

Relevance & Irony: A pragmatic reading of a passage from W. Kennedy: Ironweed (1979)

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En este trabajo pretendemos estudiar el valor significativo de los **enunciados irónicos** de un pasaje dialogado de W. Kennedy: *Ironweed* dentro de nuestra elaboración personal de un modelo pragmático de análisis de textos literarios. A las ideas de Sperber y Wilson (1986,1988) sobre **relevancia, eco, ironía, y características pragmáticas de los enunciados con valor literario**, hemos unido nuestras propias consideraciones sobre la necesidad de distinguir **niveles de narración** para alcanzar nuestros objetivos, tal y como discutimos en nuestro grupo de investigación sobre Pragmática y Literatura (Universidad de Vigo 1992-93). El resultado ha sido: 1) alcanzar conclusiones importantes sobre **la naturaleza de los enunciados irónicos** desde una perspectiva pragmática, 2) **entender mejor cómo éstos operan en un texto de calidad literaria**, 3) dejar como problema pendiente, más allá de la **distancia** del enunciado su **posible actitud proposicional** a la hora de construir una interpretación coherente y relevante del pasaje. La Pragmática, más allá de las modas, se consolida como enfoque útil para estudiar las construcciones literarias.

1.- Goals.

In this paper we intend to develop some ideas put forward by Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1988) and their pragmatic school on the nature of **ironical utterances** and test them in a literary text. Our main goal is to show that Pragmatics is useful as an analytic tool to study this kind of language. However, due to the complexity of literature -a narration in this case- we have to combine the principles of Relevance Theory with our own view of how to handle literary texts. Once the principles of Relevance Theory have been examined, we will propose the frame of analysis we

have designed in the meetings of the Research Group on Pragmatics & Literature (Universidad de Vigo 1992-93) to achieve our purposes. We have to thank Marta Dahlgren, Beatriz Figueroa and Cristina Larkin for their invaluable suggestions. We started to deal with Pragmatics and literature in 1988 and the more convinced we are that this approach is valid beyond trendy fashions the more complex the task appears to be. We can only offer work in progress and we have to suggest that all objections and remarks on this subject will be very welcome.

2.- Relevance Theory.

Sperber & Wilson (1986) give this definition of the Principle of Relevance:

«Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own relevance.» (158)

The view of human communication -and Pragmatics- that led them to the formulation of this principle can be schematically described in the following points:

2.1.- Pragmatics/Relevance is based on **Intentionality** (Searle 1969). Beyond the linguistic message, what is important is the **Speaker's Communicative Intention**, what he/she **means** (Grice 1957) by uttering something **in context**.

2.2.- The listener's task is based on a **deductive-inferential** process in order to understand the speaker's communicative intention and to speak and act in consequence.

2.3.- This deductive inferential process works this way:

2.3.1.- The listener understands the speaker's utterance in context.

2.3.2.- The listener uses the **propositional content** of the utterance to start his/her deductive process. The propositional content of the utterance has to be fully meaningful i.e. **enriched**. Problems like deixis, tense and **Propositional Attitude** have to be solved by or while processing.

2.3.3.- Taking into account that we always presuppose:

2.3.3.1.- that a speaker always says something **relevant** for the conversation.

2.3.3.2.- that a speaker always relies on context to mean more than what he/she says,

the listener will start his/her deductive process by making the **propositional set of entailments** included in the original utterance **interact** with the **set of propositions** available in his/her **context** so that he/she can understand not only what the speaker has said but what he/she **has implied**. The deductive process is controlled by the **principle of Relevance**.

2.3.4.- The principle of Relevance states:

2.3.4.1.- that an utterance is always relevant (in a normal conversation).

2.3.4.2.- that the relevance is flexible. Optimal relevance is simply the highest number of **implicatures** a listener can deduce within a reasonable **Processing cost** in a context. The system works this way: a listener first checks the **situational** and **discursive** context. If the result is not satisfactory, he/she will enhance the context to include **encyclopaedic** information. But, by doing so the processing effort will be bigger and the relevance will be weaker. In other words: we do not spend hours in finding the meaning of an utterance to achieve optimal relevance in normal everyday conversation. Relevance is flexible; once we have reached a satisfactory conclusion we stop processing.

Now, this is what normally happens in normal everyday exchanges. Literary language works in a different way. The first thing that we have to take into account about literature is that we are dealing with **fiction** (Ohmann 1986) not with reality. This does not mean, for us, that we use a different deductive process, but that **reality** is once removed.

