

Trihuwan University

The Politics of Irony in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English Tribhuwan University, Kirtipur

Kathmandu, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

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June 2023

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Acknowledgments

I am genuinely indebted to my respected advisor Diwakar Upadhyay Aryal, lecturer at the Central Department of English, T.U., Kirtipur for providing me with precious intellectual suggestions and guidance. Without his appropriate suggestions, this research paper would never have been completed. There are no words to express his appropriate and intellectual help.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, the head, of the Central Department of English for his cooperation. I also want to thank my teachers, seniors, and friends for their valuable suggestions during my research work.

I would like to express my reverence for my family's inspiration and constant support in fulfilling my dream to achieve Master's Degree in English. I am thankful to my relatives who helped me directly and indirectly on various occasions.

June 2023

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Abstract

This thesis explores the politics of irony in Kathryn Stockett's novel The Help. It explores the way of subverting high values and reinforcing marginalized ones and also explores the resistance of working-class people. Stockett presents problems of racial segregation and discrimination, combined with occurrences of unjust treatment and both verbal and physical mistreatment. This paper brings the theoretical concept from Linda Hutcheon and Wyne C Booth in order to investigate Stockett's politics of making radical use of irony. Hutcheon's trans-ideological and subversive functions of irony are applicable to this research. By using Hutcheon's concept, it finds out Stockett's politics of irony that helps her to subvert the high discourse, values, and hypocrisy and at the same time to reinforce the marginalized discourse and values. Thus, it is concluded that irony helps Stockett to make marginalized people aware by unmasking the complexity and multiplicity of high culture.

Keywords: Irony, trans-ideological, subversive, reinforcing, context, resistance

This thesis attempts to explore the politics of irony in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (1962). Stockett in the novel makes radical use of irony in order to demonstrate post-war English society, political turmoil, and effects on society. She focuses on voicing the voiceless and justice for the black community. The issues of irony allow Stockett to illuminate the harsh realities faced by black maids. Moreover, it also helps her to demonstrate the sociopolitical scenario of her time and the resistance of marginalized people against the domination of the ruling class people. Stockett raises common people's voices and deconstructs the boundary between high and low through irony.

This paper also concerns the ironic situation of the characters, their dual identity, and helplessness which signify the politics of irony in Stockett's *The Help*. Skeeter belongs to the white community although she challenges the established values and fights against authority in order to survive in English society. She does not follow any rules and regulations of the authority and makes her own rule. She gets pleasure from her brutal activities such as: raising the voices of ordinary people and challenging the traditional divisions between class and society. Stockett presents such brutality ironically in order to challenge the established norms and values.

Stockett presents the characters ironically in order to show their dual identity and the ambivalent state of their life. The characters have various identities in the novel. As Skeeter points out "Nobody would like to believe something you wrote Nigro." "I don't know. I have been told I'm a pretty good writer". As well as their individual experiences, education, training, and personal attributes. Irony helps Stockett to subvert high culture, discourse, and hypocrisy and at the same time reinforce the marginalized ones. Voice of the voiceless the protagonist and her friends are ironically represented in order to demonstrate the unsaid inhumanity of the system. The protagonist and others perform legal, brutal, and challenging activities not for only getting pleasure but for resisting imposed power, values, and culture.

This is the modern era, where irony has turned as one into an unavoidable part of the literary text. It unavoidably comprises exclusion and inclusion, intervention, and evasion. Linda Hutcheon points out that irony simply does not show the difference between said and unsaid meaning rather it challenges the hierarchy, instability, injustice, and bourgeois values at the same time it enforces marginalized values also by bringing the stated and unstated things together.

The critical analysis of "*The Help*" underscores its significance as a work that prompts discussions about historical injustices, social change, and the complexities of human relationships. However, it's important to note that critiques and interpretations can vary widely, and the novel continues to be a subject of ongoing discussion and debate within literary and academic circles.

Several critics have analyzed *The Help* from different perspectives. One such critic is Martin Barker, who explores the relationship between racism and conservatism in his book *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe*. According to Barker, racism and conservatism have always been closely intertwined, as both stem from a shared sense of fear and insecurity in the face of societal change. He argues that the new form of racism is simply the latest manifestation of this conservative response to the challenges posed by modernity. He suggests that conservatives and racists are driven by a common desire to uphold traditional power structures and resist the force of change.

Pearl McHaney examines *The Help* in her article Kathryn Stockett's Postmodern First Novel. "One critique of *The Help* is that it takes the racial terror out of the 1960s by ignoring the bombings, shootings, and beatings and replacing the Ku Klux Klan with snotty Junior Leaguers who were mean to their maids" (80). However, according to McHaney, "the criticism is inappropriate since Stockett's intention was not to write a historically factual text, but a work of fiction" (81). Nevertheless, McHaney argues that the novel is received in several other categories, such as the language and the characters. She mentions, for instance, that an editor once tried to change the dialogue in the novel. However, Stockett claimed that she wanted the African American characters distinct from the white characters because that is how they sounded in her memory. Stockett explained, "Of course, she couldn't

have Minny speaking like a white socialite”(82). However, in the book, “she never gives an explanation why the novel contains different dialects” (83). Separating characters by their speech is a well-known problem. *In The Language of Postcolonial Literature. An Introduction*, Ismail S. Talib mentions that the use of pidgin in a novel could indicate a character’s lack of education, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty says “people are portrayed to be although it can also be a way to create a feeling of realism” (140). This constructs differences among people, and Justin D. Edward, that structures of difference are sustained by the “myths of the racial and cultural purity” (140). Dividing people into such groups is once again a construction of narratives of difference. In addition, the people’s values might be forgotten. This could be linked to how stereotypes emerge.

