the individuals who observe the irony, and their own understanding of what irony is. As reported by Barbe, (1995:16) there are usually three participants in irony: the speaker (ironist), the hearer (often the victim of the irony), and an audience (evaluator). In accordance to Hutcheon's views (1995:13), there can be ironies that are composed by the ironist, but which are unrecognized by the audience, or unperceived by some of the audience. Barbe (1995:118) argues that irony can be used to include or exclude people and to divide the audience so that some of them recognize the irony and some do not, as the acknowledgement of irony is based on generally shared information. Knowing what may or may have been intended as ironic requires "...detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker and his audience", according to Gaunt (1989: 25).

Irony has many different types and thus, definition that fits one type of irony necessarily does not fit the other types, which makes it harder to define. Irony is a literary and rhetoric device that is used in both written and oral forms, and its purpose is to enliven the text and provide depth and meaning, or to emphasize a particular element. Grice (1975:2013 as cited in Gurillo, Ruiz and Ortega 2013:1) has defined irony as a "a particularized conversational implicature triggered by an overt violation of the first maxim of quality". Furthermore, Montgomery et al. (2007:352) have described irony as "use of language in which the speaker or writer covertly

indicates disagreement with what is directly expressed by the words". Gurillo, Ruiz, and Ortega (2013:40) argue that irony can be used to define a linguistic phenomenon, as well as other philosophical ideas such as Socratic irony and "situational" irony. For instance, a burned down fire-station is an example of situational irony. Socratic irony consists of pretended ignorance, to provoke others to be ignorant so that their ignorance can be exposed. Beckson (1989:133) calls it "apparent self-denigration". Irony is about hiding true meanings of sentences, so it can be studied as part of pragmatics. Thus, irony is not limited to literary studies, but it is also part of pragmatics and the co-operative principles by H.P Grice. Many scholars, such as Gurillo, Ruiz and Ortega (2013), have linked their irony studies to Grice's principles.

In the following chapters, I will present the definitions of the examined irony types. Verbal irony will be presented first, then situational irony, followed by dramatic and tragic irony that are presented together.

### 2.2.1 Verbal irony

Verbal irony, also called "Rhetorical irony", is characterized by Montgomery et al. (2007:360) as "use of language where we do not literally mean what we say: instead we imply an attitude of disbelief towards the content of our utterance or writing." In other words, there is an incongruity with what is said, and what is meant. Grice (1975:124, as quoted by Gurillo, Ruiz and Ortega (2013:2) argues that "I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt". A specific ironic tone of voice is often connected to verbal irony, and according to Padilla (2009), it is considered a marker of irony, as quoted by Gurillo and Ortega (2013:22).

What makes verbal irony problematic is its close relation to sarcasm, which some consider a separate phenomenon from irony, but some have different views. For instance, Barbe (1995:28) has discussed irony and sarcasm and their relation to each other and has stated that many examples can overlap, and thus be considered both. Additionally, MacDowell (2016:4) argues that sarcasm is the simplest form of verbal irony. Irony and sarcasm can also be united, which is what Muecke (1969:23, cited by Barbe 1995:29) calls double irony, which is initially irony that is expressed through paradoxes and contradictions – for example, if someone would say "Oh boy, that escaped serial killer surely seems a nice fellow", they would be expressing a

double irony. Irony can be thought as funny or mean, and according to Hutcheon (1995:15), irony can be sometimes thought to be a retraction of affection, but sometimes it can deliberately engage emotions.

There are also different types of verbal irony, the underlying and literal (Barbe 1995:13), and the “false praise” that Green discusses (1979:21). The literal irony is for instance when someone leaves the door open, and a person left inside says, “I love it when people close the door behind them”. Underlying irony invokes the opposite meaning that is being emphasized, for example “what a nice hat”, when it is meant that the hat is not nice. False praise is similar to underlying irony; it occurs when someone for instance praises the illiterate for his or her reading speed – the true meaning of the praise is the opposite from what it means literally.

### 2.2.2 Situational irony

By the definition of Montgomery et al. (2007:358), situational irony is a plot device in which the audience knows more than the characters, who speak and act contrary to what they would if they shared that knowledge. According to Montgomery et al. (2007:358), the comic or tragic components of the situation depend on how the audience perceives the situation and its components, or on the circumstances, outcome, and the general sentiment towards the characters. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989:87) defines situational irony as “a condition of events opposite to what was, or might naturally be expected, or a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things”. Gibbs and Colston (2007:467) argue that this definition holds key features such as unexpectedness and human fragility – latter, which entails the idea that the normal order is “mocked” by the ironic events. Beckson (1989:134) argues that situation is viewed as ironic when a set of circumstances play out contrary from what was expected or thought befitting, which is similar to Gibbs and Colston’s (2007:469) views, as they discuss events that are of prescriptive manner. Normal events such as going to the movies that become ironic when what was expected to happen, happens differently, as the expectations are disrupted.

