

3 POSTIRONY IN HYSTERICAL REALISM DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on the problem of revealing postirony in hysterical realism discourse and describing different language means of creating the effect of split up reality. It is proved that the main features of hysterical realism works are the following: the total ruin of the traditional structure, polyphony of unreliable narrators, and hence, specific postironic focus on the postmodern world, which is a split up ironic reality. The goal of the research is to highlight the key notion of postirony and to describe language means of achieving the effect of split up ironic reality in hysterical discourse. To fulfil this goal one should focus on the following tasks: to point out genre peculiarities of hysterical realism discourse; to define the notion of postirony through the prism of postmodern poetics; to single out and describe language manifestation of postirony in hysterical discourse. Hence, the following postmodern techniques of writing are irony, playfulness, black humour, stylization, intertextuality, metaprose.

KEYWORDS

Postmodern irony, narrator, hysterical realism discourse, English literary texts.

Literary critics and linguists are faced with the difficult task of categorizing a wide corpus of postmodern narratives that have conquered the hearts of millions of readers worldwide, through their ironic way of representing today's reality. The term "postmodern" in this research is not only used to denote nowadays culture and literature but also for various aspects of contemporary life which are often vague and indefinable due to a sense of instability, and anxiety that became permanent during the last decades for the mankind in general.

Urbanization, the dominance of different kinds of information technologies, and digital as well, as the prevalence of virtual reality have led to the depersonalization of a person who feels "very uncomfortable in the cold Universe" [1, 2]. As a result one can feel a *crisis of cognitive ability*, struggling to survive in such an unstable world. Within the framework of the cognitive paradigm, postmodernism is a product of chaos comprehension due to a special nonlinear absurd thinking [3], which is inevitably reflected in contemporary literature as ludic absurd. In postmodern poetics ludic absurd as a literary phenomenon "reflects the senselessness of the world, chaotic, illogical, where entropy dominates, destructure, the absence of causative relationships" [4], in other words, split up ironic reality.

While defining key tendencies in the development of postmodern literature one can sum up that it is discontent with classical modes of representation, on the one hand, and mobile and easily transformed by blending or mutation of traditional genres of high and mass literature, on the other. For example, a mash-up literary work combines a pre-existing literary text, often a classic work, and a text of another genre, usually the horror genre, into an integrated narrative (the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* combines Jane Austen's classic 1813 novel with elements of modern zombie fiction).

In postmodern poetics among the general characteristics of postmodern writing scholars usually distinguish the following: irony, playfulness, black humour, stylization, intertextuality, and metaprose. Postmodernists were certainly not the first to combine in their literary works irony and humour in a special way, but for many of them, *postmodern irony* became hallmarks of their style. That can be explained by the fact that postmodern authors are disappointed with the Second World War, the Cold War, and conspiracy theories. That is why, "anger, growing despair, paralysis of the present and future, the unsettledness of life, deceit, fanaticism, anger, hatred, violence, barbarism, constant feeling of anxiety, fear of responsibility, escape from freedom, lack of choice, devastation, mental fatigue, defenselessness, the absurdity of struggle, doomedness, infertility of efforts, lack of saints in life, total wine, indifference, loneliness, mutual hatred, the terrible sacrilege of the beautiful new world" [4] become the main topics of the postmodern absurdist works.

It is quite obvious that the distinguishing feature of many contemporary literary works is, to our minds, their rather particular *ironic interpretation* of the described events and complete reconstruction of the novel's traditional narration. In this case, we can speak about *hysterical realism*, a new literary genre that is focused on minor details, the plausible absurdity of the depicted situations, namely human toxic relations and negative emotions, as well as on the polyphony of unreliable narrative voices which still fail in convincing the reader of their trustworthiness.

By the way, James Wood was the first critic, who pointed out the main features of hysterical realism novels. The major flaw of contemporary novels is marked by simple, flat, undeveloped characters. As the result, the narrative is concentrated on sharing some information, or knowledge, rather than depicting the feelings and emotions of the protagonists. Indeed, judging by the content of such literary works, contemporary novelists take their role as knowledge providers in a very serious manner, generating "books that know a thousand things but do not know a single human being" [5].

It is also worth mentioning, that fulfilling the condition of truthfulness within the fictional world in such novels does not guarantee a realistic actualization of the objective reality in a literary text which became split up. That's why, hysterical realism novels lack credibility, as the reader often fails to displace the presented facts within his reality. Besides, the constant presence of different unreliable narrators does not persuade the reader to consider them as part of his observed reality which looks like split up ironic reality.