Stockett has managed to captivate a large relationship with her novel, which effectively addresses multiple issues within a single work. Clara Zetkin briefly expresses her perspective on the remarkable thematic tapestry present in this novel. *The Help* has received considerable attention, leading many readers to approach their analysis objectively. To provide the context for these critical examinations, two sources of grounding are presented: firstly, a description of an academic panel that took place one year after the publication of Stockett’s novel. Clara Zetkin suggests that the readers of Stockett’s novel, *The Help* are compelled to transcend the conventional standards of objectivity. The captivating nature of the story evokes a sense of magic in readers, leading them to deeply empathize with the challenges and circumstances faced by the characters. This emotional connection tempts readers to delve into the subjective realm of characters, experiencing their feelings and perspectives.

The critical reviews titled “Dirty South: *The Help* and the Problem of Black Bodies,” written by Takenya Foster- Singletary, examines various issues addressed in the novel. Takenya argues that the portrayal of certain events in the book exacerbates the segregation between white and black individuals. One example highlighted is the depiction of Minny in the novel, who embodies blackness. Her physical appearance is described as abnormal, and she is portrayed as lacking control over her speech. The quote “ She is too much too many women to be a lady, too much mouth for a maid, too much black for her own good” (100). Foster- Singletary suggests that Stockett may have fallen into the trap of presenting black women as mere icons, rather than allowing them to speak for themselves (106). This portrayal of their blackness denies their humanity.

Sarah Sacha Dollacker offers her perspective on the depiction of reality in *The Help* focusing on various themes such as racial segregation, civil rights, and the relationships between black maids and white women. She finds the novel to be rich in irony, capturing the atmosphere of the 1960s through the reference to cultural icons like Pill, Valium, space exploration, Vietnam War, Zip codes, and premarital sex. The characters are multifaceted, and the dialogue is skillfully crafted, blending humor, heartache, compassion, romance, and suspense. Dollacker highlights the satisfaction of revenge, exemplified by Minny’s chocolate pie. She praises the luminous prose, describing Constantine’s voice as the sound of chocolate. The ultimate lesson conveyed is that the boundaries between black and white, quality and trash, and employer and employee are not as clear-cut as they initially appear. Aibileen’s statement, “Kindness don’t have no boundaries,”(56) resonates throughout the narrative. Despite the hype surrounding the novel, Dollacker asserts that it lives up to

expectations, defying the common disappointment that comes with heightened anticipation.

Claire Suddath comments on Stockett's novel for its ability to bring attention to the experiences and perspectives of African American women during a time of significant social change in the United States. She appreciates the compelling and thought-provoking portrayal of the complex relationships between maids and their white employers. Suddath acknowledges the controversy surrounding the novel, including criticism from African American scholars who argue that it reinforces negative stereotypes of African American women. However, despite these debates, Suddath concludes that *The Help* is an important and powerful work of fiction that sheds light on a neglected aspect of American history. The article not only provides a positive review of *The Help*, highlighting its strengths, but also places the novel within broader discussions about race, gender, and representation in American literature.

This paper attempts to address the radical use of irony. Stockett presents problems of racial segregation and discrimination, combined with occurrences of unjust treatment and both verbal and physical mistreatment. Selfish politics, and post-war human situations through the use of irony. Linda Hutcheon's conservative irony and radical use of irony. Here use radical use of irony involves using irony in a way that challenges norms, exceptions, or established conventional. For example, a radical use of irony might involve Subverting Expectations: This could involve using irony to surprise the audience by taking a situation in an unexpected direction. This subversion of expectations can be jarring and thought-provoking.

To gain a more profound understanding of the ironic situations and discrimination within the given context, an analysis is required. In this scene, the character Skeeter's friend, known as Miss Skeeter, is talking to Skeeter's maid,

Constaine, and Skeeter interrupts their conversation by revealing that she knows about Constaine's role. Miss Skeeter then shifts her attention to Skeeter and acknowledges that she knows about the situation as well. "Oh, I know Constantine, "I say Miss Skeeter moves her eyes from the window to me. "She raised me, did you know that?" I nod, wishing I hadn't said anything. I know too much about that situation" (10). This line provides an understanding of the strong bond between Miss Skeeter and Constantine, while also foreshadowing upcoming conflicts and undisclosed information that will arise as the narrative develops. These women face intimidation and discrimination despite being innocent of any wrongdoing. Skeeter, along with other women, takes it upon herself to support these women by writing a series of articles that shed light on the injustices and discriminatory attitudes of the white individuals