Gibbs and Colston (2007:469) argue that ironic occasions involve contradictions between the goals, actions, and outcomes of situations, and that situational irony does not necessarily entail an ironist but an observer who sees the event as ironic (2007:468). They also suggest that in

plethora of ironic occurrences, the expected reality diminishes the actual reality of what has happened, which can make the persons involved look absurd, while compared to what they were capable of in that event (Gibbs and Colston 2007:494). For example, a sheepless shepherd or a private investigator whose wife is cheating on him, are situations that entail absurdity.

### 2.2.3 Dramatic and tragic irony

I have grouped dramatic and tragic irony together, as they share similar traits and tragic irony is sometimes placed as a category of dramatic irony. Dramatic irony is defined by Montgomery et al. (2007:348) as “when a character on stage and involved in a dramatic action has a specific belief that the audience knows to be false. Typically, that incorrect belief will be about some crucial component of the plot, and hence the dramatic irony”. Beckson and Ganz (1989:133-134) associate the term “dramatic irony” also to situations where the character’s lines are comprehended in a double sense by the audience but not by the play’s characters. Thus, dramatic irony is not limited only to theatre, as Gibbs and Colston (2007:477) have also drawn attention to it. MacDowell (2016:9-10) points out that “the “discrepant awareness” associated with dramatic irony, for instance is only possible if a film highlights for us salient facts about the story of which certain characters remain ignorant...”. This would mean that not all characters must remain ignorant, but some might know what the audience knows as well.

Tragic irony is quite similar to dramatic irony, with the exception that its results often end tragically, and it has strong association with Greek tragedies. In tragic irony, the characters are similarly unaware of the facts that the audience knows like in dramatic irony, but in tragic irony, the knowledge audience holds is of tragic kind and lead to a tragic end (Collins Dictionary 2018). William Shakespeare’s ending of Romeo and Juliet is one of the most famous examples of tragic irony, but if Romeo had known what the audience did, it would not be known as such.

### 2.3 Multimodality and cinema

In this research, I will examine the verbal output of the characters, but also their nonverbal communication when it is relevant. For instance, Gaunt (1989:25) argues that ironic intentions can become clear by tone of voice, but also by gesture, when in the presence of people meant to understand the irony. This means that one can imply the irony for their friend by either tone

of voice or gesture in a group in a way that is only clear to that friend. Thus, gestures, facial movements, and body language in addition to what is being said, can indicate irony, and can be observed. For example, rolling one's eyes or a stern facial expression can imply irony. Deliens et al. (2018:35) also point out that in spoken communication marked tone of voice and/or facial expressions often accompany ironic utterances, while discrepancy with the background context is similarly an effective clue. The discrepancy with background context is when for instance a character known for their passionate dislike of ice-hockey says "Oh, I cannot wait until the ice-hockey season starts and it is shown on every channel and it's the sole subject of every discussion!". In this situation, there is an incongruence between what one knows to be true about the character, and how the character acts.

Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala (2017:325) have argued that everything seen or heard on screen is planned, and that even the smallest movements may be designed to happen in that exact time – such as character blinking an eye, or someone crossing the scene or a bird singing in the distance. This could mean that even the tiniest movement can be planned to amplify ironic intentions in the screen, and that is why it is important to consider these when researching irony.

## 2.4 Previous research

While irony is a widely researched subject, irony in *The Princess Bride* is not. There is a study by Alfonso and Fargo that discusses William Goldman's ironic screenplays, in particular *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *The Princess Bride*. Alfonso and Fargo (2014) examine Goldman's adventure narratives and ironical revisions of the film genre, and his writing style, in which they identify irony as one of the major elements. In their study, they have identified that Goldman plays with film genre conventions by making them into parodies, or by transforming or subverting them, sometimes using meta-fiction. They argue that Goldman uses ironic detachment and contrasts with genre conventions, like for example, Buttercup wanting to be saved from royal marriage by a pirate is a contrast to a traditional fairy tale setting. Alfonso and Fargo (2014) also make note of the underlying ironic tone which lies in the narrator – in the novel it is the fictional Bill Goldman, and in the film, the grandfather. Parody in the *Princess Bride* has been studied by Henry and Rossen-Knill (2009), who examined the fairy tale parodying in the movie, but there is no earlier comprehensive study on irony in the *Princess Bride*.

Irony in film in general has been studied for instance by MacDowell (2016), who has further studied the subject and wrote the first book about irony in this medium. MacDowell (2016) examines how films create irony. According to MacDowell (2016), even the briefest moment of irony might be the contribution of infinite features of style and dramatization. He also makes the argument that irony is not just in one element of filmmaking, but it works in synthesis with other elements (MacDowell 2016:97).

### 3 The Present Study

#### 3.1 Research questions

The aim of this qualitative research is to examine the use of irony in *The Princess Bride* movie.

The research questions are:

- 1) What types of irony are there in the movie?
- 2) How is humor conveyed through the irony?

I will count the irony occurrences and their categories, analyze the transcribed scenes, and explain why they are ironic, and in what category of irony they fall. I will also examine how humor is conveyed through the irony.