The most important point we have to take into account in the study of a literary text using Relevance Theory is: When involved in the deductive inferential process as readers of a literary text we give ourselves an amount of **time and processing effort** in deducing **weak** implicatures that we cannot normally afford in everyday conversation: we exploit Relevance at no matter what cost. We can spend hours and hours on a text «playing» with possible meanings. To make this activity possible it is, of course, necessary to have a good handling of the linguistic material by the writer so that a potential reader can exploit weak implicatures. In Blakemore's (1991) words:

«Some speakers do indeed produce utterances in the expectation that the hearer will recover a specific set of propositions. But a speaker may produce an utterance with no expectation at all about the way in which it will be understood. In between these two extremes there is a whole range of intermediate cases... In other words, there may be a range of acceptable contexts and contextual effects for the hearer to choose from. The exact extent of the range will vary according to how tightly the speaker constrains the hearer's interpretation. A speaker who constrains the interpretation of his utterance so that the hearer takes very little responsibility in the choice of contextual assumptions and contextual effects is said by Sperber & Wilson to be engaging in «strong communication». The greater the responsibility the hearer has in the selection of contextual assumptions and effects the «weaker» the communication.

Sperber & Wilson suggest that the effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures can be termed a «poetic effect». This is not to suggest that such effects can be achieved only by poets. We have all produced ironic or metaphorical utterances. You may not want to call these everyday figurative utterances poetry, but they exhibit the characteristic of indeterminacy and vagueness just the same.» (156-57)

Therefore:

A) A writer communicates **weakly** to achieve literary effects in a way **not different in nature** from normal everyday conversation.

B) A reader recognizes this communicative intention allowing him/herself more deductive effort in his/her search for Relevance.

In fact, we are not so far away from the **symbolic nature** of literature and the **interpretive role of the imagination** in its study as conceived by the English Romantics. In Bowra's (1961) words:

«...the English romantics pursued their lives of imaginative enquiry until they found answers which satisfied them. Their aim was to convey the mystery of things through individual manifestations and thereby to show what it means. **They appeal not to the logical mind** but to the complete self, to the whole range of intellectual faculties senses and emotions. Only individual presentations of imaginative experience can do this. In them we see examples of what **cannot be expressed directly in words and can be conveyed only by hint and suggestion**. The powers which Wordsworth saw in nature or Shelley in love are so enormous that we begin to understand them only when they are manifested in single, concrete examples. Then, through the single cases, we apprehend something of what the poet has seen in vision. The essence of the Romantic imagination is that it fashions shapes which display these unseen forces at work, and there is no other way to display them, since they resist analysis and description and cannot be presented except in particular instances.» (10)

If we see this idealism in historical perspective and we substitute «formal semantics» for «logical mind» and «Pragmatics» for «hint and suggestion»... and we sincerely believe that there is a way to formalize what a discourse «connotes», we see ourselves very near the romantics ... and in the middle of the controversy about literary language. But this is a subject for further study and the subject matter of a possible future paper.

The most valuable aspect in Sperber & Wilson's theory is that it supplies us with a **communicative principle**: Relevance, and with a formal model -proposition, implicature, context- which allows us to explain how we reach certain conclusions about a message and how we discard others. Further, they give us a **characterization** of literary language that at the same

time connects it with and differentiates it from normal everyday language in a continuum in which everyday irony and metaphor play a central role. We will come back to these concepts later on in this paper, together with another important concept: propositional attitude. But, to be coherent, we have to handle first the crucial problem of **levels** in narration.

3.-Levels in Narration.

When we face the task of analysing a narrative text, a problem immediately springs up: that of levels of narration... and interpretation. While in normal everyday language there is typically a speaker and a listener, in a narration there may be **many** speakers and, even worse, the listener is not present or defined. We are not going to deal with the problem of the **narrator** or with the problem of the **ideal listener/reader** of a narration (Adams 1985). We are only interested in studying what the mechanism is that allows us a **comprehensive and consistent** interpretation of our text in our search for maximal relevance, i.e. how we build up an interpretation of a text. For the moment, we have only attempted this task in **literary dialogues** where the similarity, at least in form, with normal everyday conversation is higher. We are conscious that by making reference to this problem we have entered one of the more difficult and controversial aspects of literary theory. This is the reason why we want to be very humble in our proposal.