The main features of hysterical realism novels are the following: the total ruin of the traditional novel structure, polyphony of unreliable narrators, and hence, specific postironic focus on the postmodern world, which is split up ironic reality.

The goal of the research is to highlight the key notion of postirony and to describe language means of achieving the effect of split up ironic reality in a literary text. To fulfil this goal one should focus on the following tasks: to point out genre peculiarities of hysterical realism novels; to define the notion of postirony through the prism of postmodern poetics; to single out and describe language manifestation of postirony in literary texts of the suggested genre.

3.1 POSTMODERN TECHNIQUES OF TEXT CREATION: IRONIC NOVEL WRITING

Postmodernism became a cultural phenomenon of the 20th century and the most important stage in the evolution of contemporary art. The term "postmodernism" is used to describe a reaction to or response to modernism in the late twentieth century, as liberation from modernist principles and patterns. In its essence, postmodernism rejects what modernism stands for. Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history, but it describes this fragmentation as something tragic, something that can be mourned as a great loss. Postmodernism, on the other hand, does not complain about the idea of fragmentation, conventionality, or inconsistency, but rather welcomes it. In literary poetics, the term is used to describe certain genre characteristics of literature after World War II, such as the fragmentation, paradox, dubious narrator, the reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment, laid down in contemporary literature, etc.

Eco, U. believes that "postmodernism is not a fixed chronological phenomenon, but a definite spiritual state..." [6]. Crisis, pessimism, decline, the world of "simulacra", false visions, the world of many referents, multiple meaning, as well as the following postmodern techniques such as irony, playfulness, black humour, stylization, intertextuality, metaprose are released in scientific works by such researchers as Babelyuk, O., Koliassa, O., Lodge, D., Runner, B.

Postmodern literature aims to bring back a large readership, to make it accessible to all kinds of contemporary readers. Whereas modernist and avant-garde literature were only for the "chosen" Barth, J. believes that the ideal postmodernist writer should hope to be able to interest and captivate a certain audience, wider than professional high art professionals... The ideal postmodern novel should be a duel between realism and unrealism, "pure art" with the biased, elite prose with the mass literature" [7]. That's why to grasp the readers' attention postmodern authors play with them in the process of text formation, allowing the readers to make multiple interpretations of their open texts, or even to collaborate with the author in creating and/or transforming the author's version of the text in the process of "interactive reading" of the electronic Internet version.

Besides, postmodern literary works are extremely interesting as they are often deliberately transferred to distant from the contemporary readers' historical epochs. For example, in the Middle Ages – Eco, U. ("Foucault's Pendulum", "The Name of the Rose"); in the Middle Ages, where Baroque and antiquity – Panich, M. "Khazar Dictionary", "Last Love in Constantinople"; in antiquity – Ransman, K. "The Last World", in the Middle Ages – Kunder, M. "Slowness", in the Enlightenment – Zuckind, P. ("Smells, or the Story of a Murderer").

An important technique of postmodern novel writing is a reference to previous literary works. Critics say this device shows the lack of originality of postmodernism in general and its reliance on clichés. The postmodern intertext can be defined as a cultural rhizome, that is parallel to another literary work that contains stereotype codes, an expanded discussion of the process of this literary work writing or the adoption of a style. Interesting are references to fairy tales as a manifestation of a special genre of postmodern literature, for example in the works of Margaret Atwood, Donald Barthelme and many others.

We completely agree with Eco, U. who believes that understanding any text we read is based on our previous reading experience, which we gained from other texts. "Intertextual knowledge can be considered as a special coding, they set their own intertextual frames" [6]. Under such conditions, our reading becomes integrated, attracts other texts, and activates our literary memory and cultural traditions.

Intertextuality in a postmodern literary work can be manifested in different ways and depends on the method of analysis and the form of intertextual connections. Piege-Gro, N. divided relations into two types: co-presence and derivation. The first type contains a reference, quote, allusion, plagiarism, and the second – stylization and parody. Allusions and quotes, cultural memory that enriches the text, collage, different epochs of culture, bricolage, palimpsest, imitation of the classical reading modes, addressing the reader-participant, reader-interpreter, fragmentation of the text – all these are elements of intertextuality, which are considered by different authors in their way. For example, quotes from natural science art, natural science, socio-political, technical, medical, artistic, and philological literature provide an opportunity to understand the mentality of society, and to learn the culture of the cited era. Quotations also testify to the explicit connection, reinforce the stylistic and semantic significance of the text, and are central to the intertextual discourse. "Another word" in quotations is clearly defined and expressed. Epigraphs occupy a prominent place in a postmodern literary text. They serve as intertextual links that connect pretexts.