#### 3.2 Data

*The Princess Bride* is 1 hour and 38 minutes long and it is directed by Rob Reiner. The screenplay, and the novel of the same name that the movie is based on, is written by William Goldblum. *The Princess Bride* has been featured on many top lists, like Bravo's "100 funniest movies" and American Film Institute's "AFI's 100 Years...100 Passions" list, where it was placed the 50th and the 88<sup>th</sup> (The Film Spectrum, AFI). The movie stars Cary Elwes, Robin Wright, Mandy Patinkin, André the Giant, Chris Sarandon, Wallace Shawn, and Christopher Guest among others. I chose *The Princess Bride* as my data as I find the strong irony that it contains very amusing and interesting. The movie is highly humorous, and fair amount of that humor consists of ironic moments, which is why it is suitable for irony analysis.

#### 3.3 Analyzing the *Princess Bride*

My method of analysis is mainly literary analysis, but I have done a combination of text analysis and a multimodal analysis. The analysis process involved the following steps. My first step was

to re-watch *The Princess Bride* and mark down the scenes that contained irony. I marked down the ironies categorically and counted the instances (see chapter 4.1). Then I chose the scenes that were transcribed according to the transcription conventions explained in Appendix 3. In addition to the transcription, I also made notes of the context before and after the scenes and interpreted the facial expressions and the body language of the characters as part of the multimodal analysis. This was necessary, since the irony is not always solely in the language use, but it might sometimes be in the situation, or in a situation that occurred before or after the focus line(s). As the final step, I analyzed the extracts using the descriptions of irony by Montgomery et al. (2007) and other scholars.

## 4 Analyzing the irony

In this section, I will discuss and present my findings. First, I identify and categorize the types of ironies used in the movie (Chapter 4.1). Then, I will examine in more detail the four most used irony categories (Chapters 4.2-4.4). For each category, I will provide examples that best exemplify the categories and that were chosen for their clarity and humoristic value. During the analysis for each example, I will also discuss how humor is conveyed through the irony.

The samples I present are composed from short transcriptions of the scenes that contain irony, and from a brief background information about their context and content. I will explain what is happening or happened before or after the transcribed conversation to familiarize the reader to the situation so that the irony can be more easily understood. The analysis will be based on the provided background theories, but they have been expanded within my own interpretation – as irony is innately subjective (Garber 1988:294).

### 4.1 The types of irony in the *Princess Bride*

In the *Princess Bride*, I found 57 uses of irony. All in all, there were six different categories of irony. These categories are: verbal irony, situational irony, dramatic irony, tragic irony, romantic irony, and the unidentifiable irony. The categories that I will analyze further are: verbal irony, situational irony, dramatic irony, and tragic irony. Romantic irony and unidentifiable irony were left out, as the first had only a few instances and the latter because of its complexity. Because of their closely related nature, I will analyze dramatic and tragic irony together. As the recognition of irony can be difficult due to its subjective nature (Garber

1988:294), I was unable to determine the categories for some instances of ironies despite the fact that I was able to recognize them as ironic. I will call these unidentified ironies “unidentifiable irony”. Many cases of unidentifiable irony had incongruence between words and actions and as such, they did not meet the criteria of verbal irony for example. However, I identified them as ironic as the incongruence was evidently clear – the characters meant to do the opposite of what they said.

## 4.2 Verbal irony

In this section, I will analyze the verbal irony examples. Simply put, verbal irony is the incongruence between what is meant, and what is actually said. Verbal irony is the most used type of irony in the Princess Bride, and it is mostly used by Westley, to subtly deride or provoke other characters and to offer comic relief, as illustrated by extracts 1-3. Extracts 1 and 3 are deriding, while extract 2 is provoking.

Extract 1. Before this extract, Buttercup and Fezzik see the mysterious man closing in on them after defeating Inigo in a sword fight. Vizzini takes Buttercup, commands Fezzik to finish the mysterious man by killing him with a rock, and leaves. Fezzik feels that it would not be very sportsmanlike, so he surprises Westley as he arrives to the hill by throwing a rock towards him and purposely missing his head. Fezzik suggests they fight without weapons or tricks, sportsmanlike. Westley agrees to this, although he feels that the odds are in Fezzik’s favor, as he is a giant. They began to wrestle and talk at the same time, as Westley struggles to fight Fezzik.

1. FEZ: Why are you wearing a mask? (.) Were you burned by a↑cid
2. or something like ↑tha:t?
3. WES: Oh ↑no, it's just they're terribly comfortable. (.)
4. ((dodges punches while speaking))
5. I think everyone'll be wearing them in the futu↑re.
6. ((dodges a punch))

In this example, Westley is being ironic when he answers Fezzik’s question (lines 3 and 5). Masks are commonly used to mask one’s identity, not because how they feel. What Westley says, he does not mean literally, which is the definition of verbal irony according to Montgomery et al. (2007:360). Ergo, Westley does not truly think that everyone will be wearing them in the future. He is answering to Fezzik ironically and in a slightly deriding manner, as he thinks the question is silly to begin with. He is also slightly mocking Fezzik’s gullibility with his irony.

