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SUMMARY
DOCTORAL THESIS

IRONY. A PRAGMATIC AND LITERARY APPROACH

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CONTENTS

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SUMMARY

The aim of my thesis is to offer an overview of the major works within linguistic studies on the nature, function, and understanding of irony. Even though I have not developed a new theory about irony, this paper could be very useful to researchers or students interested in irony development and comprehension or in the field of linguistics. Although the studies related to irony have increased considerably, very few books have been devoted exclusively to irony in its general form. The aim of my research is to present and analyse the theories that are among the most widely mentioned in the interdisciplinary study of irony. Moreover, I wanted to study the differences between verbal irony and the functions of irony within the literary texts.

The definition provided by the Oxford dictionary for the term *irony* is:
The expression of one's meaning by saying the direct opposite of what one is thinking but using tone of voice to indicate one's real meaning. Irony is used in order to be amusing or to give something emphasis. A situation, an event, etc that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects, and is often amusing as a result. (A.S. Hornby, 1995: 632).
This definition highlights the main features of irony: negation and dissimulation. Even though it is a complex concept, irony has been given a common definition: *saying the contrary to what one expects.* (A.S. Hornby, 1995: 632). Unfortunately this definition does not cover all the aspects of irony. Being a complex phenomenon, irony has been interpreted from different perspectives. Several theories have been proposed from various backgrounds (linguistic, philosophical or psychological). Each theory offers a different perspective on the concept, or uses a different theoretical framework in their explication. In reality then, they are all likely explaining a portion of the phenomenon, or one of a variety of mechanisms underlying the comprehension of irony.

I have chosen to analyse irony from a pragmatic point of view because it has become an important part of our daily conversations. Irony enables the speaker to render different attitudes, from superiority to appropriateness. My thesis contains five chapters. I have

tried to emphasize the idea that irony covers a large number of functions and cannot be reduced to the simple definition *saying the contrary to what one expects.* (A.S. Hornby, 1995: 632). Thus, each chapter presents irony from a different perspective.
The first chapter describes the development of irony. The scholarly investigation of irony has a very old history and a very broad base. Thinking and commentary about irony in all its forms goes back to some of the earliest recorded philosophical works. The Greek philosopher, Socrates and the Latin orator, Quintilian were the first to define and use irony. The Socratic irony has been considered the first expression of irony, leading to different theories about the concept.

Quintilian defined irony as *saying what is contrary to what is meant*, and emphasized that irony is closely connected to dissimulation and pretense. What is more, Quintilian identified the relation between irony and politeness, a theory which was to be debated by many researchers. Aristophanes used irony in his literary work. *The Frogs* is an example of a satirical play which portrays and criticizes various aspects of politics and reality.

Various studies of irony can also be found in fields as diverse as anthropology, literature studies, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and more. The topics related to irony include art, literature, music, media, language, thought, cartoons, journalism, theater, politics and many others. In the second chapter I presented irony's functions within other fields (psychology, gender studies and discourse analysis).
The subchapter *Gender and Irony* introduces an interesting topic: the relation between gender, irony and the translating process. I analysed and compared four translations, two of the novel *The picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and the other two of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* The translators are both men and women. I was interested to observe if gender and irony comprehension can lead to different interpretations of the same text.

The data analysed in this chapter was collected from different sources, mainly from movies or TV series. Several dialogues belong to the TV series House M.D. The main character, Doctor Gregory House uses sarcasm and ironic comments in order to avoid direct confrontations.

The third chapter consists of a presentation of irony in the fields of linguistics and pragmatics. I discussed about the main theories conducted in these fields. Paul Grice

included irony in his theory about the conversational implicatures. John Searle analysed irony as an indirect speech act. Sperber and Wilson developed an interesting theory about relevance. Akira Utsumi discovered new unexpected ways of linguistic or pragmatic analysis. He used the mathematic formula inside the utterance interpretation. All these theories enabled me to understand and identify irony and its functions.

The subchapter about the answering machine paradox *I am not here now* offers a new approach to this utterance. The ambiguity of this message and the context in which it is performed leads to an ironic effect. The utterance could be interpreted as saying the opposite of the real situation which brings us back to irony's definition: *saying the direct opposite of what one is thinking.* (A.S. Hornby, 1995: 632). I mentioned the answering machine paradox because I think it is a relevant example which emphasizes the duplicitous function of irony.