So, to sum it up, intertextuality is the formation of the meanings of texts by other texts, that is "every text is an intertext; other texts are present in it at different levels in more or less recognizable forms; texts of the previous culture on the texts of the surrounding culture" [8].

Many postmodern authors employ a postmodern technique of metaprose (metafiction), trying to give the reader an awareness of the author's presence and fiction creation. It helps to account for various distortions in the story, impossible changes in time, or to maintain emotional distance from the narrator. Some examples of metaprose literary texts are as follows: "Swim-Two-Birds" by Flann O'Brien, "Suffering", "Secret Window" by Stephen King, and "Atonement" by Ian McEwan, "Counterfeiters" by Andre Gide, "The World through Harp's Eyes" by John Irving.

In addition to that, one can't but mention another important postmodern technique such as stylization, which is the joining or "glueing together" several textual elements. Stylization is closely associated with postmodern intertextuality, when many postmodern authors have combined or "inserted" elements of previous literary genres and styles to create a new narrative voice or comment on the literary works of their contemporaries.

As described by many literary critics, the style of a postmodern literary text is characterized by the following features: epistemological uncertainty, fragmentation, collage, and postmodern irony.

Epistemological uncertainty is a postphilosophical principle that expresses the plurality of truth. Fragmentation of the chronotope and plot due to the collage technique. According to the terminological literary dictionary, collage is "a technique in the fine arts, which consists in glueing different materials on any basis" [9]. In literary poetics, collage means borrowing from other literary works and introducing into another text motifs, quotations, and numerous stylistic devices. That's why collage is associated with literary play and intertextuality.

The symbols of postmodern irony are quotation marks that define the multi-layered depth of a particular reading process of postmodern text that exists as a phenomenon of intertextuality. Concrete employment of quotation marks could have many senses: whether the author only means them, whether the reader knows or not about the quoted source, how deeply he understands the author's irony and how he builds up his ironic attitude to the text – all these aspects contribute to postmodern boundless freedom of language games," said Babelyuk, O. [10]. Pieces of numerous cultural codes, formulas, rhythmic structures, fragments of social idioms, etc. – they are all absorbed by the text and mixed up in it because there is always language before or around the text" [8].

Among the main components of postmodern irony are: "the contradiction between its form and content, as well as the ability to evoke a certain emotion, the reaction of the reader (usually negative)" [11]. It is proved that postmodern irony functions in literary texts focused on three main areas: the author, the reader and the character. The study of all possible interactions between them reveals the fact that postmodern ironic writing largely depends on the ironic position of the author himself, the type of narrator who represents his position and the characters.

Recently postmodern irony has become a key feature of postmodern literary texts. In particular, in hysterical realism, where attention is focused on the ironic idea of the characters about their way of life and ironic writing in general. Postmodern irony is based on the interaction of different types of modern worldviews: humorous, ironic and philosophical.

3.2 GENRE PECULIARITIES OF HYSTERICAL REALISM NOVELS

In the most general sense *genre* is understood as a historically developing type of literary work, which has definite language characteristics, a predetermined nature, and axiological accents. It means that different genre forms are rather dynamic and can be easily transformed or modified depending on the external changes in the socio-cultural context. Besides, the genre is also influenced by the objective qualities of the described object, phenomenon, or process. Furthermore, it is always marked by definite ideological, moral, ethical, aesthetic, professional and individual psychological features of the author [2]. Besides, in contemporary literature, one can trace the use of different genres and styles typical of other kinds of literature and genres (detective story, pornography, love story, essay, diary, cookery book, receipt, letter, newspaper clip) but each of

which contributes to the stylistic hybridity and mixing of genres. Although *generic 'mixtures'* are typical, especially for contemporary literary works.

