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The irony found in the novels of Karácsony Benő

**PhD Thesis
ABSTARCT**

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Keywords: irony, the principle of structure, perception of the world, postmodern poetic, ironic language, points of view, association, subtext, canonization.

Abstract:

Starting from the philosophical theory of irony, based on the behaviors and attitudes of Socrates, analysis (researched) by romanticists, by Kierkegaard, by Paul de Man and Éva Antal, this abstract has reconsidered the theories by reanalyzing the novels of the novels of writer Karácsony Benő. In his work irony has a philosophical aspect, always establishing an issue of knowledge, but it is also a principle of narrative structure and therefore a perception by the world, the ironic narration denouncing it becomes irony in itself. This abstract also analyzed the processes of canonization of the writer, putting such issues as: how ironic texts were interpreted by the two ideologies of the twentieth century, by transylvanian ideology and by stalinism.

The following premises stand at the basis of this study:

- a. In Karácsony Benő novels, irony is not only a principle of structure but also a concept of life. The principle structure is not meant to be interpreted as a notion of structuralism, but as a dynamic structure, which is based on classical forms of narrative disassociation.
- b. Therefore, the narrative poetics of the writer can be considered as an advancement of postmodern novel poetics for the “new novels”, which is how Thomka Beáta said it, which was also the starting point for sixty to seventy years of the XX century.
- c. The polyphony of narrative viewpoints, ideological impartiality, and a sense of freedom, due to their irony, have contributed to the canonization process. While simultaneously, the ideological work of this writer was rejected, although others are grateful for his genius.

This Ph.D. thesis is structured into four main chapters.

The first chapter *The Theory of Irony* establishes the theoretical foundations of the research. From the bibliography of irony the thesis has not sought to represent all aspects, but has aimed to focus on philosophical interpretations. Thus the first chapter, *The Ironic Character in Ancient Comedy* and *The Irony of Socrates*, presents the mentality and ironic behavior, which has been interpreted by many thinkers throughout history. The first appearance of irony is found in the ancient comedies of Aristophanes, in which two characters are typical: one is proud and confident (*alazonul*), and the second one, who is considered to be ignorant, but he always makes a fool of the first one (*eiron*). Socrates represents himself being helpless and ignorant to sophists philosophy, but at the end of their conversation he makes a fool of the ones who initially presented themselves with pride and with superior intellect. Antal Éva considered that Socrates' *alazonul* was actually represented ancient democracy. In its conception the Socratic irony has an existential-philosophical aspect to it. In our opinion, the *alazon* has a prideful attitude while also being confident. Therefore, he considered himself to be wise, for he could know the world and himself. The irony of Socrates, in our interpretation, has more of a philosophical aspect, being ironic in knowledge. In the theoretical chapter, we set forth on this concept, and study different aspects of interpretations, which exploit the irony of Socrates: the romantic conception, which looks like aesthetic philosophy, particularly by Fr. Schlegel, existential-philosophical interpretation of Hegel and Kierkegaard; and not least Paul de Man's theory, that highlights an aspect of postmodern philosophical view of irony. They put such issues forward: do times exist when is irony not always an irony of knowledge, which permanently affects the intention of interpretation? Starting from the idea of Fr. Schlegel, who believes that irony is *parabaza* (the removal of figures of speech), De Man goes on and points out that irony is a permanent *parabaza* of any figures of speech, even the story line. This dissertation is based on this theory, which also includes other observations made by Antal Éva: why doesn't Paul de Man - in a postmodern aspect - capitalize on Kierkegaard's conception, which would analyze the so-called existentialist, not the writer's life, but of literary texts? The next chapter entitled *From the Irony of Knowledge to the Postmodern Poetics of the Novel*, based on the ideas of Thomka Beáta, it studies the characteristics of postmodern poetics of the novel, which

