

Personal Life Experience Shown in Irony: A Song Analysis

Theresia Arianti

^a Faculty of Business and Education, MNC University, Jakarta 11520, Indonesia

¹ theresia.arianti@mncu.ac.id*

* Theresia Arianti



Received 28 April 2023; accepted 5 June 2021; published 30 June 2023

ABSTRACT

As songs are a means of conveying a message; thus, it is important to understand the lyrics of a song correctly. Irony is one way to embed a hidden message in a song. This study aims to investigate the irony contained in four songs: Welcome to Paradise, Welcome to My Life, Jesus of Suburbia, and Won't be Home for Christmas. It also aims to examine what personal life struggle is shown in the irony contained. The findings show that three out of four songs examined represent the song writers' personal life struggle related to childhood trauma. It is suggested that future studies do triangulation to this study to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation drawn.

KEYWORDS

Irony_1
Song Analysis_2
Personal Life
Experience_3
Irony in Songs_4

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA](#) license



1. Introduction

A song has long been known to be the representation of the writer's feelings, ideas, and stands. There are many ways to put one's personal thoughts into a song, one of them is through the use of irony. Wilson and Sperber (2004) stated that irony happens when an utterance's meaning is the opposite of the literal word.

Since a song is a multi-interpretative form of art, it is important to know the song writer's true message in order to obtain the correct idea of the song. This way, the message contained in a song would be correctly perceived by the listener; thus, enabling them to get the right impact from the song.

Many writers, including song writers, deliver their life stories in a song through irony. This irony is used to share a message that might be sensitive (family-related message); thus, an irony is used to make the message more implicit. Songs that contain a "dark" message are usually the ones composed by rock or punk-rock bands. The members of these bands often include their "dark" life stories through their music. Some of these bands are Green Day, Blink 182 and Simple Plan. Therefore, this study examines songs written by these three bands, as follow:

Table 1 Songs Analyzed

No.	Title	Band	Song Writer
1.	Welcome to Paradise	Green Day	Billie Joe
2.	Jesus of Suburbia	Green Day	Billie Joe
3.	Won't be Home for Christmas	Blink 182	Mark Hoppus, Scott Raynor & Tom Delonge
4.	Welcome to My Life	Simple Plan	Pierre Bouvier & Chuck Comeau

There are two research questions raised in this current study, they are:

1. What irony is used in Green Day's, Blink 182's and Simple Plan's songs?
2. How does the irony show the song writer's personal life struggle?

Therefore, this study aims:

1. To investigate the irony used in Green Day's, Blink 182's and Simple Plan's songs.
2. To examine the personal life struggle of the song writer shown by the irony used.

The said songs above are chosen since they contain 'dark' narrative in the lyrics which would be a great source of irony leading to the revelation of the song writer's personal life struggle.

As stated in Egerdahl's book *Green Day: A Musical Biography* (2010), Billie Joe Armstrong, one of the two song writers of *Welcome to Paradise*, was the youngest of six siblings born in 1972 in Oakland, US. His father, Andy, was a truck driver; while his mother, Ollie, was a waitress. Billie lived happily until one day this family was struck by the news of Andy's esophageal cancer. He died in September 1982, four months later, bringing the youngest, Billie, into deep sorrow. Ollie was later remarried with a man whom none of her children liked.

Blink 182's members have a similar childhood and teenage hood struggle to Billie. According to AAE Speakers (2022), Mark Hoppus, one of the members of Blink 182, was born on March 15, 1972 in California, USA. His parents were divorced when he was in his third grade. He then lived with his dad and sister. This event has affected him greatly.

Another Blink 182's member, Scott Raynor, the original drummer of Blink 182, was born on 23 May 1978 in California, US. He was later replaced by Travis Braker, due to his drinking issues, making the band to cut him loose (Blink 182-Bio, n.d.).

Out of the three bands analyzed in this study, Simple Plan, seems to have the least childhood trauma. According to IMDB (2022), Pierre Bouvier, the lead singer, was born on 9 May 1979 in Quebec, Canada. According to Bouvier (as cited in Sound, 2022), he grew up in a bilingual family; his mom's side speak English while his dad's speak French. He had a wonderful childhood and had a happy life with his parents and three brothers.