In contrast to its diversity, any genre form is an exact unity of special poetic properties, such as a particular plot structure, characters, their speech and rhythm characteristics, stylistic means and devices. For example, for detectives, the key genre features are as follows: the reversed plot structure (in the last chapter, the reader learns what happened), and numerous flashbacks, which help to tie the plot lines and reveal the suspense. The emphasis in such detective narration is on the process of investigation, the crime itself is hygienic, described at random. It is worth mentioning that the events are described by the unreliable narrator. As a rule, they have "a double bottom". Such technique is also called "an updating act", because, on the one hand, it makes the reader curious about the ending, and, on the other, predicts the end of the story. But the most interesting thing about this genre is, to our minds, the unreliable relations between the author/narrator and the reader: given author's hints about the solution are done in such a way, that the reader considers them misleading or irrelevant.

So, to sum it up we may assume that every stage of genre development absorbs completely new characteristics of a definite literary epoch along with the traditional elements pertinent to already established genres.

Speaking about the essential features of postmodern literary genres in general, and of the "crisis" of large literary forms in particular we completely agree with Patricia Waugh who discusses the changes in the postmodern novel as being an "uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic" period. This question is part of a larger discussion on the survival of postmodern literature in a digital world, and its continuous genre transformations to keep up with the latest cultural and literary tendencies.

To my mind, these changes are caused by the fact, that many postmodern authors deny traditional literary forms connected with the ordered presentation of reality, such as a well-made plot, chronological sequence, authoritative omniscient author, rational connection between what characters 'do' and what they 'are', causal connection between 'surface' details and 'deep', 'scientific laws' of existence [12]. Within the postmodern approach, they are free to experiment with different literary genres and forms, making their literary works highly specific and unique, and involving the reader in active cooperation in the process of novel writing.

Among the most frequently used postmodern literary techniques in novel writing one can point out intertextuality (the usage of previous literary works within another literary work), temporal distortion (non-linear, rhizome-like timelines and narrative techniques in a literary text), pastiche (various literary styles within a literary work to make a mixture of styles), metafiction (a kind of postmodern writing about the act of writing of a literary work), magical realism (introduction of impossible or unrealistic events into a narrative that is realistic), faction (mixing of actual historical events with fictional events without clearly defining what is factual and what is fictional), and direct reader involvement (direct addresses to the reader and his full involvement into the creation and interpretation a literary work).

Today it is quite obvious that the norms of any literary genre no longer suit contemporary novel writing, which is faced to present the 'hysterical' rhythm of the present society. In their literary works postmodern authors tend to reject outright meanings, they highlight the possibility of multiple meanings or even more a complete lack of meaning. That is why, we are witnessing the rise of a new novel which an English critic James Wood calls "big" and "ambitious", with "stories and sub-stories sprouting on every page"; a novel that impresses through its rich web of episodes, but fails in convincing the reader in its trustworthiness [5]. In his review of Smith's latest novel, "*White Teeth*", the critic defines it as *hysterical realism* [5]. He also set the historical boundaries of this new genre, going back as far as Dickens and his realistic portrayal gloomy reality of London, and up to the postmodern area, with literary works of Thomas Pynchon or Don Delillo, whom he considers the founders of hysterical realism.

Keeping this in mind a wide range of contemporary writings can be regarded as examples of *hysterical realism novels*, on the grounds, that they are quite innovative in their form and content, and have stirred a lot of controversies in the literary world in the past few decades. According to Wood, these writings fail to achieve "the novel's basic task of representing human beings" [5], by focusing more on building thick plots and transmitting information, than on creating dynamic multifaceted characters. Wood accuses the new generation of authors of following the Delilloan style of writing: "A big contemporary novel is a perpetual-motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. It seems to want to abolish stillness, as if ashamed of silence – as it were, a criminal running endless charity marathons. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page, as these novels continually flourish their glamorous congestion" [5].

It is worth mentioning that Smith acknowledges this ideological shift that affects the main objectives of fiction writing, but in opposition to Wood, she embraces the new current and attributes it to the constantly fluctuating demands of the general public. From her perspective, the novelist should be more concerned with explaining "how the world works", rather than guiding the reader towards experiencing a certain set of emotions. For example, the ironic exposition of postmodern reality transforms the objective reality described in literary sources. The text and its characters of fictitious reality are divided into separate ambiguous fictional worlds, full of hints and hallucinations. In postmodern fiction, the reader does not sympathize with the protagonist, because he can not establish a certain emotional connection with him. We fully support Wood, who covers the issue of fictional characters in his essay "*How Fiction Works*". He argues that the boundaries between real people and literary constructions are disappearing: "There is no such thing as a novelistic character. There are just thousands of different kinds of people, some round, some flat, some deep, some caricatures, some realistically evoked, some brushed in with the lightest of strokes" [5].