This proposal is to expand Relevance Theory as described here in the following way:

3.1.- We will distinguish tentatively **three linguistic levels** that will interact and combine in an **inclusive** way to allow us, in our descriptive inferential process, to build up an **interpretation**. This interpretation is neither the «true» one nor the «only» one. It is simply that which, for us, is **most relevant**, based on the same principle which applies when somebody utters «it is cold in here» and we infer that the speaker wants the heater to be turned on. We can be «right» or «wrong», as we can be «right» or «wrong» in our everyday conversational exchanges, but we have been **consistent** with our method of reasoning.

3.2.- We will maintain and use the frame: proposition-implicature-context in the way suggested by Sperber and Wilson.

3.3.- We will allow ourselves to use as our guide the Principle of Relevance. This means that we can «enjoy» inferring «weak» implicatures as far as the interaction propositional content-context permits us to do so. In principle «open» «arbitrary» interpretations lie outside this frame of analysis.

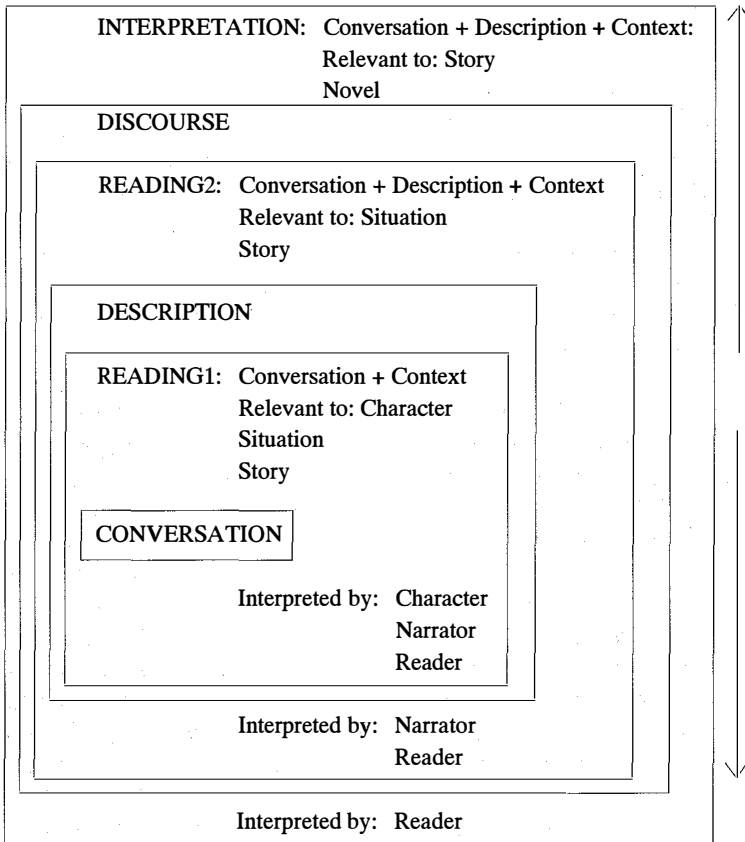
3.4.- We will see the literary work **from the point of view of the reader**. We will not focalize alternatively on the writer-narrator-reader and the like, something for us confusing and prone to inconsistency.

By distinguishing levels of narration we are not that far away, in principle, from **Structuralist Poetics**. The term «levels of analysis» comes from this source. Todorov (1971), for example, uses the labels: «level» and «layer»:

«A certain destruction we said, for to destroy does not mean to ignore. The apparent order is not the only one and our task will be to make evident «all» the orders of the text and to specify their interrelation. A literary reading cannot, therefore, be modelled on the image of myths, concerning which Levy Strauss observed: «considered in the crude state, any systematic chain must be regarded as having no meaning: either because no signification appears at the outset or because we suppose we perceive a meaning but without knowing if it is the right one». The same gesture, which is the refusal to be content with the perceptible organization of a text, assumes different significations in these two cases: **in the perspective of reading, each layer of the text has a meaning.**» (241-42)

Our conception of «layer» or «level» is similar and different at the same time. Similar because we accept the view of structured different possible readings. Different because we integrate this idea in Relevance Theory in the following way: 1.- **each level is going to interact with the other levels**, 2.- **they are going to be part of the deductive inferential process of the reader in his/her search for Relevance**.