The observer mentions that the discussion involves a bathroom-related topic and that Miss Leefolt enters the kitchen abruptly at that moment. "But that talk in there, about the bathroom- and smack on that word, Miss Leefolt walk in the Kitchen" (11) This Quote, creates a sense of tension or curiosity, leaving readers eager to know how this interruption may impact the conversation or the unfolding events. Skeeter aims to raise awareness and challenge the racist and discriminatory mindset held by white women towards their black employees. The novel also explores the racial segregation experienced by black individuals within white communities with black maid workers being denied access to basic facilities such as toilets in the houses where they work. Skeeter aims to raise awareness and challenge the racist and discriminatory mindset held by white women towards their black employees. The novel also explores the racial segregation experienced by the black individuals in the white communities with the black maid workers being denied access to the basic facilities such as toilets in the houses where they work.

In chapter twelve this dialogue is said by the character Miss Skeeter “That’s what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they’ll fit right in your pocket” (369). This quote illustrates that despite the perception of the difficulty, practical solutions are often simple and in various situations. It emphasizes the idea that the most straightforward approach is often the most reliable and applicable. The mention of Miss Hilly’s name by Aibileen is described as coming out flat and bitter, comparable to a bad pecan. The person speaking is reflecting on a change of mind and attributing it to someone named Hilly: “I just have to ask you. What changed your mind?” Aibileen doesn’t even pause. “Miss Hilly,” she says. I go quiet, thanking Hilly, s Bathroom plan and accusing the maid of stealing and her talk of diseases. The name comes out flat, bitter as a bad pecan” (122). The speaker's portrayal of uttering the name “Miss Hilly” reflects their emotional state.

The choice of words such as “flat” and “bitter” conveys a lack of enthusiasm or positivity. By likening the name to a “bad pecan,” the speaker intensifies their negative feelings, indicating a dislike or resentment towards Miss Hilly. The speaker’s response suggests a negative connection with Miss Hilly and implies that whatever caused Aibileen’s change of mind was not regarded positively by the speaker. The irony, which involves a contradiction between expectation and reality, serves as a means for Stockett to expose the stark disparities between public perception and the actual state of racial relations during that historical period.

Based on the quote, in chapter ten, “And Aibileen, I thank you for putting me on your prayer list. My *angina* sure is better now. I call you this weekend and we catch up” (Stockett 127). The quote expresses the speaker’s thankfulness for Aibileen’s spiritual assistance and the belief that it has positively influenced their

well-being. It also emphasizes the speaker's intention to stay connected with Aibileen by scheduling a phone call for a friendly conversation. The challenges faced by marginalized individuals within a racially divided society not only the inherent inequality and injustice but also the stark contrast between commonly held beliefs and the harsh realities experienced by marginalized groups. Through the irony Stockett magnifies the voices of the black maids, offering a compelling depiction of their experiences within the racially charged context of the 1960s.

The following quote reflects an ironic situation as conveyed by Aibileen, "Aibileen takes a breath, and looks around for anybody listening. We are like royalty here. Folks are always hemming in on us. You know that Miss Skeeter? I told you I did the other day" (128). She raises her voice "Well, remember how I slipped up and told her about Treelore writing colored things down?". "Minny" Betrina says, I sure was glad to hear about your new job" (129). The conversation underscores the strong connections and trust among the characters, while also suggesting the presence of risks and difficulties within their surroundings.

The narrative is primarily told from the perspective of three women: Aibileen and Minny are black maids, while Skeeter is a white aspiring writer. These three characters provide different viewpoints and experiences related to race and marginalization in the story. By presenting these three distinct perspectives, *The Help* provides a multi-dimensional exploration of race, class, and gender. The interactions and relationships among Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter catalyze questioning and challenging the societal norms and prejudices of the time.

The following dialogue seems to depict a moment where Constantine is reproaching Eugenia for her behavior or attitude, highlighting the importance of kindness and displaying empathy towards others. "Now you look here, Eugenia"

because Constantine was the only one who'd occasionally follow Mama's rule. "Ugly live up on the inside. Ugly be a hurtful, mean person"(122). This line suggests that ugliness extends to a person's qualities, such as their behavior, attitude, and treatment of others. By linking ugliness to hurtful and mean behavior, Constantine is conveying the idea that true ugliness arises from negative character traits. Constantine's message implies a moral lesson about the importance of kindness, empathy, and treating others with respect.

The following quote, "We can finally cut that old down now," (134). The excerpt highlights a dialogue where Miss Celia's statement triggers a personal reflection by the speaker, expressing a sense of being unfairly treated and experiencing emotional harm. The author skillfully weaves a narrative that explores the dynamics of power, race, and social norms. One example of this is when Miss Celia utters a seemingly innocuous statement, which holds a deeper ironic meaning. "I was sick and I know that's no excuse, but I was feeling real poor and she starts sobbing then like the worst thing she's ever done in her life is yell at her mind" (135). It provides insight into their emotional vulnerability and highlights their recognition that their illness does not excuse their action. Overall, the excerpt portrays a character who is grappling with own guilt and remorse while reflecting on the severity of their actions.