Humor is conveyed through the actions that occur in between the ironic comments. Westley is answering Fezzik while casually dodging punches, which makes the situation and the ironic

comments funny. His actions also support the irony, as Westley says the comments in a very “matter of fact” manner and tone, while simultaneously avoiding getting killed.

Extract 2. In this transcript, Buttercup and Westley are reunited, but Buttercup does not recognize her long lost love. Instead, she thinks he is the Dread Pirate Roberts, who she holds responsible for Westley’s death. Before the extract, there is a more hostile conversation, where Westley doubts Buttercup’s abilities to love and accuses her a liar. Westley is agitated, as he believes Buttercup forgot him soon after his alleged death. Dread Pirate Roberts’ lines are marked as Westley, as most of the audience is aware of his identity by now.

1. BUT: I h know who you ↑are: hh. Your cruelty reveals everything hh. (.)
2. >You're the Dread Pirate Roberts, admit it!<
3. WES: °With pride°. ↑What >↓can I do: for you?<
4. ((bows down grandiloquently, then stands hands on akimbo))
5. BUT: You can die slowly, >cut into< a thousand pieces
6. WES: <°Tsk-tsk-tsk. Hardly complimentary, your Highness°>. ↑Why loose your venom on me?
7. ((shakes his head, hands folded))
8. BUT: (.)°You killed my lo:ve°.
9. WES: <It's possible.> (.) <I kill a lot of people>.
10. ((smiles a little, then expression hardens, but a small jeering smile can be seen))
11. (.)↑Who was this love of yours? (.) Another prince like this one? (.) ugly, rich, and scabby?
12. BUT: No! A farm boy. Poor. (.) <°Poor and perfect. With eyes like the sea after a storm.°> (0.4)
13. ((stares into the distance, then looks at Westley angrily))
14. >On the high seas, your ship attacked< (.) <and the Dread Pirate Roberts
15. never takes prisoners!<
16. WES: I can't afford to make exceptions (.) I mean once ↑word leaks out >that
17. a pirate has gone soft, people begin to disobey you and it's nothing
18. but work, work, work all the time.<
19. ((spreads his hands, then lifts them over his head, opens them, and again
20. places them behind his head))
21. BUT: YOU MOCK MY PAIN!
22. WES: LIFE IS PAIN highness! <Anyone who says differently is selling something>
23. ((stares at Buttercup with a hard and serious look))

In this example, verbal irony takes place in multiple lines (for example 9-11,16-18), as Westley is being ironic in most of his lines, exception being his last line. Westley is being ironic to provoke Buttercup in lines 9 and 16-18, so what he says reflects feelings like indignation and contempt, which according to Grice (1975:124, quoted by Gurillo and Ortega 2013:), along with hostile and/or derogatory judgement are present when something is said ironically. Westley is exaggerating the truth and lying (9,16) to give out the impression that he is Dread Pirate Roberts (technically true, but the real Roberts is retired, Westley is his successor personating him), and that he has killed her love, when in fact he is her love. His irony stems from his personal pain and is directed to the one he thinks caused it – Buttercup. Hutcheon (1995:15) discusses retraction of affection and deliberate engaging of emotions, which is something that Westley seems to succeed in during their heated discussion.

The irony is conveyed through Westley's tone of voice, facial expressions, body language and the context of the situation – Buttercup is talking to Westley as if he has killed his love but fails to recognize that he is her love. In line 9, Westley's tone of voice is first slightly amused, as his pitch is higher (“it’s possible”) but changes to a more serious tone (“I’ve killed a lot of people”) which is of little lower tone. Though the tone changes a little, it still stays very calm and matter-of-fact, which contradicts the true meaning behind those words. His facial expression is stern, but the position of his mouth is a little crooked as the right side is slightly higher, and the twitches in the corners of his mouth reveal his amusement: his mouth first twitches up and down just before line 9 as if he is saying something funny, and the right side of his mouth twitches again at end of line 9. The same features that convey irony, also bring forth the humor. Westley's nonchalant exaggerated gestures (the bowing in line 4, and the relaxed hand movements in 19 and 20) add on the humoristic features of the scene and lighten up the serious nature of the conversation. The bowing has a double meaning: it acts as a reminder, one which Buttercup misses, as Westley worked for her as a farm boy and was in love with her until she too fell in love with him. It also mocks her righteousness: she is a princess-to-be, blaming Westley of being a murderer but has no clue who he really is – her former servant, and true love.