The frame we propose is:



This is our tentative proposal for the analysis of dialogues. We have, we hope, shown that our use of the structuralist concept **level** is not mechanical but an enlargement of Relevance Theory to allow for a **coherent interpretation** of a text.

4.- Irony and Propositional Attitude.

We had to state our working principles and ideas to tackle the point which is essential to this paper: the study of **irony** in a passage from

Kennedy's *Ironweed*. Before starting the analysis we have to draw on Sperber & Wilson again to find a theoretical basis for our study.

The problem of irony as a figure of speech is a leit-motif in Philosophy, Logic, Literary Criticism, Rhetoric and Pragmatics. Therefore we are not going to be so bold or naive as to formulate an explanation in a few lines. We are interested in examining how Sperber & Wilson's (1988) ideas on irony can be operative in our framework to help us find a consistent interpretation of a literary text. In a nutshell: as another step to examine the potentiality of Pragmatics as a tool for literary analysis we are going to use a definition of **irony** which focuses on the concepts of «**echoic utterance**» and «**propositional belief**» in order to study the contribution it makes to relevance in a specific text.

For Sperber & Wilson, the essential nature of an utterance used ironically is that it is **echoic**. That is, we utter what we or somebody else would have uttered «seriously» in a different situational context. Apart from the fact that we use this utterance in a context where the propositional belief is not the same, we **interpret** the original thought because its propositional meaning is once removed from the original use. At first, that utterance would have been, theoretically, a reflection of a thought in such a way that the speaker would have **believed** it. The fact of quoting -more or less literally- somebody **frees us from the need to manifest our belief in the propositional content of the utterance**. The actual speaker can show a different **propositional attitude** which will be relevant by context. He/she need not believe it. It is not a question of truth-values any more but, as Sperber and Wilson (1988) put it, a question of **faithfulness**. Commenting on Mary reporting on her interview with an agent: «(6) a) I met an agent last night. b) He can make me rich and famous»:

«Free indirect speech, like direct quotation, can be used for two main purposes: to inform an audience about the content of the original, or for the expression of attitude. By speaking in a manifestly smug, surprised, approving or sceptical tone, Mary [reference to a previous example] may simultaneously inform Peter of what the agent told her, and express her reactions to what she has been told. Where interpretive representation involves such an expression of attitude, let us call the utterance **echoic**, and say that Mary **echoes** the agent's views.

The interpretive use of utterances, like the use of direct quotations, presents problems for a framework with a maxim of truthfulness. When Mary uses (6) to echo the agent's utterance, she does not commit herself to the

existence of a state of affairs described; nor does she appear to flout that maxim of truthfulness. Rather, her utterance is accompanied by a different type of guarantee -a guarantee of faithfulness, not of truth. Mary guarantees that her utterance is a faithful enough representation of what the agent said. Moreover, since her utterance is chosen for its propositional form, this example cannot be dismissed as falling outside the domain of verbal communication proper.» (138-39)

Before reaching the next step: irony, let's see Sperber & Wilson's definition of **propositional attitude**, a concept that, beyond philosophy (Anderson & Owens 1990, Quine, 1970) plays a central role in their work:

«Let us assume that there is a basic memory store with the following property: any representation stored in it is treated by the mind as a true description of the actual world, a fact. What this means is that a fundamental propositional attitude of belief or assumption is pre-wired into the very architecture of the mind. As a result, a representation can be entertained as an assumption without the fact that it is an assumption being explicitly expressed. Such basic assumptions, entertained as true descriptions of the world but not explicitly represented as such, we will call **factual assumptions**.» (74)

That is, there are **facts** and there are **beliefs, desires** and the like «**that facts**» (Pxp). We can distinguish these two aspects in an utterance. The most important feature of an echoic utterance is that it allows the speaker to disengage from the propositional attitude of belief and/or his/her commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed. By means of this disengagement and the uttering of the sequence in a context other than the one where we would normally have used it we achieve **an ironic effect**, which is shown in a **characteristic propositional attitude** by the **clash** proposition-context. According to Sperber & Wilson (1988):

«Ironic utterances, we would argue... The speaker echoes a thought she attributes so someone else while disassociating herself from it **with ridicule or scorn**.» (146)

Therefore, the key concepts are: **echo, propositional attitude and context**. By means of them we can characterize an utterance as **ironic**.

5.- Irony and levels of analysis.