Here are some ways: racial, residential, educational, social, and employment in which black maids were largely limited to working as domestic servants in white households. Occupational segregation from racial prejudices and systematic barriers that restricted employment opportunities for black individuals. Many other industries and professions were predominantly closed off to them.

They experience a range of segregation and discrimination in different aspects of their lives. In this context, the quote is spoken by the character Aibileen Clark. She is advising another character to go to the State Street Library, where she mentions there is a dedicated room filled with works by Southern writers. Writers include Faulkner, and Eudora, Welty, referring renowned authors William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and possibly others from the Southern region. “Go down to the State Street Library. They have a whole room full of Southern writers. Faulkner, Eudora, Welty” (154). The statement suggests that the State Street Library has dedicated a separate room or section to Southern literature, recognizing its significance and offering a space for readers to explore the works of notable Southern authors. This type of collection could provide valuable resources for anyone interested in studying or appreciating the rich literary heritage of the American South. “Aibileen gives me a dry cough, You know colored folks ain’t allowed in that library” (154). They faced racial, residential, educational, and employment segregation, with a particular focus on their limited options as domestic servants in white households. Their restricted job opportunities were a result of racial biases and systematic barriers that prevented black individuals from accessing a wide range of industries and professions.

The following lines depict a situation that can be seen as ironic. “And from what I hear, they’re a lot of time to write a lot a letter in jail.” I’m trembling. my breath feels like fire. “Time to write to every person in Jackson about the truth about you. Plenty time and paper is free” (440). “Nobody would like to believe something you wrote Nigro.” “I don’t know. I have been told I’m a pretty good writer.”(442). The conversation presents contrasting views on “Nigro’s” writing skills, emphasizing the second person’s confidence and belief in their own abilities as a writer. It showcases different opinions regarding Nigro’s talent for writing.

Own particular interest was triggered by the fact that irony appears to have become a problematic mode of expression at the end of the twentieth century. It has never been without its problems, of course, but lately, the various media seem to be reporting an increasing number of cases of the more or less disastrous misfiring of ironies. Many have written of the shift over time from seeing irony as a limited classical rhetorical trope to treating it as a vision of life. The focus of this study, therefore, will not be on Socratic irony or romancing irony.

My concern here is simply with verbal and structural ironies, rather than situational irony, the irony of fate, and so on. That is another reason why the people why the philosophical focus that has been so important to discussions of irony from the romantic period through the current neo-pragmatic "ironism" of Richard Rorty is not necessarily my own.

Stockett also concerns about the ironic situation of the characters, their dual identity, and their helplessness. For example, Aibileen is a black maid who has spent her life taking care of white children and has a deep and abiding love for her charges. However, she knows that society devalues her and her child and that she must keep her emotions in check to survive. This is ironic because Aibileen's love for the white children is genuine, yet society forces her to suppress her feelings and act as if she does not care. In the similar Minny, another black maid, is known for her exceptional cooking skills, which are highly valued by her white employers. However, Minny is unable to use the same skills to create a better life for herself and her family, as she is limited by the systematic racism and discrimination that exist in society.

The situation described involves a person who is unsure about what to say to someone they are interacting with. The acknowledges hesitation and reluctance to

express their thoughts or feelings. Additionally, they perceive that the other person is also not openly communicating what they truly want to say.

The situation appears to revolve around individuals who feel uncertain about how to communicate with someone they are engaging with. They are aware of their own hesitations and unwillingness to openly share their thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, they recognize that the other person is also refraining from expressing their genuine intentions. “I don’t know what to say to her. All I know is, I ain’t saying it. And I know she ain’t saying what she want a say either and it’s a strange thing happening here cause nobody saying nothing and we still managing to have us a conversation” (35). The quote emphasizes the contradictory aspect of a situation where both people struggle to convey their thoughts yet somehow maintain a form of dialogue.

The novel suggests that African American female slaves faced three formidable barriers that inevitably marginalized them from the rest of society: their race, gender, and enslaved status in a society dominated by white males. The novel examines how black women occupy a unique position where racial and sexual ideologies and politics intersect (12). It portrays black women as enduring discrimination and oppression based on both their race and gender. The experiences of black maids depicted in the novel are not only shaped by their race but also by their gender, and their subjugation and exploration are influenced by both of these factors.

The Help serves as a compelling illustration of a book featuring resilient characters who face the oppressive effects of segregation. Similarly, the novel delves into the unjust discrimination faced by the people of color in the United States during the early 1960s. Many individuals, particularly those subjected to discrimination, harbor anger over the injustices they have endured, reaching a breaking point in their lives. It is

at this juncture that they resolve to address the wrong that affects people like them and strive to alter the perspectives of others.

