

Irony in the Prose of Faik Konica

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Abstract

Irony in literature is a figure of speech (trope) from Greek language "erioneia" and means hidden mockery, pretension. It involves incongruity between what is expected and what occurs. The trope is used intentionally to mean the opposite. Faik Konica is one of the Albanian writers who used irony wittily and skillfully. For Konica the artistic prose offers an aesthetic taste which is related to a new way of thinking and calls for perfection of style and language. The author uses irony with the aim of putting emphasis on the word and the situation. He had his humor inspired not by his personal discontent but by the national ideal, by the humanity and emancipation of the individual. His style is a mixture of elements of satire and light melody of the lyric, but only as part of irony against the mediocrity and absurdity of Albanian society. In his work Konica confronts two contrary cultures: the Western European culture to which he belonged with the grotesque backwardness of his people, with caricature characters sunk into ignorance and into the oriental mire of moral, economic and cultural vegetation. These are the problems that the author ironies, which make the object of our work.

Keywords: Needle Doctor, irony, national ideal, humanity, orientalism

1. The Theoretical Concept of Irony

Irony is a rhetorical figure related to tropes; it is a way of communication that conveys different and usually contrary meanings to what is said or declared. Irony is a similar figure of speech with metonymy. Based on the meaning it expresses, irony is a fine mockery through words which has a laudatory character. Irony is a poetic figure which is related to the critical attitude of the writer toward the object being ironized, for example:

*"Ka ndenjur si nje ka
Po ha edhe po ha,
Shembet me pilaf,
Fruhet me hoshaf;
S'ka kohë të flasë*

Faik Konica; "Anadollaku në mësalë" (1901).

There are many types of irony, but they can be reduced in two main categories: situational and linguistic. Each irony depends by its success to analyze and diminish the distance between words and events. Irony can be classified also as comical and tragically. Irony is the art of transverse and close spawning by supporting its functioning in such techniques as, unrevealed/open expression, paradox, word-games and other clever forms of expression and inconsistencies.

There is an elementary irony which is confused with recognition, and which as an art, is the "daughter" of entertainment. Of course, irony is too moral to be a real artistic figure and too cruel to be really comic. Nevertheless, there is a feature which drives them closer: art, comical and irony are made possible only where the *vital hustle* is outstretched. However the figure of irony is even more liberated than the comical one: because the comic, often hurries to laugh just not to cry, like those cowards who speak loudly to the pitch black dark night to find courage; they think to escape risk only by naming it, and act freely just to be safe and outrun danger. Irony, which no longer is afraid from surprises, plays with

danger.

The figure of irony is known for particular intonation of the word as a speech, which completes the meaning of the figure. As an expanded figure of speech it can give full creations, where the ironic tone prevails. When irony takes over a bitter, attacking character, when it expresses hate and deep contempt is called sarcasm. This powerful tool is used often by poets in satirical acts or orators in their speeches when they want to expose and batter hard their opponents, the vices and flaws of a society, class differentiations, different parasites etc. Irony is used more in humoristic literature, whereas sarcasm in the satirical literature. Famous writers like Konica, Çajupi, Fishta, Noli, Migjeni, N. Bulka, D. Agolli, etc have used irony and sarcasm masterfully.

2. Konica, Master of Irony

One of the greatest writers of the Albanian literature, who has used irony masterfully, is Faik Konica. This highly educated person, considered a wandering encyclopedia, brilliant essayist, perfect stylist, theoretical and practical founder of the Albanian literary critic, political actor oriented by the west, brought a new model in the Albanian mentality. From the mind and hand of Konica emerge only needles that eventually pinch your mind in the moment you start reading something written by his hand. Konica knows no withdrawal. He, in the same way that wants to win over mentality, asks for perfection in style and art.

Konica was equipped with rare intelligence and in the parish of humor, in England; he further developed his sense of irony. In America he finds the appropriate terrain to develop both. Faik Konica had the philological-esthetic culture, the taste for art and the sharpness of judgment. Irony for Konica was a divine gift. His humor was inspired not only by narrow despairs but by national ideals. In his stile are mixed the harsh sound of satire and a light melody of the lyric, but only passingly because what comes after are only irony and despair against mediocrity which made it draw the sword of deep sarcasm and blow a lightning; only he could hit the nail in the head.