Sperber & Wilson do not extend their analysis beyond utterances. The problem is now to handle it A) in discourse, B) In a literary dialogue. In other words, we have to examine the **interaction** proposition-context to infer relevant consequences which will help us in building up our interpretation. We think that to achieve this goal it is completely necessary to take into account the working framework we have proposed. Unless we know **who** is being ironic (writer/narrator/character), **about what** (discourse, situational context, further context) and **who** it is he/she is making fun of, we will not be able to achieve a coherent interpretation. This is what we plan to do now. First we will present the text and then we will comment on those ironies which are relevant to us. We have to emphasize that we are not going to work out a full interpretation because: 1) we are going to examine **irony** only, not the whole meaning of the passage, 2) we are going to deal with two levels of analysis: those of **character** and **narrator**. To see the passage from the point of view of the writer we would have to take into account the whole work, which is beyond our scope. We will limit ourselves to the brief examination of how irony works inside the proposed framework and to advancing a couple of questions for further study.

6.- The Passage.

WILLIAM KENNEDY: IRONWEED (1979).

Francis had coffee and bread with the bums who'd dried out, and other bums passin' through, and the preacher there watchin' everybody and playin' grabass with their souls. Never mind my soul, was Francis's line. Just pass the coffee. Then he stood out front killin' time and pickin' his teeth with a matchbook cover. And here came Rudy.

Rudy was sober too for a change and his gray hair was combed and trimmed. His mustache was clipped and he wore white suede shoes, even though it was October, what the hell, he's just a bum, and a white shirt and a crease in his pants. Francis, no lace in one of his shoes, hair matted and uncut, smelling his own body stink and ashamed of it for the first time in memory, felt deprived.

«You lookin' good there, bum,» Francis said.
«I been in the hospital.»
«What for?»
«Cancer.»
«No shit. Cancer.»
«He says to me you're gonna die in six months. I says I'm gonna wine myself to death. He says it don't make any difference if you wined or dined, you're goin'. Goin' out of this world with a cancer. The stomach, it's like the pits, you know what I mean? I said I'd like to make it to fifty. The doc says you'll never make it. I said all right, what's the difference?»
«Too bad, grandma. You got a jug?»
«I got a dollar.»
«Jesus, we're in business,» Francis said.
But then he remembered his debt to Marcus Gorman.
«Listen, bum,» he said, «you wanna go to work with me and make a few bucks? We can get a couple of jugs and a flop tonight. Gonna be cold. Look at that sky.»
«Work where.»
«The cemetery. Shovelin' dirt.»
«The cemetery. Why not? I oughta get used to it. What're they payin'?»
«Who the hell knows?»
«I mean they payin' money, or they give you a free grave when you croak?»
«If ain't money, forget it,» Francis said, «I ain't shovelin' out my own grave.»
.....
«There's seven deadly sins,» Rudy said.
«Deadly? What do you mean deadly?» Francis said.
«I mean daily,» Rudy said. «Every day.»
«There's only one sin as far as I'm concerned,» Francis said.
«There's prejudice.»
«Oh yeah. Prejudice. Yes.»
«There's envy.»
«Envy. Yeah, yup. That's one.»
«There's lust.»
«Lust, right. Always liked that one.»
«Cowardice.»
«Who's a coward?»
«Cowardice.»
«I don't know what you mean. That word I don't know.»

«Cowardice,» Rudy said.

«I don't like the coward word. What you're sayin' about coward?»

«A coward. He'll cower up. You know what a coward is? He'll run.»

«No, that word I don't know. Francis is no coward. He'll fight anybody.

Listen, you know what I like?»

«What do you like?»

«Honesty,» Francis said.

«That's another one,» Rudy said.

.....

«Hey,» Rudy said, wasn't you with a woman the other night I saw you?»

«What woman?»

«I don't know. Helen. Yeah, you called her Helen.»

«Helen. You can't keep track of where she is.»

«What'd she do, run off with a banker?»

«She didn't run off.»

«Then where is she?»

«Who knows? She comes, she goes. I don't keep tabs.»

«You got a million of 'em.»

«More where she came from.»

«They are all crazy to meet you.»

«My socks is what gets 'em.»

Francis lifted his trousers to reveal his socks, one green, one blue.

«a regular man about town.» Rudy said.

Francis dropped his pantlegs and walked on, and Rudy said. «Hey, what the hell was all about the man from Mars last night? Everybody was talkin' about it at the hospital. You hear about that stuff on the radio?»

«Oh yeah. They landed.»