In the last two chapters I analysed irony from a different perspective, the literary approach. My corpus consisted of two literary works: *The Trojan War will not take place*, written by the French author, Jean Giraudoux and James Joyce's *Ulysses.* The both texts were inspired from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey.*

The play *The Trojan War will not take place* describes the historical context which precedes the Trojan War. The author parodies the human nature, and historical fatality. Even if Hector or Ulysses tried to prevent the war, history must follow its natural course.

My contribution to this topic is the ironic interpretation of the novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce. The main themes interpreted in *Ulysses* are the stream of consciousness and the parallel with the *Odyssey. Ulysses* has not been analysed as an ironic novel, even if Joyce, himself declared that *Ulysses* was, first of all, a funny book.

Ulysses is the keystone of Joyce's artistic career, and one of the great achievements of twentieth century literature. Published in 1922, in Paris, *Ulysses* seems to be a continuation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* The novel follows closely the classical *Odyssey*, both in subject and form. Thus, each episode finds it counterparts in Homer's masterpiece. What is more, the main characters can be aligned with the characters from the epic tale. The three important correlations are Stephen Dedalus to Ulysses' son, Tellemachus, Leopold Bloom to Ulysses and Molly Bloom to Penelope.

By all the complex methods we have come to associate with modern literature Joyce transformed the parochial Dublin life of 1904 into a universal metaphor. That metaphor is *Ulysses.*

It is impossible to place *Ulysses* in a single well-defined literary tradition, or to assign it to a particular genre. One of Joyce's aims in writing the book was to break down the accepted distinctions between genres and create a new, unique form out of the resulting confusion. This amalgamation of methods and subjects that were once thought mutually exclusive makes for real difficulty at first reading, and has lead to a bewildering variety of critical approaches; but it is a major source of the novel's power. *Ulysses* can be viewed as an encyclopedia of modern life, or a symbolist novel, or a comic extravaganza, or even as a conventional novel of character and situation, the list of various approaches is almost endless. *Ulysses* is the story of one day in the life of Dublin. Although hundreds of Dublin's citizens pass through its pages, the action of the novel revolves around the lives of three characters: Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Leopold's wife, Molly. *Ulysses* opens with three episodes devoted to the alienated artist, Stephen, and closes with Molly Bloom's sensuous reverie as she lies in bed waiting for sleep. Within this framework the novel deals primarily with the personality and behavior of its hero, Leopold Bloom. We can only conclude that the best reading of the work is the one which yields the greatest number of related perspectives.

General remarks on the structure and themes of *Ulysses* can serve as rough guides to the novel's difficult terrain, but they are no substitute for local surveys. Only by tracing a single motif through its various metamorphoses can we come to an understanding of the novel's complex laws of development. Like the modern city which it describes, *Ulysses* offers a bewildering variety of routes, but all lead to a few central points. Although the realistic action moves in time through a single day, the movements of the characters' minds follow no temporal sequence but are determined by associational psychology. Only the events of June 16, 1904, are given in chronological order. All the elements provided by memory or association come to the reader piecemeal and must be ordered in retrospect. Thus, as Joseph Frank says, "Joyce cannot be read, he can only be re-read. (A. Walton Litz, 1966: 85).

In the subchapter *Structure,* I tried to analyse the ironic passages and the parody realised by Joyce. Stephen is the main character in the first three chapters. They consist almost entirely of Stephen's thoughts. Joyce's scant use of punctuation makes it somewhat difficult in the first and second episodes to distinguish between third-person narrative, interior monologue, and dialogue.

After a brief stay in Paris, Stephen Dedalus has returned to be at the bedside of his dying mother, and there he has refused her request that he kneel and pray for her. Having rejected family, church and homeland, Stephen is haunted throughout *Ulysses* by the gnawing remorse of conscience. Although he no longer believes, he cannot escape the influence of the Irish-Catholic heritage: as his companion, Buck Mulligan says, Stephen has *the cursed Jesuit strain* in him, *only it's injected the wrong way.* (James Joyce, 2012: 6).

Throughout *Ulysses* the mature Joyce preserves a considerable measure of detachment in describing Stephen, the image of his younger self. The irony is heavy and the criticism biting. In his symbolic role, Stephen is the type of the introverted artist, separated fom society and yet able to judge society. However, when Joyce deals with Stephen as an individual it is with full realization of his pride and arrogance.

Aeolus is the first episode in which the text seems conscious of itself as a text. The newspaper-like headlines break up the otherwise-familiar text and suggest to the reader that an outside editor, author, or arranger is responsible for them. We are no longer involved in a one-on-one relation with the plot of *Ulysses* someone is filtering this information for us.