This change becomes evident as the narrator reflects, “It wasn’t too long before I seen something in me had changed. A bitter seed was planted inside of me, and I just didn’t feel so accepting any more” (2). It reflects the internal transformation experienced by Skeeter Phelan, one of the main characters, as she becomes aware of injustice and discrimination. This quote also implies that Aibileen, another character, starts questioning the established norms and reject the notion that she should passively accept discrimination and mistreatment. This notion reflects a broader theme in the novel, exploring how black women in Jackson challenge and resist the oppressive social and cultural norms prevailing during the era. Through Aibileen’s character. Stockett underscores the significance of self-awareness and the power of individual agency in effecting change.

Stockett skillfully employs irony in her novel, *The Help*. “That was the day my whole world went black. Air looked black. Sun looked black. I lay up in bed and stared at the black walls of my house. Took three months before I even looked out the window, and see the world still there. I was surprised to see the world didn’t stop” (3). This quote explores themes of grief, loss, and the disorienting nature of personal trauma. It captures the intense emotional impact that an event can have on an individual, as well as the slow process of recovery and reintegration with the external world. Stockett exposes the stark contradictions between the façade of polite society and the harsh realities of racial discrimination and inequality. Situational irony permeates the story as characters find themselves in unexpected and contradictory situations.

Stockett exposes the stark contradictions between the façade of polite society and the harsh realities of racial discrimination and inequality. Situational irony permeates the story as characters find themselves in unexpected and contradictory situations.

One notable example is Skeeter, a young white woman aspiring to be a writer, who challenges the established norms by collecting the stories of black maids. The irony lies in Skeeter's privileged upbringing and social status initially blinding her to the injustices surrounding her, highlighting the stark contrast between her quest for equality and her ingrained prejudices (19). Verbal irony is a statement in which the speaker's words are incongruous with the speaker's intent. The speaker says one thing, but they really mean another, resulting in an ironic clash between their intended meaning and their literal words. Most types of verbal irony can be classified as either overstatement or understatement. Verbal irony is effectively employed in the novel, as characters use words or phrases that convey meaning contrary to their literal interpretation. In verbal irony, a person uses words that mean one thing but imply that the reality is different, such as a person saying, "Great weather today!" (19) when it is raining.

The maids, in particular, employ this form of irony to express their frustration and subtly challenge their white employers. Through their clever and sarcastic remarks, they convey their true feeling and expose the hypocrisy and superficiality of the white women they serve (20). Encyclopaedia defines dramatic irony as a situation in which the audience or reader has a better understanding of events than the characters in a story do. The irony is often the result of a story having shifting perspectives of a character being absent from a scene or chapter that reveals important information to the audience. The audience and the characters now expect different outcomes based on their different

information. Dramatic irony abounds in works of tragedy. In Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the audience knows that Oedipus's acts are tragic mistakes long before he recognizes his own errors. It also plays a significant role, with readers privy to information unknown to the characters themselves. This creates a sense of tension and anticipation as readers await the collision between the oppressive white society and the courageous maids risking their livelihoods to share their stories. The dramatic irony heightens the emotional impact of the narrative, emphasizing the urgency and importance of challenging the prevailing social order.

This quotation from chapter one, "It wasn't too long before I saw something in me had changed. A bitter seed was planted inside of me. And I just didn't feel so, accepting, anymore." (3). This quote indicates a personal transformation experienced by the speaker. The phrase "I seen something in me had changed"(3). Suggests a realization or awareness of significant shifts within the speaker's perspective or attitude. The mention of a "bitter seed" being planted inside implies the introduction of a negative or unpleasant element in the speaker. It could represent a particular event or circumstance that affected them deeply. The following quote implies that through prayer, one can tap into a divine or higher power that ensures the progress and well-being of individuals or situations: "That's the way prayer do. It's like electricity, it keeps things going" (27). This quote portrays the significance of prayer in keeping aspects of life in motion, suggesting that it is an active and essential force rather than a passive act. It underscores the idea that prayer provides the energy, strength, and continuity needed to navigate challenges and sustain various elements of existence. It emphasizes the importance and potential impact of prayer in maintaining or driving various aspects of life.

This research paper invites readers to think more deeply about issues of race, class, and power. By using irony to highlight the hypocrisies and contradiction of the white women who employ the help, the novel challenges reader to examine their assumptions and beliefs about race and class. For example, the character Hilly Holbrook, who is one of the main advocates for the “Home Help Sanitation Initiative” (4) Black people, is shown to be deeply insecure and fearful of losing her social status and power. This creates irony in which a character who claims to believe in the superiority of her race is driven by her insecurities and fears. By exposing the personal motivations behind Hilly’s racist beliefs, the novel encourages readers to question their assumptions about the motivations of racists and to consider how personal insecurities and fear can drive prejudice.

The connection between the quotation and the analysis can be established by examining how this experience contributes to the overall theme or message of the novel: The first time I was ever called ugly, I was thirteen. It was a rich friend of my brother Carlton’s over to shoot guns in the field. ‘Why are you crying, girl?’ Constantine asked me in the kitchen. I told her what the boy had called me, tears streaming down my face” (74). The fact that the black women who work as maids and nannies are often far more knowledgeable and capable than their white employers gives them credit for creating a sense of irony that challenges readers to question their assumptions about race and class. (5). It could be supporting how the power dynamics between white employers and black employees are often more complex than they appear on the surface, the novel encourages readers to think more critically about the intersections of race, class, and power.