Let's analyse the linguistic manifestation of postmodern irony reflected in D. Ryan's novel "*The Spinning Heart*": "MY FATHER **still lives** back on the road past the weir in the cottage I was reared in. I go there every day to see if he dead and every day he lets me down. He hasn't yet missed a day of letting me down. **He smiles at me; that terrible smile.** He knows I'm coming to

check is he dead. **He knows I know he knows. He laughs** his crooked laugh. I ask is he okay with everything and he only **laughs**. We look at each other for a while and when I can no longer stand the stench off of him, I go away. Good luck, I say, I'll see you tomorrow. You will, he says back. I know I will" [13].

In this passage, the author with the help of postmodern irony reveals the toxic abnormal relationship between the father and son, namely, the son visits his old father every day, not to make his life more comfortable and easier, but only to find out whether he is alive, not dead: *MY FATHER still lives* [13]. The convergence of different kinds of repetitions, namely chiasmus *He knows I know he knows; He smiles at me; that terrible smile*, especially the repetition of the word "laugh" persuade the reader that the father is aware of his son's hostile attitude, but he can take it with irony, mocking at him, *every day he lets me down. He hasn't yet missed a day of letting me down*, looking at their relations through the prism of postmodern irony.

As we can see from the analysed textual fragment postirony transformed the objective reality of the characters, who seemed to live in their realities, that is in reality which had been split up into several ones. This happens due to the overuse of reality, as hysterical realism novels display complicated webs of events that incorporate a large number of interconnected characters who live in their reality often split up into some other. For example, Donal Ryan's debut novel "*The Spinning Heart*" is told by 21 completely different unreliable narrators, that represent the stream of conscientiousness technique, and insightful narratives of the residents of a tight-knit, rural town during the Irish economic collapse.

At the textual level, radical plurality often manifests itself not only in a depiction of formerly marginalized and outcast characters (different ethnic groups, but also in various kinds of losers, junkies, prostitutes, lesbians, homosexuals and deviants) depicted as rather positive characters but also in the use of multiple, often alternative or overlapping narrative voices offering the version of reality and the vision of the world which is equal to the other voice's interpretation.

So to sum it up, in hysterical realism discourse "the characters are represented as lost, emotionally exhausted" [11]. They experience many vital events in which they lose their human features. These traits initially distinguished them as realistic personalities of objective reality. In the process of the plot development, the characters fall into a web of decisive events and toxic relationships, until everything that remains human in them turns into a caricature of a character who will never be able to overcome his fictitious state.

3.3 LANGUAGE MANIFESTATION OF POSTIRONY IN HYSTERICAL REALISM NOVELS

The linguopoetic analysis of hysterical realism novels proved that the most commonly used stylistic devices in such literary texts are paradox, unreliable narrators, unrealistic and impossible plots, language games, parody, dark humour, and postirony which are in the focus of our attention in this research.

It is worth mentioning that from ancient times to the present, irony has been a phenomenon of special interest due to the ambiguity of its interpretation. It has been investigated from a philosophical, aesthetic, ideological, psycholinguistic, and anthropocentric point of view.

In a broad sense irony (derived from the Greek *eironeia* – "hypocrisy, hidden ridicule or cunning") is an artistic path that shows a mocking attitude to the subject depicted by the artist. Plato interpreted irony as "not just deception and nonsense, but as deception only from the outside, something that embodies the complete opposite of what is not expressed. This is ridicule or mockery, which contain a very clear imprint of the goal aimed at achieving the highest justice under the guise of self-humiliation" [14]. In other words, the irony is seen as an explicit image of a negative phenomenon to ridicule and discredit the phenomenon, to draw attention to its shortcomings.

It is interesting to notice that the understanding of irony is constantly changing over time; it is interpreted differently by representatives not only of different cultures but also within one culture, it is also differently treated by scientists and people who do not belong to science. This can be explained by the fact that irony needs a background (the so-called "echo") that reinforces it: an opinion, norm, opinion or statement with which it is associated [15]. That is why irony is called the phenomenon of "unspoken understanding" that is based on the general understanding of the universe and "a matter of ideological complicity", an agreement based on shared understandings of "how the world is" [16].

Basic characteristics of irony are its ambiguity, which determines a wide range of its understanding and interpretation (from subtle ridicule, expressed in hidden form, antiphrasis, to the way of worldview) and the diversity of its types – verbal, situational, structural, cosmic, the irony of fate [17]. This determines the choice of approaches for the analysis of its different aspects.