Extract 3 (longer version in Appendix 2). The scene where this conversation occurs, is often referred to as the battle of wits. In this scene, after defeating both Inigo and Fezzik, Westley catches up to Vizzini, who is sitting by a stone turned table with food and drinks, while holding a knife to blindfolded Buttercup's throat, threatening to kill her if Westley comes close. Vizzini sums up that “I can't compete with you physically, and you are no match to my brains”, so as in Westley's words, they are in an impasse. Westley then suggests they have a battle of wits for the princess to the death, to which Vizzini agrees, as he is sure he will win. Westley puts iocane powder (one of the deadliest poisons known to man) in one of the wine goblets. Vizzini must figure out where the poison is and choose a goblet to drink from. Then they drink, and “find out who is right, and who is dead”. The battle begins, and Vizzini begins a long monologue that turns into a mindless ramble about which wine he can and cannot choose. Westley asks if he has made his decision, which leads us to the following extract:

1. VIZ: \$Not remote↑ly\$ (.)>Because< iocane comes from AUSTRALIA (.) as everyone ↓kn↑ows,
2. <and Australia is entirely >peopled< with criminals> (.) and criminals are used to having
3. people not trust them, as >you are not trusted by me< <so I can °clearly
4. not choose the wine in front of you°>.
5. WES: ↑Truly, you have a dizzying intellect.
6. ((strokes his jaw and nods his head))
7. VIZ: WAIT TILL I GET GOING! (.) °Where was ↓I?°

In this example, Westley mocks Vizzini. Westley's nonchalant delivery of irony and his mannerism make the exchange of words funny, as does the Vizzini's false pride on his intelligence, which is undermined by Westley's ironic false praise. He comments on Vizzini's intellect ironically (line 5), by referring to it with the adjective “dizzying”, which is a positive

praise, when taken literally. However, Westley means the opposite, and this becomes clear from his mannerism (flat but slightly amused tone of voice, jaw stroking, line 6) and thus, he breaks Grice's first maxim "do not say what you believe to be false". The Vizzini's long senseless ramble preceding Westley's comment also supports the irony claim, as it takes the foundation off from the comment's truthfulness. The irony also mocks Vizzini's intellect, as Vizzini considers his intelligence higher than others', yet he fails to recognize the irony of the comment, which also makes the situation humoristic and conveys humor. In line 7, he gets very excited about the praise, and is ready to further display his "overpowering" intelligence. Vizzini's reaction is similar to a small child, who is eager of the received praise and ready to continue his/her praised action. Such a reaction from a grown man is amusing.

### 4.3 Situational irony

In this section, situational irony is under an analysis. Situational irony is when the circumstances play out contrary from what was expected or thought befitting (Beckson 1989:134). Situational irony in *The Princess Bride* is often related to unexpected situations, as extracts 4 and 5 illustrate.

Extract 4. In this extract, Vizzini, Inigo, Fezzik and the abducted Buttercup have arrived at the bottom of Cliffs of Insanity, leaving behind the mysterious man who has been following them. Vizzini believes they have out run the mysterious man. Before this extract, Vizzini is already made to look like a fool, as he insists nobody is following them, when again Inigo proofs him wrong and notices the mysterious man.

1. VIZ: We're safe! Only Fezzik is strong enough to go up our ↑way, he'll have
2. to sail around for hours till he finds a harbor!
3. ((Fezzik starts to climb, Vizzini, Inigo and Buttercup in his back))
4. INI: ((looks down))
5. He's climbing up the rope (.) and he's gaining on us
6. VIZ: °Inconceivable°
7. ((mouth and eyes wide open, amazed expression))

The irony in this example stems from the situation – Vizzini is adamant the mysterious stranger has failed and when it turns out he has not, it makes the situation ironic, as it folds similarly to Beckson's (1989:134) view: the contrary happens instead of what was expected. Although the turn of events might not come as a surprise to the viewers, it is unexpected for Vizzini, which is conveyed to the audience in line 6, and his stunned facial expression (line 7, eyes and mouth wide open, frozen expression). Vizzini expects that the mysterious man will fall behind as it is shown in lines 1 and 2, but the contrary happens (line 6), hence the irony. In accordance to Gibb's and Colston's views (2007:468-469): there is a contradiction between Vizzini's goals

and the reality of what happens, as the actual reality is diminished by the expected reality. The ironic turn of the events that drop him from his arrogant assumptions and the fact that he is made to look absurd and laughably foolish by the events make the situation funny. The repetitiveness of line 6 also adds humor to the situation (Vizzini says “inconceivable” numerous times during the movie).

Extract 5. The beginning of the movie. The grandson is sick and bedridden, playing videogames. His mother enters the room, checks his condition, and then tells him that this grandfather has come to visit him.

1. SON: °He'll pinch my cheek (.) I hate that°
2.           ((head tilted, nods, and lifts his eyebrows))
3. MOM: @Maybe he wo:n't@
4.           ((squints her eyes at her son))
5.           ((grandpa makes his entrance, slamming the door and hands open wide))
6. GNP: He::y! how is the sickie: (.) ↑huh?
7.           ((pinches grandson's cheek))
8.           ((grandson gives his mother a look and raises his eyebrows as grandfather
9.           pinches him))

The situational irony is derived from the mockery of the promise (Muecke 1969 as quoted by Gibbs and Colston 2007:467). The boy's mother insinuates in line 3 that maybe this time, the grandfather will not pinch the boy, but in contrary, he does (line 7). There is a half-promise that what the boy says will happen will not happen, and thus when it does happen, it is both ironic and funny. The boy's reaction to the situation makes it funnier (line 8), as for him the outcome was apparent and expected, but for the audience who had no previous information of the grandfather's habits the outcome was not clear. The way the boy raises his eyebrows is cheeky, and it communicates nonverbally to the mother, “I told you so”. The humor is conveyed through the boy's reaction to the irony and through the irony itself – the ironic occurrence itself is funny.