According to Allfamous.org (2022), Chuck Comeau, another member of Simple Plan, was born on 17 September 1979 in Quebec, Canada. According to Songfacts (2022), Chuck Comeau's parents were not supportive towards Chuck's career choice as a musician. It led the band to write a song 'Perfect' which tells a story about a broken father-and-son relationship.

Several previous studies have been conducted to examine lyrics of songs. Sihaloho et al. (2021) examined the irony and hyperbole of Bruno Mars' songs. They found that there are five different types of hyperbole and irony found in the songs. Moreover, Carter (2021) examined Rolling Stones' songs and found that their songs aimed to criticize wealth and privilege; and also to give the authenticity for the band. Even though some previous studies about songs have been conducted, none has investigated the irony used to show the song writer's personal life struggle.

In order to conduct the analysis of this study, several theories are needed which are the theory of irony and the life story of each song writer analyzed.

According to Kreuz (1989) irony is used to show one's attitude towards something by saying the opposite. For example:

(Example 1)

Jane : Today would be sunny and warm.

Jacob: Let's go to the beach!

Jane and Jacob went to the beach, and it rained heavily.

Jacob : Today IS sunny and warm.

In the example above, Jacob is repeating Jane's utterance in order to show that what Jane said earlier was wrong. Jacob's utterance has the opposite meaning from the reality. Moreover, Jacob said the utterance implicitly, which then made it fit to be called irony since it contains implicit negative attitude.

Furthermore, irony is divided into echoic irony and pretence irony. An irony is called echoic when it repeats a previous utterance. Wilson (2006) explained that an irony is called echoic when it represents another representation of idea or thought.

In order for an irony to be called 'echoic', the utterance needs to be attributed to someone else other than the speaker himself. Example 1 shows the example of echoic irony since Jacob's utterance is the repetition of Jane's previous utterance.

On the other hand, pretence irony does not need any antecedent to echo and does not need to be attributed to someone else. The example of pretence irony is shown below:

(Example 2)

Today is stormy and Bob says: "What a beautiful weather."

In the example above, Bob is not repeating any previous utterance. However, the listener can still understand the irony since there is shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener about the definition of "a beautiful weather". Therefore, the irony will still be understood even without any previous utterance.

2. Method

This research was a descriptive qualitative study. The data examined were the irony contained in the lyrics of *Welcome to Paradise* and *Jesus of Suburbia* by Green Day, *Won't be Home for Christmas* by Blink 182, and *Welcome to My Life* by Simple Plan. The data collection included listening to the songs, finding the song lyrics, reading the lyrics and locating the irony in the lyrics (labelling). The next step was analyze the data by interpreting the irony (categorizing it as either echoic or pretence and analyzing the negative attitude contained). The researcher then further related the irony with the song writer's personal life struggle. The data analysis was done with Ms. Excel (categorizing the data) and Ms. Word (describing the data qualitatively).

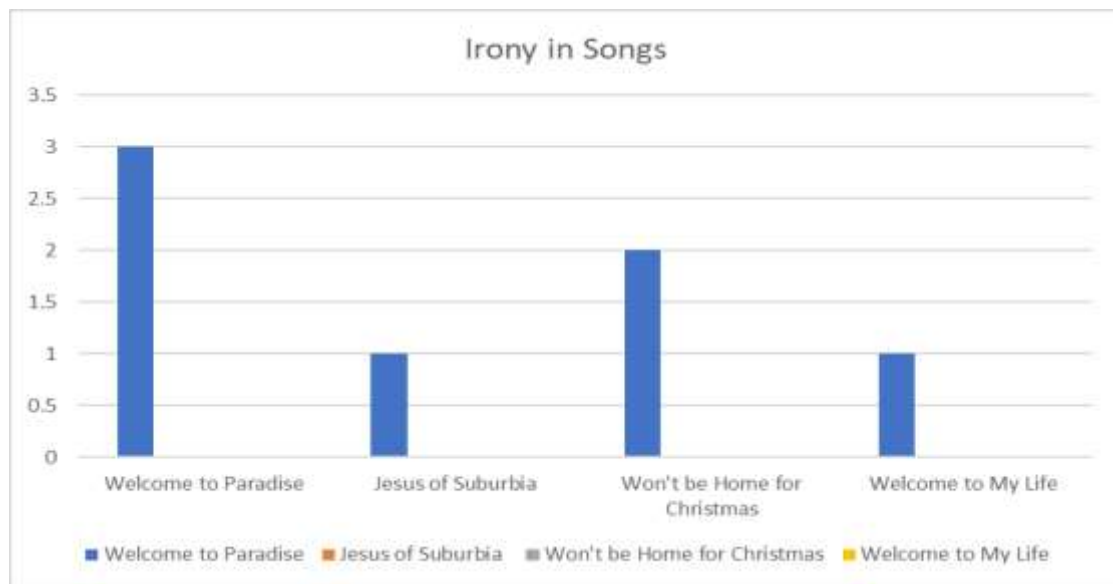
This study included multiple sources of theory to triangulate the data. The irony found in this study was analyzed with the theory of irony from Kreuz (1989) and Wilson (2006) and then re-confirmed with the description of the song writers' life struggle from Egerdahl's book *Green Day: A Musical Biography* (2010), AAE Speakers (2022), Blink 182-Bio (n.d.), IMDB (2022), and Allfamous.org (2022).

