

“Narrative Irony and Ideological Missteps in Children’s Film”
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Building from Mikhail Bakhtin, my presentation extends studies by Mike Cadden and Linda Hutcheon, as well as picturebook scholarship by Maria Nikolajeva and Perry Nodelman, to consider the potentially concerning ideological ramifications of narrative irony in children’s film. I claim irony allows filmmakers to engage gender and cultural commentary without making explicit thematic statements, thus seeming to advocate for social change while still maintaining a heteronormative status quo.

For example, use of irony in musical numbers like “I’ve Got a Dream” from *Tangled* (2010) and “You’re Welcome” from *Moana* (2016) seemingly critique gender stereotypes, while simultaneously reinforcing problematic representation. Similarly, while songs like “Savages” and “Mine, Mine, Mine” in *Pocahontas* (1995) seem to highlight the villainy of colonization and prejudice, they require interpretative leaps that confuse ideological messages, as is the case in songs that employ humor to establish diverse settings like “Arabian Nights” or “Prince Ali” in *Aladdin* (1992) and “Down in New Orleans” or “Goin’ Down the Bayou” in *Princess and the Frog* (2009). These examples are especially concerning when viewed via contemporary understandings of intersectionality, which I examine especially in *Mulan* (1998), a film wherein uses of narrative irony not only problematically assumes Americanized ideological perspectives, but intertwines representation of culture and gender in ways that perpetuate stereotypes about masculinity and misrepresent Chinese culture. Using such examples, I assert that narrative irony in children’s film often has problematic gender and culturally based ideological consequences.