Since irony is a complex rhetorical phenomenon, it comprises three main segments where we distinguish: philosophical and aesthetic (worldview) irony, literary (as part of the comic) and stylistic irony. Literary irony is divided into two major types: irony as a stylistic device (ironic ridicule) and irony as an effect aimed at the reader (or viewer, as this type of irony, is often found in dramatic works). Interaction between interlocutors and the correct interpretation of irony is very important for successful communication. In this case, irony serves as a kind of filter to identify "their", i.e. those who understand the meaning of what is said. Thus, irony from the pragmatic point of view divides listeners into target audiences and "victims", provoking an emotional reaction in both the former and the latter: "irony has an evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional responses in those who get it and those who do not, as well as in its targets and in what some people call its victims" [18].

One of the important issues in the study of irony is its affiliation with language. The idea of irony as an independent category is based on the fact that it operates in a situation based on the cognitive structures of the participants and, not being a unit of the language system, is realized mainly using the language code. A signal of irony for the recipient is the contextual inappropriateness reported. This approach does not seem entirely legitimate, as irony is not just a fragment of the objective world in the form of an ironic situation, but a linguistic phenomenon.

The connection between irony and language is inseparable, as irony is expressed by linguistic means. Most researchers rightly consider irony as one of the important attributes of language behaviour, which depends on the observance or violation of ethical norms, the specifics of the communication situation, on the relations of participants in communication.

To our minds, the term "ironic game" most accurately conveys the essence of the phenomenon, which includes the actions of communicators of generation, transmission and perception of ironic meaning. The conditions for the success of an ironic game determine the success of irony at the interaction level. These rules cover the requirements of ironic preparedness of communicators, and the suitability of circumstances for an ironic game. Under conditions conducive to ironic play, the understanding irony is more than understanding the meaning of an expression; it integrates different types of information from the social context, including events, beliefs and emotions of the speaker, as well as paralinguistic factors, such as facial expressions. "Comprehension of irony goes beyond literal understanding, integrating different types of information from the social context, including events, the speaker's beliefs and emotional attitudes, and paralinguistic cues such as the facial expression" [15].

An ironic game can fail in an unnecessary situation: there can be different types of negative consequences – the addressee's refusal to participate in ironic communication, ignoring the restrictions imposed by society on the use of irony, stylistic and genre errors. Communication difficulties can be also caused by inattention or excitement of the addressee, surprise and rejection of irony in these circumstances. It is important to remember that the very essence of ironic communication is the need for active intellectual contact among its participants. The importance of psychological contact should also be added.

According to researchers, irony "happens" in the space between the said and the unspoken; "Happens in the space between (and including) the said and the unsaid; it needs both to happen" [17]. The connection between these two components also generates an ironic meaning that the addressee must understand. The discourse proceeds according to certain strategies of communicative behaviour. Deviations from "typical" discursive actions are perceived as significant and signal to the addressee about the additional semantic load. In addition, other factors play a role, such as the communication situation and personal characteristics of the interlocutors. All these factors together determine the "effectiveness of irony"; in violation of the interaction of the semantic system of discourse with the communicative situation and consciousness of communicants, and the pragmatics of irony remains unrealized for the recipient.

Researchers of irony also use the term "ironic discourse", which means the frequency of realization of irony through speech acts that correlate with the specific characteristics of the speaker's personality, as well as the person who ironizes. The ability to produce and perceive ironic statements is inherent in every person, but this ability depends largely on education, intellectual and cultural levels.

The above-mentioned statements about irony could be extrapolated to postirony which is vividly seen in hysterical realism novels. It is worth mentioning that in postmodern irony something is

meant to be cynically mocked and not taken seriously. It combines these two opposite elements by either having something absurd taken seriously or being unclear as to whether something is meant to be ironic.

"Postironic" is an acceptable term – it is very modish to use this as if to suggest one of three things:

- 1) that irony has ended;
- 2) that postmodernism and irony are interchangeable, and can be conflated into one handy word;
- 3) that we are more ironic than we used to be, and therefore need to add a prefix suggesting even greater ironic distance than irony on its own can supply.

None of these things is true.