«Who?»

«The Martians.»

«Where'd they land?»

«someplace in Jersey.»

«What happened?»

«They didn't like it no more'n I did.»

«No joke,» Rudy said. «I heard people saw them Martians comin' and ran outa town, jumped outa windows, everything like that.»

«Good,» Francis said. «What they oughta do. Anybody sees a Martian oughta jump out two windows.

«You don't take things serious,» Rudy said. «You have a Whatayacallit, a frivolous way about you.»

«A frivolous way? A frivolous way?»

«That's what I said. A frivolous way.»
 «What the hell's that mean? You've been readin' again, you crazy kraut? I told you cuckoos like you shouldn't go around readin', callin' people frivolous.»
 «That ain't no insult. Frivolous is a good word. A nice word.»
 «Never mind words, there's the cemetery.» And Francis pointed to the entrance-road gates. «I just thought of somethin'.»
 «What?»
 «That cemetery's full of gravestones.»
 «Right.»
 «I never knew a bum yet had a gravestone.» (7-12)

7.- Ironies in the text.

This passage depicts a gloomy atmosphere in which the idea of death is overwhelming. However, besides this, we perceive that, beyond the negativeness, the situation, the characters and the conversation described, there is a place for **distance** and **irony**. In some cases the narrator makes fun of the characters, in some other cases they make fun of each other or of themselves: they are **bums**. For us, paradoxically, the use of irony makes the passage even more desperate, more pessimistic and at the same time forces the reader to feel sympathy for these two losers. We are going to restrict ourselves to the «technicalities» we have been discussing until now, but we have to advance what is going to be our final concern: **does irony stop at the reader's understanding of the mockery and scorn of the passage? Is the narrator's distance part of a communicative intention which is based on scorn?** We would say that Kennedy is a very good writer because of his cautious handling of the language and the ironic effects as opposed to context. He is able to provoke a clash that stirs our feelings. But let's leave this point here and examine the ironic utterances:

7.1.- Situation.

The narrator describes a gloomy setting. We would have to pay attention to **register** (Quirk et alii 1985) in so far as the degree of **faithfulness** of the representation to the original utterances from a bum is

relevant in meaning. We would have to pay attention also to his jokes («playing grabass with their souls»). However, not to be too ambitious, let's go to the dialogue:

7.2.- Dialogue.

7.2.1.- «You looking good there, bum,» Francis said.

«I been in the hospital.»

«What for?»

«Cancer.»

«No shit. Cancer?»

The irony here has nothing to do with the characters. Neither of them means to be ironic. It **springs up** from the situation which transforms a greeting into something different in context. The irony here is **on the level of the narrator**. It is an irony provided by life -the plot- and echoed by the narrator. There is distance, but, is there scorn? What is the narrator's propositional attitude? We should think about it in order to build up an interpretation of the novel.

7.2.2.- «He says to me you're gonna die in six months. I says I'm gonna wine myself to death. He says it don't make any difference if you wine or dine, you're goin'.»

The first irony is by Rud(d)y: «I'm gonna wine myself to death» in which the **character** makes fun of the doctor's serious message. The second irony is by **the Doctor**. It has the form of a **pun**: «wined or dined» is used to mean to treat somebody very well (Simon & Schuster's 1973) in a normal context. Using the utterance here, in this context, it challenges Rudy's irony with another irony, grammatically reinforced by the use of the expression in a subordinate clause followed by a metaphoric: «you are going».

Here we have an interesting series of steps:

- wine and dine used in its **appropriate** context.
- wine and dine echoed by the doctor (irony)

- wine and dine echoed by Rudy (self-inflicted irony)
- wine and dine echoed by the narrator (irony on a tragic situation). It is up to the reader now.

7.2.3.- «The cemetery. Why not? I oughta get used to it.»

It is easy to see Rudy's self-irony. A **character** is making fun of himself and his desperate situation.

7.2.4.- «I mean they payin' money, or they give you a free grave when you croak?»

First, we would like to note the construction: «They are paying you money or they give you a free _____ when you _____?» **Echoic frame** that could be used in a kind of linguistic transaction not as gloomy as this one. Once we insert the two lexical items: «grave», «croak» the sentence becomes ironic in a double sense. First because of the clash with the context, second because of the nature of the **metaphorical** items used. Once we have the joke we could consider it a piece of black humour. Once we know Rudy's situation it becomes ironic. He makes fun of himself.