#### 4.4 Dramatic and tragic irony

In this section, dramatic and tragic irony will be analyzed. Dramatic irony is when there is a double meaning on the character's words that is understood differently depending on stance of the hearer (Beckson and Ganz 1989:133-134) or when the knowledge of characters and audience differs: the audience knows something that the characters do not (Montgomery et al. 2007:348). Tragic irony differs from dramatic irony with its consequences – they are tragic or fatal. Extract 6 illustrates tragic irony with a fatal outcome, while extract 7 demonstrates both irony types, and extract 8 exemplifies dramatic irony. Dramatic irony in *The Princess Bride* often reveals itself later in the movie and is thus not immediately clear.

Extract 6. This transcription takes place in the same conversation as extract 2 and is the end of that discussion. After extract 2, Vizzini continues to ramble about Australia, and Westley accuses him of stalling. Vizzini denies and keeps on rambling. Westley then accuses him of trying to trick him into saying something and adds that it will not work. Vizzini says it has worked, and says he knows where the poison is. Westley demands he makes his decision and Vizzini says he will, and as he starts to say which he chooses, he ends mid-sentence, points out to distance and yells “what in the world could that be?”. Westley looks, and Vizzini changes the goblets. Westley says he saw nothing, and Vizzini plays it cool, saying he could have sworn he saw something, with a smug look.

1. VIZ: ((Snickers and looks at the goblets))
2. WES: <What’s so funny?>
3. ((suspiciously))
4. VIZ: I-I’ll tell you in a minute! (.) First, let’s drink. Me from my glass, @and you:: from yours@.
5. ((they toast each other, suspense music clues, camera swifts from smug Vizzini to
6. Westley and back to Vizzini, and they drink, set the goblets on the table)
7. VIZ: ((snickers))
8. WES: You guessed wro↑ng.
9. VIZ: @YOU ONLY THINK I GUESSED WRONG@! THAT’S >WHAT’S SO
10. FUNNY! < I switched glasses when your back was turned!
11. HA HA! You fool! >You fell victim to one of the
12. CLASSIC BLUN↑DERS! (.) < The most famous is never get
13. involved in a LAND WAR in ASIA, but \$only slightly
14. less well-known is ↑this (.) >NEVER GO IN AGAINST A
15. SICILIAN WHEN DEATH IS ON THE LINE<!! Ha ha ha ha
16. ha ha!! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Ha ha ha-
17. ((Vizzini freezes still, and drops dead to the ground))

The irony in this example is the tragic kind, as the situation has tragic consequences. As the audience does not know where the poison is and thus do not know the outcome of the situation as they watch it unfold, the tragic irony reveals itself the moment Vizzini dies. The audience recognizes the irony in Vizzini’s victorious monologue (lines 9-16) mocking Westley for his wrong choice. Further irony is provided by Westley’s later explanation to Buttercup of what happened (see Appendix 2): both goblets were poisoned as Westley has built an immunity to iocane powder – Vizzini was doomed to die, no matter his choice. Vizzini’s arrogant and mocking monologue right before he dies provides the humoristic aspect to the irony – he celebrated his victory too early, both underestimated his opponent and overestimated his own intelligence, which led to his untimely ironic death.

Though the character’s false knowledge and the audience’s awareness are contributed to both dramatic and tragic irony, I argue that it is not necessary in all cases, as the situation can be ironic, even though the audience is not aware what is happening, or the character holds no false knowledge. Even though the audience is not aware of the poison’s location beforehand (unless they have seen the movie or read the book), they can recognize the irony between Vizzini’s earlier talk (lines 9-16) and his sudden death (line 17), which gives the irony its tragic nature.

In this situation Westley is aware of what will happen, so one out of three characters knows what is happening, and two out of three do not, which differs from the general definition of tragic irony (characters are unaware). Vizzini falsely thinks he has just killed Westley by switching Goblets, thus holding a false knowledge, so Westley and some of the audience are the only ones who know the truth.

Extract 7. In this extract, Westley and Buttercup have reunited since Buttercup has discovered his true identity. To escape Prince Humperdinck, they have fled to the Fire swamp, which is known for its three terrors: the flame spurt, the lightning sand, and the R.O.U.S – a rodents of unusual size. Westley already saved her from the first terror and has just saved Buttercup from the second, and is reassuring her they will make it, when he spots a R.O.U.S. He starts walking to take Buttercup to safety.

1. BUT: hh Westley! (.) What about the R.O.U.S's hh?
2. WES: Rodents Of Unusual Size? (.) ↑I don't think they exist.
3. ((Westley shakes his head, then a large R.O.U.S attacks Westley))
4. A::::RGH!