The *Lestrygonians* episode presents Bloom's thoughts. He has problems understanding this word. As the novel continues, our thoughts and opinions about events and people will become continually revised as we hear about the same events and people from a different character. Thus *Ulysses* features three main characters instead of only one. In contrast to the aloof and cold-blooded Stephen, Leopold Bloom is sympathetic, kind and completely human.

It was Joyce's intention to present Bloom in the round and we see as many aspects of his personality as possible. No other character in English fiction is surrounded with such a rich array of intimate detail. Whereas, Stephen is only the artist, Bloom plays the roles

of father and son, husband and citizen. And yet, in spite of his many roles and complex personality, Bloom is as isolated as Stephen. Within the structure of Irish society he is an outcast, a member of the alien Jewish race. Within the framework of orthodox Hebrew society he is also an outcast since he has renounced the faith of his fathers. He is even a failure within his own family: the death of his young son Rudy has disrupted Bloom's relations with his wife and she has turned to a succession of lovers. Bloom's alienation in the realms of national, religious and family life parallels that of Stephen. Throughout the novel, both Bloom and Stephen are searching for some feeling of communion to relive their intolerable isolation. Bloom seeks a substitute for the son he has lost, Stephen a father to replace the authorities he has rejected. By the end of the novel and with help from each other, both have partially succeeded.

Bloom and Stephen are isolated men searching for a community. In contrast to them, Mrs. Bloom is stable, self-sufficient, sensuous having neither vice nor virtue. In one episode (*Ithaca*) Joyce compares her with the earth around which Stephen and Bloom revolve like captured comets she remains in Bloom's thoughts throughout the day, he returns to her bed at night, and it is with her that Joyce gives the final episode of the novel. In Joyce's own words she is sane full amoral fertilizable untrustworthy engaging shrewd limited prudent indifferent.

Since *Ulysses* deals with only one day in the lives of its characters, June 16, 1904, now known in literary circles as *Bloomsday*, how is it possible for Joyce to endow the events of that day with universal significance? The answer is that he has accomplished this remarkable feat by placing the realistic action of the novel in front of a vast symbolic backdrop, by manipulating simultaneously a number of literary and mythic parallels. At one point in *Ulysses* Stephen says: *Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves.* (James Joyce, 2012: 193). By virtue of the symbolic roles which Joyce has assigned to then, Stephen and Bloom are many men during the course of one day, but they are always meeting themselves, they maintain their identities as individuals, and Joyce seldom allows the symbolic action to obscure the naturalistic setting.

Scylla and Charybda brings back Stephen. He is presenting his theory about Shakespeare. The action takes place in the National Library director's office, sometimes after 1.00 p.m. The episode also illustrates Stephen's embedded parody of the selfsame style, a passage whose comedy derives from the incompatibility of style and subject matter and from the use of incongruent language, linguistic elements that cannot be appropriated to the overall text's matter discourse.

An example of the manipulation of symbolic correspondences may be seen in the frequent allusions to Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* There are references in every episode, and one entire section (the Library episode is devoted to a discussion of Shakespeare's life and art. To amplify his treatment of Stephen and Bloom as father, Joyce tentatively identifies Stephen with Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and Bloom with the ghost of Hamlet's father. These associations greatly enrich the texture of the novel and help to define Stephen's attitude: the ambivalence of Hamlet's feeling for the ghost is a correlative for Stephen's uncertain attitude toward the home, church and fatherland that he has rejected.

If the *Hamlet* myth is the primary analogue of Stephen's actions, the Homeric myth indicated by the novel's title is the major symbolic backdrop for Bloom's day in Dublin. Joyce assigned a Homeric tag to each of the eighteen episodes of *Ulysses* and the action of each episode is illuminated by a corresponding section of the *Odyssey*. Bloom is associated with Ulysses, Stephen with Telemachus, Molly with Penelope, and most of the other characters have their Homeric counterparts. Joyce uses the correspondences with the *Odyssey* to define Bloom's nature and to endow his behavior with general significance.

In addition to these obvious uses of *Hamlet* and the *Odyssey*, Joyce invented many more structural patterns which give unity to the diversified materials of *Ulysses*. An intricate network of cross-references and recurring motifs binds the eighteen episodes together; furthermore, each episode is unified within itself by the use of a single setting and a distinctive mode of narration, as well as by repeated references to an appropriate art, colour, symbol, and organ of the body. For example, the eighteen episode, *Oxen of the Sun*, takes place in a hospital, where a child is being born. In order to harmonise his form with his subject matter, Joyce makes frequent references to the womb and to the art

of medicine, takes the mother as his guiding symbol and narrates the episode according to a technique labelled embryonic development. The style of the episode changes as the action progresses, and this change reflects simultaneously the growth of the human foetus, the geological evolution of the earth, and the development of the English language from Anglo-Saxon to modern slang.