3. Results and Discussion

Results

The table below shows the number of irony contained in each song analyzed.

Table 2 Irony



Overall, the songs contain from one to three irony utterances in the lyrics. Below is the further data of the irony contained. The irony is highlighted in yellow:

Song 1: Welcome to Paradise

Dear mother can you hear me whining?

It's been three whole weeks

Since that I've left your home

This sudden fear has left me tremblin'

'Cause now it seems that I am out there on my own

And I'm feeling so alone

Pay attention to the cracked streets

And the broken homes

Some call it slums, some call it nice

I want to take you through

A wasteland I like to call my home

Welcome to paradise

A gunshot rings out at the station

*Another urchin snaps and left dead on his own
It makes me wonder why I'm still here
For some strange reason it's now
Feeling like my home
And I'm never gonna go
Pay attention to the cracked streets
And the broken homes
Some call it slums, some call it nice
I want to take you through
A wasteland I like to call my home
Welcome to paradise
Dear mother, can you hear me laughing?
It's been six whole months since that
I have left your home
It makes me wonder why I'm still here
For some strange reason it's now
Feeling like my home
And I'm never gonna go*

*Pay attention to the cracked streets
And the broken homes
Some call it slums, some call it nice
I want to take you through
A wasteland I like to call my home
Welcome to paradise, oh paradise
(LyricFind, 2021)*

Song 2: Jesus of Suburbia

*I'm the son of rage and love
The Jesus of Suburbia
The bible of none of the above
On a steady diet of
Soda pop and Ritalin
No one ever died for my sins in hell
As far as I can tell
'Least the ones I got away with
And there's nothing wrong with me
This is how I'm supposed to be
In a land of make believe*

That don't believe in me

*Get my television fix
Sitting on my crucifix
The living room, or my private womb
While the moms and Brads are away
To fall in love and fall in debt
To alcohol and cigarettes and Mary Jane
To keep me insane
Doing someone else's cocaine
And there's nothing wrong with me
This is how I'm supposed to be
In a land of make believe
That don't believe in me
At the center of the Earth, in the parking lot
Of the 7-11 where I was taught
The motto was just a lie
It says, "Home is where your heart is, " but what a shame
'Cause everyone's heart doesn't beat the same
It's beating out of time*

*City of the dead (hey! Hey!)
At the end of another lost highway (hey! Hey!)
Signs misleading to nowhere
City of the damned (hey! Hey!)
Lost children with dirty faces today (hey! Hey!)
No one really seems to care
I read the graffiti in the bathroom stall
Like the holy scriptures of a shopping mall
And so it seemed to confess
It didn't say much, but it only confirmed that
The center of the earth is the end of the world
And I could really care less
City of the dead (hey! Hey!)
At the end of another lost highway (hey! Hey!)
Signs misleading to nowhere
City of the damned (hey! Hey!)
Lost children with dirty faces today (hey! Hey!)*

No one really seems to care...

Hey!

I don't care if you don't

I don't care if you don't

I don't care if you don't care

(3x)

I don't care!