In this example, the irony is similarly conveyed as in extract 4. Although both Westley and the audience see the R.O.U.S before its attack, Buttercup remains unaware of its existence. Moreover, the fact that the attack happens after she asks about them and Westley answers by denying their existence makes the situation even more ironic. This irony can be considered both dramatic and tragic: the audience and Westley are aware of the lurking R.O.U.S, but Buttercup is not, and the attack in line 3 ends in Westley injuring himself. Although he is not killed by the R.O.U.S, the end-result could have been fatal, and the irony can thus be considered tragic. Montgomery et al. (2007:348) define dramatic irony as a character's false belief that the audience knows to be false, but I argue that dramatic irony needs not false beliefs, but that the irony can consist of ironic actions that take a dramatic turn.

The timing and the expected unexpectedness of the attack make the situation both ironic and funny. The audience and Westley can expect that something will happen as they have seen the R.O.U.S, but the attack is so sudden that it is also unexpected, also by the characters. The attack happens right after Westley denies their existence (line 2), even though he knows they exist. So, verbal irony is also presented as Westley says something he knows to be false. Humor is conveyed by timing, and the unexpectedness of the ironic event.

Extract 8. Prince Humperdinck, Count Rugen and their soldiers are tracking down Princess Buttercup and his abductors. Prince Humperdinck, who is a skilled hunter, is examining the tracks of a mighty duel (Westley and Inigo's duel). He uncovers that the loser ran off alone, and that the winner is following another track that heads towards Gilder.

1. RUG: Shall we track them bo↑th:?

2. HUM: °The loser is nothing.° (.) °Only the princess matters.° (.)
3. >Clearly this was all planned by warriors of Gil↑der!< (.)
4. >We must all be ready< (.) <°for whatever lies ahead.°.>

The dramatic irony in this situation is not unveiled, until later in the movie when the audience finds out that Humperdinck is the mastermind behind the abduction. This reveal makes all his earlier and future actions and comments, such as this extract and line 2, ironic – throughout the movie, he has been pretending to care for Buttercup’s wellbeing and swearing revenge in a very dramatic manner if she is harmed, when in fact he has been the one planning her abduction and murder all along. In this situation, the only ones aware of the irony are Humperdinck (the ironist), Rugen, who is in on the plan, and the viewers who for example have read the book or seen the movie earlier, so the irony divides the crowd (Barbe 1995:118). Although Humperdinck’s comments are lies, the irony in them and in the situation are clear after the reveal. It is also possible that although his comments are lies, the irony is directed to Rugen who knows about the plan and thus, they are the only ones who know the crucial information about the plot. Buttercup is saying “the Prince will save me” throughout the whole movie and is thus unaware that he who she is saying will rescue her, is actually trying to kill her. Buttercup’s naivety also adds to the irony of the situation, as the audience who know from the beginning that Humperdinck is evil (if they already have the knowledge from the book or seeing the movie earlier), see her declaring her false savior throughout the movie.

Thus, line 2 conveys the dramatic irony carried throughout the whole movie, once the viewer is aware of Humperdinck’s true nature and the plot twist. The line is also verbally ironic, as Humperdinck does not mean what he says, or at least he does not mean it the way the audience thinks he does. There is also a double meaning – the princess matters, but not as in “we must save her”, but as in “she must die”.

## 5 Conclusion

The irony in the Princess Bride is manifold – it is present throughout the whole movie, and its different genres are represented numerous times and the humor is often carried by the irony. Some ironies are clear immediately, while some ironies become clear only after the situation of the scene unfolds itself. This kind of “post-irony” enables the movie to become even more ironic after it has been watched. As the movie is re-watchable by its nature, the ironies it holds are then clear from the beginning to the end when it is watched another time. The verbal irony

in the Princess Bride is often unnoticed by others, only the ironist is aware of the irony in their comments while the other characters remain unaware of the mockery they have suffered, which makes the irony even funnier. In the film, Westley is the ironist exceedingly often, other ironists being Miracle Max, Grandfather, and Prince Humperdinck. The irony in the Princess Bride is then often of excluding nature, as the understanding of the irony is divided to those who get it, and those who do not, be it on the screen or the couch.

The irony in the Princess Bride is recognized from the tone of voice, facial expressions and other nonverbal cues, context, and from the situations. The tone of voice is often in incongruence with the meaning of the words – the sentence is for example delivered in a very matter-of-fact way, while the true message of the sentence does not match the delivery. Facial expressions varied from serious to slightly amused, but generally the facial expressions remained stern. Other nonverbal cues were often exaggerated gestures. Context helped to identify the irony in cases where the situation/words were in incongruence with the context of the scene.

This study answered the question of what types of irony there are in the movie. There are six different types of ironies in the Princess Bride, the types being verbal, situational, dramatic, tragic, romantic, and unidentifiable irony. There is a total of 57 ironic occurrences in the movie. In verbal irony, I also concluded sarcastic comments as verbal irony and sarcasm are closely knit, and it was difficult to tell them apart.

The study also answered how humor is conveyed through the irony. The humor is conveyed through many means in the movie, irony being one of them. Irony carries certain humor, which is evident in the movie. The humor is conveyed through the irony via the delivery and reactions to the irony, context, unexpectedness, and the irony itself. The means of delivering the irony can make the situation funny, or how others react. The lack of reaction can also be humorous, as it indicates that the characters did not notice the irony and furthermore, often the ones who did not notice the irony, were in fact the subjects of the irony.