emphasizes the disappearance of the narrator, but can not appear as an omniscient narrator, but attempts to mask the identity of the speaker invent other methods that avoid narration, which leads to poetic polyphony as a narrative, whose principle structure is irony. However, Thomka Beata stresses that all of this, is to prevent the prediction of the outcome / ending of the novel, which takes place in the twentieth century. In the third largest chapter entitled *The Intrigues (The Plots) of the Ironic Text* the researcher's aims are to start with J.M. Defays' ideas, the appearances of ironic novels. They are analyzed by the language, by the narrator, by the narration and even reaching the dissection of the work (the work means, in this case, only novels). Because of irony, language manifests itself not as something unitary, but as a certain type of speech to customize characters belonging to a lifestyle, a mentality, with a specific life design. That language is reflected in the individuality of speech, of which no one, no ironic speech receives possession of others, but a ironic report which is which is somewhere in between. Thus the writer's work puts the issue of language relativity. Also in this section, the topic is language research of the ironic speech in novels *Pjotrúška*¹, *Napos oldal*² (Up in the sun), and *A megnyugvás ösvényein*³ (Step quietly), which is presented by the main characters. Ironic speech does not ask about superiority but accepts the periphery, which is given by *alazoni*. But at the same time the ironic language itself turns out to be intellectual language, that can only be understood by those characters that speak this language, so for this reason language is presented as secret code. This codification comes from a particular theme (e.g. From russian literature and nature, and from breaking the rules regarding language use. Often ironic language is born out of the joy of language (used by Barthes), not for a higher purpose. Therefore, the ironic text challenges the reader, who meets many plots while reading. The subchapter *The Irony of the Narrator (narrator/narrator/characters)* is concerned with the study of narrative point of view. In the novels *Új élet kapujában* (The Gate of a New Life) and the *Utazás a szürke folyón* (Journey on a Gray Bank) the narrator attempts to disguise the narrator, the narration is left to the characters, and only the narrative portrayed through the characters as a whole (in the sense of a film shoot). In the novels *Pjotrúška*, *Napos oldal* (Head in the Sun), *A*

¹ Karácsony Benő: *Pjotrúška*. Trad. George Sbârcea. Editura Kriterion, București, 1973.

² Karácsony Benő: *Cu capul în soare*. Trad. Petre Bokor. Editura Kriterion, București, 1974.

³ Karácsony Benő: *Cu pasul în liniște*. Trad. Petre Bokor. Editura Kriterion, București, 1976.

megnyugvás ösvényein (Step Quietly) the narrator has another method to avoid the role of the omniscient narrator. In these works the narrator is multiplied several times by the main characters, as if he himself would be a main character (*Pjotraska*) or a single protagonist. For example, Felmer Kázmér (*Napos oldal, A megnyugvás ösvényein*), whose character is constantly doubling, which is a multiplication of different characters. Thus we emphasize that the technique of propagation of the narrator is meant to taunt himself, but at the same time the narration in general. The Oldal Napos novel goes even further in this regard because it has more direct attempts to disguise the narration. Are there challenging statements/sentences addressed to the reader, which falsifies the narration itself, and removes it, namely self-irony? Also in this section it is intended to endure the conspiracy of ironic texts. The subchapter *Subtexts as Allusions of Self-Irony of the Masterpiece* hints that not only does it emphasize the narration but also the work. In this case, only from the novels, self-irony is made by certain symbolic systems such as sunnyside or gray river. The chapter *The Irony of Irony* concludes that the discourse can be ironic, by removing the ironic narrative through self-irony and ironic character of the work, by the subtextes and by self-irony in the novels of Karácsony Beno which manifest irony in itself. So the reader is prevented of all attempts to reach a fixed interpretation of the novels. The last chapter starts from the assumption of Gyimesi Éva, stressing that ideological canonization processes (transylvanian ideology and Stalinism) rejecting the writer's work, because it was not presented by the recitation of themes (topics) that transylvanian theology required, and later proved unnecessary or even frightening for communism by liberalism and individual ideas. Related to all of this, we still note the following: novels have been marginalized throughout because of the ironic narrative poetics. At the same time the steps of this chapter examine how ironic texts were interpreted along the twentieth century.

Thesis conclusions:

- Irony is proved to be a principle of narrative structure that is dynamic, always changing, and challenges the reader or the critic;

- Irony is manifested as an attempt to perceive life as a permanent means of knowledge and interpretation, which is precisely at the same time preventing irony. Such novels did not have well-defined meanings, but they were based on the polyphony of meanings;
- Ironic language proved to be peripherally as an intelligent secret (code) and therefore not only in the context of the novels studied, but in the context of twentieth century Hungarian literature;
- The poetics of the novels published after the sixties and seventies, which called „New Novels” by Thomka Beáta, seem to continue the poetics of Karácsony Benő.

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