

## Irony, Sincerity, and Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*

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### **Irony:**

Kneejerk irony: “the tendency to make flippant ironic comments as a reflexive matter of course in everyday conversation”.—from Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*

“Irony, entertaining as it is, serves an almost exclusively negative function. It's critical and destructive, a ground-clearing...But irony's singularly unuseful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks.” From David Foster Wallace's “E Unibus Plurum: Television and U.S. Fiction”

“I think the price we paid for our golden life was an inability to believe in love; instead we gained an irony that scorched everything it touched. And I wonder if this irony is the price we paid for the loss of God.” —from Douglas Coupland's *Life After God*

In a 2012 op-ed piece from *The New York Times*, Christy Wampole declares that “irony is the ethos of our age,” operating as a “shield against criticism” because of a “deep aversion to risk.” She claims that “the hipster is our archetype of ironic living,” and she refers to the urban hipster as a “walking citation” whose clothing, comments, and attitude refer—usually snarkily-- to something beyond the clothing itself. She adds that “to live ironically is to hide in public” because when you are devoted to nothing—always mocking it—the “ironic frame acts as a shield against criticism.”

### **Cynicism:**

I think cynicism is lazy thinking posing as depth and coolness; there's no nutrition in cynicism.” —Douglas Coupland

### **New Sincerity:**

“All across the pop culture spectrum, the emphasis on sincerity and authenticity that has arisen has made it un-ironically cool to care about spirituality, family, neighbors, the environment, and the country.”—from Jonathan Fitzgerald in *The Atlantic*'s “Sincerity, Not Irony, is Our Age's Ethos”

“Anderson's appeal to our sentiment and emotions echoes the New Sincerity cultural movement. Popularized in the 1980s by American author David Foster Wallace, New Sincerity is characterized as a movement away from postmodern irony and cynicism towards sincerity, hope, romanticism, and affect. Today, the sincerity movement is reverberated in indie music from Arcade Fire to Vampire Weekend, and the books from authors like Zadie Smith, Dave Eggers, and Jonathan Safran Foer.” —Roos Gravemaker

## **Metamodernism:**

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker argue that an interconnected “metamodern aesthetic/ philosophy “oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity.”

## **On Wes Anderson:**

“Some argue that he has helped to create the indie “quirky” film. Others assert that he is one of the creators of the “New Sincerity” school of film, which has brought a new faith in the American dreamer, an optimistic point of view, and un-ironic heroes. Others argue the opposite, that Anderson is one of the new “smart” school of film that “blanks” out the meaning of a film scene and leads us to an even more cynical, ironic, distanced, relativistic way of watching films. “–Valerie Ross

“Ironic hipsterism works best in small doses, and for the first hour *Moonrise Kingdom* is downright delightful. But eventually Anderson’s penchant for style over soul becomes draining. This leads to scenes of utter nonsense, with Sam being struck by lightning and rival scouts chasing him en masse across an open field in the Benny Hill tradition.” –Jon Niccum

“The success of *Moonrise Kingdom* depends on its understated gravity. None of the actors ever play for laughs or put sardonic spins on their material. We don’t feel they’re kidding. Yes, we know these events are less than likely, and the film’s entire world is fantastical. But what happens in a fantasy can be more involving than what happens in life, and thank goodness for that.”—Roger Ebert

“Mr. Anderson’s visual style and narratives, in other words, are his own. He draws you into his fantastical worlds with beauty and humor, and while their artifice can keep you at somewhat of a distance, this only deepens the story’s emotional power, especially when he lowers the boom, as he always does.

Written by Mr. Anderson and Roman Coppola (they worked together several times before), “*Moonrise Kingdom*” breezes along with a beautifully coordinated admixture of droll humor, deadpan and slapstick. Like all of Mr. Anderson’s films, though, there’s a deep, pervasive melancholia here too, a sense of regret evident in Mr. Bishop’s slouch (with his plaid pants, he is a walking John Cheever tragedy) and in the way Captain Sharp and Mrs. Bishop look, and don’t look, at each other. Adulthood can seem so desperately painful, so maybe Sam and Suzy shouldn’t be quite as eager to grow up.

But Sam and Suzy, while their story has the charms of a fairy tale and some of its terrors, aren’t playing at love. They are in love, and that is the most real thing in the world.”—Manohla Dargis