The author poignantly expresses this revelation, stating, “That was the day my whole world went black. Air looked black. Sun looked black. I lay up in bed and stared

at the black walls of my house. Took three months before I even looked out the window, and see the world still there. I was surprised to see the world didn't stop," (3). On that particular day, my entire surroundings descended into a state of darkness. The atmosphere seemed void of any illumination, and even the sun wore a melancholic shade of black. I found myself confined to my bed, unable to divert my gaze from the pitch-black walls of my house. It took an extended period of three months before I could gather the strength to cast a brief glance through the windows and witness the persistent existence of the outside world. I was astonished to discover that the world had not paused or ceased its progress, despite the immense difficulties I was facing personally. Traumatic experiences can have a profound impact on an individual's perception of the world and their ability to cope with life's challenges.

This quote is spoken by the character Aibileen Clark in the novel *The Help*. Aibileen is an African-American maid and one of the main characters in the story. "You is kind... You is smart. You is important" (521). This quote captures the essence of self-love, affirmation, and empowerment. It highlights the importance of acknowledging one's strengths and worth, even in challenging times. Aibileen's words demonstrate how positive self-affirmation can bring about profound transformation and the nature of a person's self-esteem and overall well-being. Also highlights the significance of recognizing the value and worth of every individual. It serves as a reminder that each person possesses distinct qualities and contributions, and it is crucial for them to acknowledge their significance in the world.

In chapter five, in the following quote, Aibileen speaks to Mae Mobley, the child she looks after as a maid. Aibileen offers this guidance to help Mae Mobley develop inner strength and a sense of value in a society plagued by racism and discrimination: "Every morning, until you dead in the ground, you gone have to make

this decision. You gone have to ask yourself, “Am I gone believe what them fools say about me today?” (73). This quote highlights the significance of self-belief and encourages introspection regarding the opinions of others. It serves as a reminder that we can decide whether or not to accept what others say about us each day. It empowers us to choose to believe in ourselves and hold a positive self-perception, regardless of any negative comments or rumors from others.

The following quote, “I always thought insanity would be a dark, bitter feeling, but it is drenching and delicious if you roll around in it” (407). This Quote, speaks to the power of embracing our feelings and emotions, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable. The message is one of resilience and hope, reminding us that no matter how hard we may feel the weight of our emotions, we can still find moments of joy and pleasure within them. Black domestic workers are portrayed as marginalized in several ways. They are employed by white families’ maids, cooks, and nannies, but are often treated as second-class citizens and are subject to racial discrimination and segregation. They are paid low wages and have little job security, as they can be fired at any time without cause. They are also subject to physical and emotional abuse, both from their employers and from society at large.

Aibileen’s ability to simplify intricates can also improve communication between individuals. “That’s what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they’ll fit right in your pocket.” (25). Here are some ways in which the rhetoric of irony helps the novel. The novel uses irony to highlight the contradiction between the ideals of the civil rights movement and the reality of life in Jackson. For example, the main character Skeeter, a white woman who wants to expose the mistreatment of black maids, faces opposition from her white friends who claim to support civil rights but are unwilling

to challenge the status quo. This irony emphasizes the hypocrisy of those who claim to support civil rights but are not willing to take action.

The narrator in *The Help* employs irony to convey a contrasting or unexpected perspective, thereby highlighting the disparities or contradictions within the story. “Miss Leefolt sigh, hang up the phone like she just doesn’t know how her brain gone operate without Miss Hilly coming over to push the Think buttons”(225). This statement reflects Miss Leefolt’s dependence on Miss Hilly for intellectual support and decision-making. It indicates a lack of confidence or autonomy in her own ability to navigate complex situations, relying on Miss Hilly’s guidance to make sense of things. The novel uses irony to satirize the stereotypes and prejudices that are prevalent in Jackson's society. For example, the character of Hilly, a white woman who is obsessed with racial segregation and maintaining the status quo, is portrayed as comically hypocritical and cruel. This irony exposes the ridiculousness of racial stereotypes and prejudices. The use of irony in *The Help* engages the reader by encouraging them to think critically about the issues of racial discrimination and inequality. The use of irony can make the reader question their own beliefs and prejudices and encourages them to consider the perspectives of others.

Stockett’s novel *The Help* presents ironic situations in various aspects of the story. In one instance, Trelore is mentioned, as another character, emphasizing his young age and premature passing, which evokes a sense of loss and sadness “Trelore, the night before I started waiting on Miss Leefolt. He was twenty- four years old. The best parts of a person’s life. It just wasn’t enough time living in this world” (2). The narrator’s reflection on the loss of Trelore highlights the impact of his premature death and the feeling that he was deprived of the opportunity to fully live and explore the world. It conveys a sense of longing and a recognition of life’s

fragility and the value of the time we have. Another scene involves Miss Leefolt instructing Aibileen to clean the house and prepare chicken salad, while Miss Skeeter greets Aibileen more respectfully. “A bill that requires the white home to have a separate bathroom for the colored help. I have even notified the surgeon general of Mississippi to see if he will endorse the idea.” (9). These lines give insight into Hilly’s character and beliefs. Her endorsement of the bill indicates that she supports racial segregation and believes in maintaining a clear distinction between white households and the African American individuals who work in them.