Everyone's so full of shit

Born and raised by hypocrites

Hearts recycled, but never saved

From the cradles to the grave

We are the kids of war and peace

From Anaheim to the Middle East

We are the stories and disciples of

The Jesus of Suburbia

Land of make believe

And it don't believe in me

Land of make believe

And it don't believe

And I don't care! (Whoo! Whoo! Whoo!)

I don't care!

(3x)

Dearly beloved, are you listening?

I can't remember a word that you were saying...

Are we demented or am I disturbed?

The space that's in between insane and insecure

Ooh

(3x)

Oh therapy, can you please fill the void? (Ooh, ooh)

Am I retarded, or am I just overjoyed? (Ooh, ooh, ooh)

Nobody's perfect, and I stand accused (ooh, ooh)

For lack of a better word, and that's my best excuse (ooh, ooh, ooh)

Ooh

(3x)

To live and not to breathe

Is to die in tragedy

To run, to run away

*To find what you believe
 And I leave behind (ooh, ooh)
 This hurricane of fucking lies (ooh, ooh)
 I lost my faith to this
 This town that don't exist
 So I run, I run away
 To the lights of masochists
 And I leave behind (ooh, ooh)
 This hurricane of fucking lies (ooh, ooh)
 And I've walked this line (ooh, ooh)
 A million and one fucking times (ooh, ooh)
 But not this time!*

*I don't feel any shame, I won't apologize
 When there ain't nowhere you can go
 Running away from pain when you've been victimized
 Tales from another broken... home!
 You're leaving...
 You're leaving...
 You're leaving...
 Ah, you're leaving home!
 (Musixmatch, n.d.)*

Song 3: Won't be Home for Christmas

*Deck the halls with boughs of holly
 Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la
 'Tis the season to be jolly
 Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la
 Outside the carolers start to sing
I can't describe the joy they bring
 'Cause joy is something they don't bring me
 My girlfriend is by my side
 From the roof are hanging sickles of ice
 Their whiny voices get irritating
It's Christmas time again
 So I stand with a dead smile on my face
 Wondering how much of my time they'll waste
 Oh God, I hate these Satan's helpers*

*And then I guess I must've snapped
Because I grabbed a baseball bat
And made them all run for shelter
It's Christmas time again
It's time to be nice to the people you can't stand all year
I'm growing tired of all this Christmas cheer
You people scare me
Please stay away from my home
If you don't wanna get beat down
Just leave the presents and then leave me alone*

*Well, I guess it's not cool to freak on Christmas Eve
'Cause the cops came and arrested me
They had an unfair advantage
And even though the jail didn't have a tree
Christmas came a night early
'Cause a guy named Bubba unwrapped my package (hot damn)
It's Christmas time again*

*It's time to be nice to the people you can't stand all year
I'm growing tired of all this Christmas cheer
You people scare me
Please stay away from my home
If you don't wanna get beat down
Just leave the presents and then leave me alone
I won't be home
I won't be home for Christmas
(5x)
(LyricFind, 2021)*

Song 4: Welcome to My Life

*Do you ever feel like breaking down?
Do you ever feel out of place?
Like somehow you just don't belong
And no one understands you
Do you ever want to run away?
Do you lock yourself in your room?
With the radio on turned up so loud*

*That no one hears you screaming
No you don't know what it's like
When nothing feels alright
You don't know what it's like to be like me
To be hurt, to feel lost
To be left out in the dark
To be kicked when you're down
To feel like you've been pushed around
To be on the edge of breaking down
And no one there to save you
No you don't know what it's like
Welcome to my life*

*Do you want to be somebody else?
Are you sick of feeling so left out?
Are you desperate to find something more
Before your life is over
Are you stuck inside a world you hate?
Are you sick of everyone around?
With the big fake smiles and stupid lies
But deep inside you're bleeding
No you don't know what it's like
When nothing feels alright
You don't know what it's like to be like me*

*To be hurt
To feel lost
To be left out in the dark
To be kicked when you're down
To feel like you've been pushed around
To be on the edge of breaking down
And no one there to save you
No you don't know what it's like
Welcome to my life*

*No one ever lied straight to your face
And no one ever stabbed you in the back
You might think I'm happy*

But I'm not gonna be okay
Everybody always gave you what you wanted
You never had to work it was always there
You don't know what it's like
What it's like

To be hurt
To feel lost
To be left out in the dark
To be kicked when you're down
To feel like you've been pushed around
To be on the edge of breaking down
And no one there to save you
No you don't know what it's like
What it's like

