

**Title:**  
**Double Talking: Essays on Verbal and Visual Ironies in Contemporary Canadian Art and Literature**

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**Abstract (summary):**

Are we living through an "irony epidemic"? In March in the mass media as well as in what we like to call "high art" and the academy, there has been a lot of talk about irony lately. Why? After all, irony is nothing new; it has been around for a long time, if Quintilian and Cicero are to be believed (see too Gaunt; Good; Green). Some people blame (and that is the appropriate verb, given the tone of most commentary) the rise of what has been labeled "postmodernism"; others simply point out that irony is a popular fin-de-siècle trope and that the twentieth century is merely poised to go out on the same note upon which it came in. But either view neglects the important changes in the iue of that trope over the last hundred years. One of the major changes has been the shift in the usage (and therefore meaning) of irony, from the idea of it as an absurdist, fundamentally pessimistic, and detached vision of existence (see Glicksberg) to the notion of irony as a more positive mode of artistic expression with renewed power as an engaged critical force, that is to say, as a rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition. In other words, irony today is neither trivial nor trivializing, despite some Marxist critics' contentions to the contrary (see Jameson; T. Eagleton, "Capitalism"). As Italo Calvino once reminded us: "there is such a thing as a lightness of thoughtfulness, just as we all know that there is a lightness of frivolity" (l o) - and the two should not be confused.

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Verbal Irony typically operates at the level of words and sentences that are understood by audiences or readers to carry meanings different from the words themselves when interpreted literally. (Sarcasm can be considered a form of verbal irony.) To define it simply, it occurs when a character uses a statement with underlying meanings that contrast with its literal meaning; it shows that the writer has used verbal irony. Situational Irony is a literary device that you can easily identify in literary works. Simply, it occurs when incongruity appears between expectations of something to happen, and what actually happens instead. Thus, something entirely different happens from what audience may be expecting, or the final outcome is opposite to what the audience is expecting. ———. "Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada." *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1995. Google Scholar. "George Grant Techne." *Double Talking: Essays on Verbal and Visual Ironies in Canadian Contemporary Art and Literature*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1992. Google Scholar. Innis, Harold A. *The Bias of Communication*.

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