The use of the term “colored help” demonstrates Hilly’s derogatory and dismissive attitude towards the African American workers, reducing them to their race and occupation. It is clear that Hilly Holbrook holds prejudiced views and supports racial segregation. However, a deeper understanding of the character and the story’s context would require further information about the narrative, the other characters, and the themes explored in the text. “What do you think I am? A chauffeur? Aren’t driving you to no country club in the pouring rain” (17). Minny expresses her frustration at being reduced to a role typically associated with hired help rather than being recognized as an individual with agency and autonomy.

In dramatic irony, the audience or reader is aware of something that the character in a story is aware of, leading to an ironic situation: “You are not going to college so Mama’s friends don’t have to use the same bathroom” (15). Highlights the racial segregation and discrimination prevalent during the period in which *The Help* is set. It reflects the systematic inequality and the limited opportunities available to African Americans, particularly in the context of education. This statement implies that the speaker (presumably a parent or guardian) is discouraging the person addressed from pursuing higher education. The reason given, “so Mama’s friends

don't have to use the same bathroom,"(15). Suggests that the speaker believes the person's education would challenge the racial status quo and potentially lead to a mixing of social spaces that were segregated at the time.

In the realm of the concept is seen as a communal process: "The whole thing cannot work at all unless both parties to the exchange have confidence that they are moving together in identified patterns" (13). It suggests that for any communal endeavor to be successful, there must be a sense of confidence and trust among the individual involved. This trust creates a shared understanding and belief that they are working together towards a common goal. The concept of "identified patterns" refers to a shared recognition or agreement on how things should unfold within the communal process. These patterns create a sense of order, predictability, and coherence within the community. Booth even claims that real intimacy is impossible without irony. (15). Booth sees irony as intimacy, a way in which the ironist and reader get together in a delicate dance of reconstruction of meaning. Booth's work has always been concerned with the sharing of meaning and the creation of community. "Irony is used in some satire, not in all; some irony is satiric, much is not" (29). Booth argues that not all instances of irony are inherently satirical. Irony can be employed in various contexts and for different purposes outside the reality, of satire. It can be used to create dramatic tension, convey suitable meaning; express emotional contrasts, or adds complexity to a narrative. In these cases, irony serves a different function apart from satirical critique, irony.

Irony sets in the relationship between the ironist, reader, and context that may be political. It depicts the hierarchical notion within different discourses. Irony has discursive power. Sometimes it creates humor and at the same time it creates serious condition. Linda Hutcheon states, "the transideological nature of its politics means

that irony can be used either to undercut or to reinforce both conservative and radical positions" (26). The political use of irony is to advocate all the marginalized aspects and things. Irony can function as a deconstructive tool that brings the conscious upon marginalized people and at the same time it subverts the high aspects and creates balance between margin and center. Hutcheon insists that everything that is made up of language is discourse. Ruling class people always make any discourse that supports them. Every discourse is complex ambiguous, and gives multiple meanings. Uneducated and marginalized people do not understand the tricky and complex language of bourgeois discourse. The main function of irony is to unmask the multiplicity of discourse and at the same time, it also makes aware marginalized people of their condition and context clearly.

Hutcheon further argues: irony edge, then, would seem to ingratiate, to underline, and to underline it brings people together and drives them apart. Yet however, plural these functions we still seem to want to call the thing itself by a single name: irony...the complexities of irony's inferred motivations, though an awareness of the range of the operations that irony can be interpreted as carrying out may help resist. (53) She gives the example of various functions and gives them a single name irony. Irony has a double edge that helps it to challenge the oppressive and high values and at the same time it enforces the low values too.

Hutcheon talks about the transideological nature of irony. As she argues, "irony can be provocative when it's conservative or authoritarian as easily as when its politics are oppositional and subversive: it depends on who is using it and whose expense it is seen to be" (15). Irony is double edge device that subverts as well as enforces at the same time. Irony is also used in order to satire and mocks the unwanted socio-political scenarios and development. Irony is used as the medium of

subverting high values as well as enforcing so-called low values. It helps the ironist to demonstrate the brutality and hierarchy among different people and at the same time it also creates balance in society.

This insight illuminates the nuances of understanding oneself and how we perceive things, unveiling the inherent intricacies in identifying and embracing irony that targets our strongly held opinions: “Every reader will have the greatest difficulty detecting irony that mocks his own beliefs” (81). In longer works, “the reconstruction of messages or content seems to be for the sake of revising and completing a picture of the speaker or of an action in which he is involved” (137). In an ironic portrait, we don’t stop at reconstituted segments that replace the whole message; we stop with “some kind of human character, situation or story that we have been led to see as superior” (141). Sometimes what is ironic is the contrast between what the speaker believes about himself and what we infer about him (147) this inference depends on how our knowledge and experience relate to the implied author’s intentions.