To be hurt
To feel lost
To be left out in the dark
To be kicked when you're down
To feel like you've been pushed around
To be on the edge of breaking down
And no one's there to save you
No you don't know what it's like

Welcome to my life
Welcome to my life
Welcome to my life
 (LyricFind, 2021)

Table 3 Summary of Irony Contained in Songs

No.	Title	Band	Song Writer	Irony
1.	Welcome to Paradise	Green Day	Billie Joe	a. Dear mother can you hear me whining? b. A wasteland I like to call my home, welcome to paradise c. For some strange reason it's now feeling like my home
2.	Jesus of Suburbia	Green Day	Billie Joe	a. In a land of make believe b. That don't believe in me
3.	Won't be Home for Christmas	Blink 182	Mark Hoppus, Scott Raynor & Tom DeLonge	a. I can't describe the joy they bring b. Their whiny voices get irritating c. It's Christmas time again

4.	Welcome to My Life	Simple Plan	Pierre Bouvier & Chuck Comeau	a. Welcome to my life
----	--------------------	-------------	-------------------------------	-----------------------

Discussion

This discussion part discusses how irony shows a song writer's personal struggle.

Irony in Welcome to Paradise (written by Billie Joe)

Excerpt 1

Dear mother can you hear me whining?

It's been three whole weeks

Since that I've left your home

This sudden fear has left me tremblin'

This is the example of pretence irony since it does not echo any previous utterance. There are two elements contained: negative attitude and shared knowledge. Here, the writer of the song, i.e., Billie Joe, has negative memories about his mother. Billie Joe's father died when he was a teenager due to esophageal cancer; his mom remarried with a man whom he disliked. It can be seen that Billie Joe developed a sense of disrespect, anger, and disappointment for her mom, shown in the word 'dear' which is the opposite of what he actually feels for his mom.

Excerpt 2

And the broken homes

Some call it slums, some call it nice

I want to take you through

A wasteland I like to call my home

Welcome to paradise

A gunshot rings out at the station

The sentence 'Welcome to Paradise' is the example of pretence irony since it does not have any antecedent to echo. It contains the song writer's negative attitude towards 'home'. According to Cambridge Online Dictionary (2022), paradise is a perfect place/condition where everything suits your want. In the song, the writer gives an analogy of paradise for 'home'. It looks as if he loves his home for its warmth, comfort, and love. However, in the lyrics, the song writer pictures 'home' as slums and broken, which are contradictory to paradise. 'Welcome to paradise' here is the example of pretence irony.

Excerpt 3

It makes me wonder why I'm still here

For some strange reason it's now

Feeling like my home

And I'm never gonna go

'Feeling like my home' shows positive attitude towards the place described. However, this is not what the song writer literally means. "Makes me wonder why I'm still here" and "for some strange reason" show that the song writer (Billie Joe) does not actually like the place. Therefore, the

said expression is categorized as pretence irony since it represents the opposite meaning from the reality without echoing any previous utterance.

Irony in Jesus of Suburbia (written by Billie Joe)

Excerpt 1

This is how I'm supposed to be

In a land of make believe

That don't believe in me

Get my television fix

Sitting on my crucifix

'A land of make believe' is the example of pretence irony since it does not repeat any previous utterance. According to Cambridge Online Dictionary (2022), make believe means an imagined reality which you think is better than the actual one. It is contradictory with what is actually happening which the land does not believe the character 'me'. It shows the song writer's negative attitude towards 'hometown' (represented by the word 'land'). It is in line with the song writer's (Billie Joe's) unhappy childhood/teenage hood.

Irony in Won't be Home for Christmas (written by Tom DeLonge, Mark Hoppus and Scott Raynor)

Excerpt 1

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Outside the carolers start to sing

I can't describe the joy they bring

'Cause joy is something they don't bring me

Excerpt 2

From the roof are hanging sickles of ice

Their whiny voices get irritating

It's Christmas time again

So I stand with a dead smile on my face

'I can't describe the joy they bring' gives a sense that the song writer is overwhelmed by joy. However, the next sentence says, 'Cause joy is something they don't bring me', showing that what is said earlier is the opposite of what is actually happening. This is the example of pretence irony since it contains negative attitude and the opposite meaning from reality. The message of 'Dark Christmas' can be related to Tom DeLonge's (the song writer's) unhappy childhood. His parents constantly fought at home, leading him to find music as his release.