7.2.5.- «Deadly-daily.»

In all this exchange, the mistakes are not made on purpose by the characters. **The narrator** is the one who is being ironic. He is the one who builds up the dialogue and who echoes what his characters are saying. His propositional attitude is clear (?): scorn at the characters' cultural level and their transcendental worries... and Rudy's sure death.

7.2.6.- «Lust, right. Always liked that one.»

Francis mocks at Rudy's theology with his ironic comment. The **clash** sin/liking is too evident to say much about it.

7.2.7.- «Cowardice.»

The **narrator** has a good laugh at Francis, who takes personally something that he thinks affects him. This is a joke that comes immediately after his own irony on Rudy.

7.2.8.- «Honesty... That's another one.»

A new joke on Rudy's vocabulary. It **might** be Rudy's irony, but isn't it too subtle for him?

7.2.9.- «What'd she do, run off with a banker?»

Clear irony by **Rudy** on Helen, a bum, and on her relation with Francis. Running off with a banker is clearly not a possible context.

7.2.10.- «My socks is what gets 'em.»... Francis lifted his trousers to reveal his socks, one green, one blue.

Here we have a **combination of utterance and ostensive act**. To present something ludicrous as the apparent clue for Francis' «charm» is fully ironic on his part. The narrator reproduces it literally supplying the context.

7.2.11.- «A regular man about town.» Rudy said.

Rudy's irony reinforces Francis's irony contrasting the appearance of a bum with that of a «regular» citizen.

7.2.12.- «The Martians.»

Here we have a special case of irony that is not based on the echo of something that could have been true but **on a blatant lie**. Francis mocks Rudy's credulity by giving false information and by making his ironic intention manifest. «They didn't like it no more than I did.» Francis is

apparently reporting something that Martians would have said. The last utterance, implying a relation Martians/Francis forces the ironic interpretation. On the other hand, Francis's utterance is an ironic comment on his own view of the world. That is:

- irony on Rudy's credulity.
- irony on the existence of Martians.
- irony on life in this world.

7.2.13.- «Good... Anybody sees a Martian oughta jump out two windows.»

The irony seems to be in the **exaggeration** (let's not forget the **degree of faithfulness in an echoic utterance**) and in the use of the **modal**: from the real world to a possible world. The change in Francis's echo of Rudy's utterance shows Francis's attitude.

7.2.14.- «A frivolous way.»

Rudy understands Francis's scorn.- His comment, using the word «frivolous» forces another ironical display of lack of culture.

We reach the cemetery and here we have an utterance, and a very relevant one, which is going to help us to hint at some conclusions:

8.- Conclusion.

8.1.- «I never knew a bum yet had a gravestone.»

Is this utterance ironic? If it is ironic, on what level do we have to place it? Let's have a look at the **context**. They are going to «shovel dirt» and they are «bums». It **might** be that Francis would be echoing a sentence that, in this case, would not be attributable to a specific speaker, being ironic about their work and situation... or it might be the narrator who is ironic. I think that here we have to keep in mind what Sperber & Wilson (1988) say : *The thought being echoed... may not be attributable to any specific person, but merely a cultural aspiration or norm.*» (146). It is not

necessary that the echoic utterance be literal. It is perhaps feasible that it is the echo of some solemn thought of a «solemnner» writer in a «solemnest» book about how death is unfair with poor people. This solemn thought is echoed by a dirty bum who is working his ass off in a cemetery. Who is ironic?: the narrator. What is he mocking?: a bum's life, thoughts, feelings, fears and death. The narrator is telling us something about life -a certain kind of life- and death. We are fully conscious that **we are enjoying ourselves in working out weak implicatures**. Reading a good writer such as Kennedy allows us to enjoy this task as described by Sperber & Wilson.

Now, Sperber & Wilson (1986) state: *«The attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind.»* (239). Is this the case here? can we say that **irony= scorn?**. We have isolated that part of a linguistic message that is crucial for the working out of irony: **echo, wrong context and propositional attitude**. We have also seen that our distinction of levels of language helps us to work out the meaning of these utterances. But, beyond the possible objections to our frame of analysis, we have to define the term **propositional attitude** much more in detail and, perhaps, challenge, with more texts and examples, Sperber & Wilson's view on attitude. We have, perhaps, found a place for irony in the pragmatic analysis of literary texts: **distance**, but beyond this point a lot of work is still to be done.

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