In literature, postirony generally refers to a return to sincerity when the author or character was previously speaking ironically or sarcastically. Some kinds of postirony refer to a change of heart on the part of an author or character. Other kinds of postirony refer to previously written works that were ironic in their time but are no longer considered as such. The third version of this literary device refers to a moment in which a character or author is both ironic and sincere at the same time.

This last use of this device is often done accidentally, as it is often difficult to combine sarcasm and sincerity on purpose without sounding contrived.

Postirony as a special stylistic device of postmodern poetics became key for hysterical realism literary texts in particular, as they lay a special emphasis on the ironic representation of characters their way of living, and ironic writing in general. The research is also focused on the philosophical assumptions of postmodern irony in hysterical realism fiction.

In this research, postirony is understood as a distinguishing feature of contemporary fiction and works of a hysterical realist in particular. It is based on the interaction of various types of current world perception: humorous, ironic and philosophical, which is poststructural.

Ironical presentation of postmodern reality transforms the objective reality described in literary text and its characters into a fictitious reality that split up into separate ambiguous fictional worlds full of allusions and hallucinations.

At the centre is the character Bobby Mahon, a locally well-known and respected building foreman who gets cheated out of his job and unemployment benefits by Pokey, a corrupt but charismatic boss, who "rowed us up the creek and left us there". Bobby states his situation as highly ironic: "Imagine being so suddenly useless".

Although a great strength of the book is Ryan's ability to capture the vernacular of contemporary Ireland and its diverse citizens, from newly arrived immigrants to jaded old men "drinking the farm" in local pubs to young, enterprising university graduates with stacks of useless ambition – the story itself might take place in any country affected by the disastrous economic upheavals of recent years.

Throughout the novel, we get a kaleidoscopic ironic view of the town's residents, the bitter stories of their lives, and various takes on the kidnapping of a young boy and the accusation that

Bobby killed his father. The cast of characters is diverse, ranging from the town prostitute to a "blow-in" (a woman not originally from the town) who stays in her house in a failed estate complex "like one good tooth in a row of decaying ones" to Bobby's father, a "horror of a man". Each takes a turn speaking to the reader in the first person, revealing their dreams and twisted desires that rise to the surface.

They are depressed, perverted, suicidal, both kind and cruel to a fault, occasionally misguided, ethical, confused, solipsistic, and all bound by the rules of an insular community where to reveal anything is to reveal too much. Therefore this postmodern novel becomes somehow septic, as the reader does not sympathize with the protagonist, because he does not manage to establish a definite emotional connection with him.

For example, in the novel, the disconnect and abuse between many of the parents and their grown children are cyclic and passed down throughout generations. Although Frank loved Bobby, he was cold and harsh throughout Bobby's childhood; Frank was not kind and did not encourage Bobby. Frank's father treated Frank the same way and was also physically abusive. The stereotype that men should be unfeeling and firm-handed is the root of the disconnect in Bobby's family between the men and their sons, resulting in an inability to show true feelings.

We completely support Wood, J. who elaborates on the question of fictional characters in his essay *How Fiction Works* [5]. He states, that the boundaries between real people and literary constructions disappear: "There is no such thing as 'a novelistic character'. There are just thousands of different kinds of people, some round, some flat, some deep, some caricatures, some realistically evoked, some brushed in with the lightest of strokes" [5]. For example, Josie admits that he didn't love Pokey as much as his other son Eamonn. Josie spoiled Pokey with money and material possessions to make up for this deficit, but Josie and Pokey were never close; while Josie isn't certain, he believes this led Pokey to become a dishonest man. Josie is ashamed of both Pokey and Mags. While Josie and Mags used to be close, he can't accept that she is a lesbian. Mags is heartbroken because she wants her father to remember how much he used to love her. Josie's prejudice causes the problems between Josie and Mags: He thinks homosexuality is wrong, and it's hard for him to see that it's his daughter underneath the label.

Linguistic manifestations of postirony in the literary text are reflected in the poetic system of the novel with the help of special stylistic means and devices. Taking into account poetic and stylistic peculiarities of post-irony presented in definite ironic textual fragments one can distinguish different types of postirony: *dramatic irony, situational, and verbal*.

Dramatic postirony became crucial for tying all the characters and their stories into one artistic whole. The novel's structure occasionally feels too mosaic and fractured, and readers may find themselves longing for a more linear, propulsive plot that relies on scenes that turn the action forward rather than chapters arranged as monologues. However, Ryan still engages the reader in this insular, fascinating world bound by the "*whole mad Irish country thing of keeping secrets... It's nearly like a kind of embarrassment, not wanting to say anything about yourself for fear you'll be judged or looked on as foolish*" [13].