'It's Christmas time again' is usually said in a happy mood to welcome Christmas. However, the said sentence is not used in its literal meaning; instead, it is used to show how Tom DeLonge hates Christmas shown in 'Their whiny voices get irritating'. Moreover, Mark Hoppus also had bad childhood memories regarding his parents' divorce which affected him greatly. Mark Hoppus' parents were divorced when he was a child, making him live with his dad who, unfortunately, often left him alone, making him feel lonely. The fact that he did not live with his mother can be seen as a trigger for any negative feeling he has for Christmas.

Irony in Welcome to My Life (written by Pierre Bouvier and Chuck Comeau)

LyricFind. (2021). Won't be home for Christmas. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=wont+be+home+for+christmas+lyrics&biw=1536&bih=746&sxsrf=ALiCzsYDmEMpijNkNQpsAUd_eFY2CSr1DA%3A1671094422907&ei=luCaY8WFn9qFz7sPkIK20AI&ved=0ahUKEwjFqNrrn_v7AhXawnMBHRCBDSOQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=wont+be+home+for+christmas+lyrics&gs_lcp=Cgxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAQAzIHCAAQgAQQCjIKCAAQBRAHEB4QCjIFCAAQhgMyBQgAEIYDMgUIABCGAzokCAAQRxDWBBCwAzohCAAQsAMQQzoMCC4QyAMQsAMQQxgBOg8ILhDUAhDIAxCwAxBDGAE6CQgAEAcQHhDxBDoGCAAQBxAeOgQIIxAnOggIABCxAxCRAjofCAAQkQI6CAGAEAcQHhAKOgoIABAHEB4QDxAkOgoIABAIEAcQHhAKOgwIABAIEAcQHhAPEAo6DwgAEAgQBxAeEA8Q8QQQCjoLCAAQBRAeEPEEEA06CQgAEB4Q8QQQDTtoICAAQBRAeEAo6CAGAEAgQHhAKSgQIQRgASgQIRhgBUMAMWIBBYPhCaAFwAXgAgAFfiAGfEJIBAJI4mAEOAEByAEUwAEB2gEGCAEQARgI&scient=gws-wiz-serp

LyricFind. (2021) Welcome to my life. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=welcome+to+my+life+lyrics&biw=1536&bih=746&sxsrf=ALiCzsbDzUB2Z40xJz4Kq6xIFD2sAdq0Aw%3A1671094462467&ei=vuCaY9yTHMW54t4PI4C9kAc&ved=0ahUKEwj6sj-n_v7AhXFnnNgFHRdAD3IQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=welcome+to+my+life+lyrics&gs_lcp=Cgxnd3Mtd2l6LXNlcnAQAzIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIHCAAQgAQQDTIGCAAQBxAeMgYIABAHEB4yBggAEAcQHjIGCAAQBxAeMgYIABAHEB4yBggAEAcQHjIGCAAQBxAeOgkIABAHEB4Q8QQ6CAGAEAcQHhAKOgsIABAHEB4Q8QQQCjoHCCMQsAIQJ0oECEYYAEoECEYYAFAAWLQnYLEEoaAJwAXgAgAFfiAH1CpIBAJIwmAEOAEBwAEB&scient=gws-wiz-serp

Make Believe. (2022). Cambridge online dictionary. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/make-believe>

Paradise. (2022). Cambridge online dictionary. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paradise>

Songfacts. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/simple-plan/welcome-to-my-life>

Songfacts. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/simple-plan/perfect>

Sound, R. (2022). Any question answered Pierre Bouvier simple plan. Retrieved from <https://www.magzter.com/stories/Music/Rock-Sound/Any-question-answered-Pierre-Bouvier-simple-plan>

Welcome. (2022). Cambridge online dictionary. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/welcome>

Wilson, D. & Sperber, D. (2004). On verbal irony. University College London.

Wilson, D. (2006). The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence? *Lingua*, 116(10), 1722–1743. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2006.05.001>

Musixmatch. (n.d.). Jesus of suburbia. Retrieved from <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Green-Day/Jesus-of-Suburbia>