The results implicate that the irony in the movie conveys humor and thus, some of the humor in the movie consists of irony. The results of this study might interest The Princess Bride and movie fans in general, and those who are interested in irony, linguistics, literary analysis, or

literary devices. The findings of this study might also inspire further study of the data, or similar studies of other movies. The Princess Bride and/or the irony could be researched more in closer detail, as for example one irony type could be further examined, or a comparison with the book can be established. The language used in the movie or book could be examined as well, as it is rich with figurative language. The results of this study can be used in fields such as linguistics, or literary analysis. This thesis contributes to irony studies as it examines how irony conveys humor, and it also examines the usage of irony in a movie setting.

However, it should be noted that the study is limited, as all the types could not have been studied in a bachelor's thesis as it would have required a more extensive study. More importantly, as irony is a subjective concept, another scholar might not agree with the ironies I found, or they could potentially find ironies I did not notice. Humor is also subjective (Barbe 1995:16), so what I find humorous might not be funny to another person. The subjective nature of the study of irony is both a strength and weakness: on the one hand, the study examines irony from one understanding of irony, but on the other hand, that understanding of irony might not be similar to someone else's, but this complexity is what makes the study of irony quite interesting.

My study differed from the previous study by Alfonso and Fargo (2014), as they examined the movie's screenplay and William Goldman's own writing style, while I examined the movie itself. Still, we both found *The Princess Bride* ironic – Alfonso and Fargo (2014) made notice of Goldman's ironic writing style, and I found a plethora of examples of irony from the movie. The movie thus succeeded in bringing the irony from the screenplay to the silver screen. My study also found irony even in the briefest moments, as MacDowell described the phenomenon (2016:97).

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1, extract 3: longer version

1. WES: Alright (.) where is the poison? (.) the battle of wits is begun (.)
2. it ends when >you ((points at Vizzini)) decide and we both drink< <and
3. find out who is right (.) and who is dead>
4. VIZ: but it's so simple (.) all I have to do is divine from what I know of you:!
5. <°are you the sort of man who would put the poison to his own goblet or
6. his enemy's.°> Now a clever man would put the poison into his own goblet
7. because he would know only a great fool that only a great foo:l would
8. reach for what he was given I am not a great fool, >so I can clearly not choose the
9. wine in front of you. But you must have known I was not a great fool, you would
10. have counted on it (.), so I can clearly not choose the wine in front of me<.
11. WES: You've made your decision then?
12. VIZ: \$Not remote↑ly\$ (.)>Because< iocane comes from AUSTRALIA (.) as everyone ↓kn↑ows,
13. <and Australia is entirely >peopled< with criminals> (.) and criminals are used to having
14. people not trust them, as >you are not trusted by me< <so I can °clearly
15. not choose the wine in front of you°>.
16. WES: ↑Truly, you have a dizzying intellect.
17. ((strokes his jaw and nods his head))
18. VIZ: WAIT TILL I GET GOING! (.) °Where was ↓I?°

### Appendix 2, Westley's explanation

1. BUT: Who are you?
2. WES: I'm no one to be trifled with. That is all you ever need know.
3. BUT: And to think, all that time it was your cup that was poisoned.
4. WES: They were both poisoned. I spent the last few years
5. building up an immunity to iocane powder.

### Appendix 3, The transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004) in Lerner (2004)

(.) micropause, a hearable pause, which is difficult to measure (usually less than 0.3 seconds)

(0.5) silence, timed in tenths of seconds

Pauses can be marked either within an utterance or between utterances. Within turn silences are hearable as occurring in the same turn. Silences that are not clearly within a turn are marked on a separate line.

### 2. Aspects of speech delivery, including intonation

Punctuation marks do not indicate grammatical units, but intonation:

. falling intonation (at the end of a unit, but not necessarily end of turn)

,	level intonation
?	rising intonation (not necessarily a question)
↑	marked rise in pitch (marked before the syllable where the rise occurs)
↓	marked fall in pitch (marked before the syllable where the fall occurs)
:	lengthening of sound (the more colons, the longer the sound, e.g. lo:::::ng)
ye-	cut-off speech (“self-interruption”)
yes	stress or emphasis (via pitch and/or amplitude)
□yes□	soft speech
YES	loud speech (the louder, the more letters in upper case)
>talking<	compressed talk; talk that is faster than surrounding talk
<talking>	talk that is slower than surrounding talk
.hh	inbreath
hhh	aspiration (breathing, laughter); (the more h’s, the more aspiration)
heh hhh	laughter
\$word\$	laughing voice
#word#	creaky voice
@word@	animated voice

### 3. Other markings

(I suppose) item in doubt (transcriber uncertain about what is said, a possible hearing)

( ) something is said, but it is not possible to hear it well enough to transcribe

(( )) transcriber's comment (to represent events that occur but are not part of verbal utterances, but have bearing on the interaction)