Situational irony is extremely emotional as it is created with the help of numerous symbols, images and different stylistic devices. For example, "*There's a red metal heart in the centre of the low front gate, skewered on a rotating hinge. It's flaking now; the red is nearly gone. It needs to be scraped and sanded and painted and oiled. It still spins in the wind, though. I can hear it creak, creak, creak as I walk away. A flaking, creaking, spinning heart*" [13].

The opening image of a "*red metal heart in the centre of the low front gate, skewered on a rotating hinge... [a] flaking, creaking, spinning heart*" symbolically ties together different 21 plot sublines and 21 characters of the novel, depicted with bitter irony: all of them with broken hearts and broken fates. The image of the spinning heart that needs to be repaired is a symbol of both togetherness and estrangement. It is at the centre of this chorus of anguished voices, bound together for better or worse. One of the characters reflects the setting of the novel: "*The air is thick with platitudes around here. We'll all pull together. We're a tight-knit community. We'll all support each other. Oh really? Will we?*" [13].

Bobby is the central character, and many other characters view themselves concerning him. Bobby used to be Pokey Burke's foreman. When Pokey leaves town and the company falls apart, Bobby tries to fix some of the projects that Pokey left unfinished. Many people view Bobby as a moral, decent man who leads other men with honesty and integrity. The townspeople who think otherwise of Bobby are jealous of him. Some people believe the rumours that Bobby cheated on his wife with Réaltín and killed Frank, while others could never fathom such a good man doing such bad things. Everyone in town judges Bobby, and almost everyone considers him to be attractive.

Bobby considers himself a trusting man in love with his wife, Triona. He claims to love being married because it gives him an excuse to enjoy more feminine activities, like plays. He is also smart but, because he hung out with a rough crowd growing up, he didn't want to show off academically for fear of being beaten up. Bobby hates Frank because Frank was cold and harsh to Bobby and Bobby's mother. Bobby was always jealous of his childhood friend, Seanie, who had a loving father.

Verbal postirony is revealed through numerous stylistic means and devices that can be traced quite close in a sentence or a textual fragment. For example, "*I didn't know what answer to give to that question. Before I could open my stupid little mouth again my father had a length of Wavin pipe in his hand that he used to use to shcooup the cattle along the yard and it was going swish, whack, swish, whack, swish, whack against my little scrawny body and I couldn't see out through my eyes for the shock and the sudden pain of it; I fell out backwards through the parlour door onto the hard, mucky ground and my father was roaring: You. Know. NOTTEN. You. Know. NOTTEN. You. Know. NOTTEN. You. Know. NOTTEN*" [13]. In this textual fragment, postirony reveals toxic abnormal relationships between the father and the son, which lies in the fact of the father's violence and constant humiliation of the son. The convergence of different kinds of onomatopoeia *swish, whack, swish, whack, swish, whack* repetitions and parcelling *You. Know. NOTTEN. You. Know. NOTTEN. You. Know. NOTTEN* persuade the reader that their relations are extremely hard even through the prism of postmodern irony.

CONCLUSION

The linguopoetic analysis of hysterical realism novels proved that the most commonly used stylistic devices in such literary texts are paradox, unreliable narrators, unrealistic and impossible plots, language games, parody, dark humour, and postirony which are in the focus of our attention in this research.

Irony is considered a philosophical category as modern philosophy becomes more ironic. Thus, irony, being a phenomenon of philosophy and culture, is also a way of worldview, via it the ironic personality self-actualizes. Man, as the bearer of a certain linguistic culture, is the starting point for the study of irony in terms of philosophy. Irony, satire and humor are equal forms of the comic. Irony is characterized by the fact that it provokes a certain reaction in the subject and contains opposition (mostly forms of content). Irony is also characterized by the duality of expression (internal negation, external assertion and final assertion), the focus of action on oneself and on the object. Research shows that postmodern ironic writing depends on the ironic position of the author himself, the type of narrator who represents his position and the characters. Ironic writing is characterized by: irony, playfulness, black humor, stylization, intertextuality, metaprose. It is proved that in hysterical realism discourse the characters are lost, emotionally exhausted. They experience many vital events in which they lose their human features because in the process of plot development, they fall into a web of decisive events and toxic relationships, until everything that remains human in them turns into a caricature of a character who will never be able to overcome his fictitious state.

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