However, all these elaborate ordering devices need not concern the reader during his first encounter with *Ulysses*. They are patterns which helped Joyce control his materials, and they were more important for him in the making of the novel than they were for us in reading it. Understanding these patterns enriches our appreciation of the novel's central themes, but the patterns themselves are not central. *Ulysses* is primarily concerned with the human and symbolic actions of its major characters.

The *Oxen of the Sun* chapter thematises style as a means of representing reality, language as communication. The use of incompatibilities is one of the prime strategies with which the individual parodies question the various styles they imitate. Throughout these parodies of style the relationship between the language used and the object remains unstable, suspended. *Oxen of the Sun* is one of those occasional Joyce episodes which one imagines, were more fun to write than they would be to read. The genesis and development of English prose are described in a series of pastiches.

In the *Cyclops* chapter, the comedy results from a remark that is instantly dramatized by language. The narrator says maliciously of Bloom *Gob, he'd have a soft hand under a hen* (James Joyce, 2012:290), The remark which, to the macho habitués of Barney Kiernan's pub, labels Bloom as womanly, a half-and-half, the collecting of eggs was seen as a womanly activity is here worked into a series of qualities by which chivalry is measured.

The longest and most elaborate of all the episodes in Ulysses, *Circe,* is also the last structured. We do not know within whose mind it takes place, if within anyone's, for Bloom and Stephen flow together in this section, combining, separating and complementing one another's nightmares under pressure of the same queer energy that animates the talking cakes of soap or causes a person to appear the instant his name is thought of.

The chapter *Ithaca* is a vehicle for precise intellectual argument and carries in itself the seeds of exaggeration self-parody. Virtually, every single question and answer from *Ithaca* can be read as self-parody, as a parody of the form. The episode is written in a prose that is more subversive to literature than any other chapter of the novel, deliberately renouncing plot, the voice of a narrative persona and offering, instead, a catalogue of facts without any attempt at a hierarchical structuring, told in an impersonal, alienated question and answer sequence.

Ulysses has been interpreted as a very serious book, and this is true. However, it is not a sad or tragic book, it is essentially a comic work, and Joyce's language is the language of comedy. In the Library episode Joyce describes Stephen as laughing *to free his mind from his mind's bondage* (James Joyce, 2012: 193). The laughter which pervades *Ulysses* is a sign of Joyce's own freedom, the equanimity of his mind and the sureness of his technical control. On his fiftieth birthday Joyce remarked that the adage *in vino veritas* should really be *in riso veritas*, for nothing so reveals us as our laughter.

The language of this comic epic reflects a desire on Joyce's part to provide each character with a distinctive and characteristic style. We soon learn to recognise Stephen's arid and self-centered prose, or the inquisitive idiom of Mr. Bloom. Much has been made of the stream-of-consciousness technique in *Ulysses*, which allows Joyce to record the thoughts and memories as well as the speech of his characters. Before *Ulysses* no author had made such extensive use of this method, which attempts to imitate the rambling, associative workings of the mind.

The irresistibly comic effect of the novel *Ulysses* is due to the scholarly, pedantic over-elaboration of obviously banal occurrences. For instance, the passage describing keyless Bloom's solution of climbing over the railings to get into the house and his fall enlists the full circumstance, parodying by exhaustion the incipit of realist novels with the establishing of the time, place and circumstance of the narrative.

The collapse of styles, discourses, slang, ironies are frequently used in Joyce's novel. If earlier a relatively straightforward prose, blending free indirect narration with interior monologue (stream-of-consciousness, processed the real), in the second half of the book, the reality to be processed becomes ever more the linguistically supported, artificial world created in the earlier episodes.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce provided an example of simultaneous construction and deconstruction of meaning and significance. The chapters satirize not only the styles they call into play but, in the same time, the nostalgic inherent in the Modernist expressive form. Rather than expressive-mimetic, they can be described as ludic.

All in all, this thesis contains what I have considered to be some of the most influential and important contributions to the modern scientific study of irony. The most interesting and fascinating topic in the studies of irony is what it can pragmatically and socially accomplish for speakers. This approach is a relative newcomer in that most previous work on verbal irony has addressed reception and context. This paper enables consideration of the extent to which basic linguistic and literary interpretations play in the analysis of irony, as well as perhaps in its comprehension.

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