Irony has various functions such as: subversive, enforcing, corrective, and satiric. It is a discursive practice used in postmodern times. There are various discourses about irony. It demonstrates multiplicity in any discourse and at the same time it makes aware people of the situation and falsity of discourses made by ruling class people. Booth’s and Paul de Man’s figuration of rhetorical theory and irony. Paul de Man explores irony and allegory as related functions in “*The Rhetoric of Temporality*.” It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that this was only a temporary eclipse recent developments in criticism reveal the possibility of rhetoric that would no longer be normative or descriptive but would more or less openly raise the question of the intentionality of the rhetorical figure. (188). de Man, however, quickly makes a critical turn that is “non Boothean” in nature: such concerns are

implicitly present in many works in which the term “mimesis” ‘metaphor,’ “allegory,” or “irony” play an important part. One of the main difficulties that hamper these investigations stems from the association of rhetorical terms with value judgments that blur distinctions and hide the real structure”(188). This connection is said to create confusion by obscuring clear boundaries and concealing the true underlying framework or structure.

Booth’s central theme of individuals striving to unite in their search for truth, despite the challenges they often encounter. Clark Colebrook emphasizes that Booth as a confirmed pluralist places significant importance on the role of literature in fostering community, facilitating meaningful conversations, and promoting consensus among people. Clark quotes Booth, stating that his writing is concerned with “ how we manage to get together, sometimes, in our efforts to reach a human truth, and why we so often fail to” (51). This perspective can be related to Stockett’s novel *The Help* where black women are depicted as existing at the intersection of racial and sexual ideologies and politics. The novel portrays them as victims of discrimination and oppression, experiencing the effects of both their race and gender. The experiences of the black maids in the story are influenced not only by their social identity but also by their gender. Consequently, they face subjugation and exploitation resulting from the combined impact of these two factors.

Hutcheon describes the subversive power of irony that breaks down the hierarchy. The ironist presents the self-critical characters in the novel in order to subvert the hierarchy in society. Stockett presents Skeeter as a revolutionist and self-critical, self-reflexive, and self-mocking character in the novel.

Black maid fights against the domination of the white system. The discourse that is made by ruling class people is also used by the marginalized character Aibileen

in order to combat and challenge economic and social hierarchies. Aibileen and Minny were unable to save themselves from the torture of the whites. They are forced to watch voiceless and justice for black maids. As black maids said: “you can also see the other characters and themes related to it each theme is indicated by its own dot and icon, like this one” (12). Aibileen has the uncanny ability to see the good in any person, but the death of her son Treelore causes a “bitter seed” to grow inside her that makes her less tolerant of racist housewives like her employer Miss Leefolt and Leefolt’s friend Miss Hilly. This bitterness prompts her to help Miss Skeeter reveal the truth about how these women treat their maids. Her moral principles and desire to hold Jackson accountable for its oppression of black domestic workers give her the strength to continue working on the project, despite the dangers threatening her.

Aibileen's saying is very ironic in the sense. Stockett makes his own discourse that is different from the main discourse of the ruling class people and functions as a counter-discourse for the marginalized people. Black maids use the hierarchical tendency of ruling-class people to always dominate their friends, and they have multiple identities that are known as self-reflexive and self-critical discourses. Stockett uses these things intentionally in order to mock, challenge, and break the hierarchy in society.

This is the modern era, where irony has turned as one into an unavoidable part of the literary text. It unavoidably comprises exclusion and inclusion, intervention, and evasion. Linda Hutcheon points out that irony simply does not show the difference between said and unsaid meaning rather it challenges the hierarchy, instability, injustice, and bourgeois values at the same time it enforces marginalized values also by bringing the stated and unstated things together.

In conclusion, Stockett strategically employs irony for political purposes, dismantling elevated societal values, discourse, and culture. Simultaneously, she emphasizes and amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals. *The Help* serves as a narrative that mirrors the tumultuous socio-political landscape following the war, where marginalized groups rebel against the unjust and hypocritical practices of the bourgeois class, challenging established laws, orders, and discussions. Through her use of irony, Stockett skillfully captures the depiction of political instability, diversity, duality, and intricacy within contemporary society. Moreover, she presents a comprehensive representation of the racial interactions and societal inequities of that era. Stockett has unmasked the hidden multiplicity of high discourse and culture by making radical use of irony. The irony has helped Stocketts to awareness of marginalized people about the condition and complexity of their society. Stockett has used such complexity intentionally in order to demonstrate complex society and dualism in discourse and identity. Skeeter represents the voice of voiceless people and justice for black maids.

Irony has been employed to showcase the self-serving nature of politics and the over indulgence in science and technology. The contemporary chaotic political scenario has been mocked and has made people aware of the upcoming disastrous conditions of the modern people due to their selfish nature. Stockett conveys that marginalized individuals have actively engaged in raising voices as a means to counter the dominance of prevailing narratives and cultural imposition. Stockett has broken down hierarchical values and raised the voice of common people through the help of radical irony. He has tried his best to give power and justice to those who have unable to understand the tricky discourse and culture of the bourgeois by using irony's edge that has transgressed high things and reinforced common things.

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