In the multipage text it has been written the mega history of Albania which Konica describes with profound shading. On one side Konica is presented with a wide European culture, part of the most famous aristocracy, whereas from the other part are presented his people, drowned in grotesque backwardness, with caricature characters smeared in oriental slum. Faik tried to get back in its feet, his people and his country, to shake it hard by hitting with the stinging scourge of his satire, rather than pondering it. Cynical, sarcastic and merciless with mediocrity and ignorance, he tried to show Albanians that they were Europeans and should see beyond the veil of ignorance and turncoatness.

Scholar Arshi Pipa writes: "*Faik warded off tradition...deflected from the meaning of those strong and healthy roots which had been the vitality of the Albanian during centuries*"¹

Arshi Pipa has built the portrait of Konica and when he draws his lips he describes them neither thick nor thin, but fine. Pipa says that you can catch a phrase which is hard to decipher as sweet joy or irony. Nevertheless, if you have read any row from "Doktor gjilpëra", you could understand its irony.

"All that intelligence which glows from the eyes of Konica is revealed by those two swingy lips, naturally for mockery. Intelligence has turned into "humor": it has recognized me".²

Arshi Pipa affirms that Faik Konica even in the prose entitled "The Writer" uttered in a radio of Washington, on 31 March 1931, formulates with irony a prayer for the writers; apparently bothered by the mediocre and worthless literature he directs to the Almighty to give us the strength to keep our mouth shut when we have nothing to say; to give us patience to think something through before writing upon it; to inspire us with a sense of justice; not only to talk with equity but also to act on that behalf! Save us from the pitfalls of grammar, from the distortions of language and the aberrations of the press. So be it! - ends with irony the prayer of the great Faik.

3. Irony in "Doktor Gjilpëra" as a Tool to Criticize the Orient and Affirm Western Europe

The most important literary work of Konica is the long satirical prose "Doctor Needle reveals the roots of Mamurras drama". "Doctor Gjilpëra" was written and published in the newspaper "The Sun" in 1924. It was the time when the June revolution had triumphed and the Albanian society was going through a bitter political struggle. Society had in front of itself vital issues to resolve, as choosing the type of the regime, the agrarian reform, the democratization and

¹ Pipa, Arshi. Magazine "Critic", 1944.

² Ibid

modernization of the state apparatus, national cultural emancipation etc. Konica work is the "offspring" of the socio-historical turning that was starting in the live of our people. The author got inspired by the murder of two American citizens in Mamurras, who organized the feudal reaction. Konica wouldn't see the Mamurras crime like an isolated event, but as an event with broader social sense, where the interests of certain circles goals intermingled and exhibited the political struggle of the time. This event would awaken freedom-loving ideals, enlightenment and emancipation of the writer and would inspire the creation of a work that would shed light and generalize the contemporary Albanian reality.

The hero of the work is Doctor Needle, a young Albanian intellectual who conducted studies in medicine in Russia and Sweden and stands before the alternative: to stay abroad where a full prospect career awaited him or return home and help its countries recovery, especially in improving the health of people. He decided to return to Albania; patriotism triumphed over personal interests.

Returning to Albania puts doctor Needle in front of a shocking reality and hence to his problems involving various topics of Albanian life. Within a short time, he is credited with the distress of the people, the injustice that is done at their expense, the state apparatus, predominantness, arbitrariness, corruption, drama, intrigue, ignorant and ridiculous clerics. In this tragic-comic state, the opposition is comprised of people who have nothing in common with the law and morality.

The principal place in this work is occupied by the relations that Doctor Needle sets with different categories of the Albanian society, with their most typical representatives. In these relations, the social-psychological discovery that makes the author, is on reverse; from one side the character and worldview of Doctor Needle is more clearly delineated; the ideal of a European man, patriotism and humanism of an emancipated man; while on the other side, are drawn different figures of the intellectual circles elite. In particular, the figure of Dr. Needle appears quite clearly in front of two of his colleagues, dr.Emrullah and dr.Protogor Dhalla.

Doctor Needle is a man of modern medicine, partisan of nature, who thinks nature is man's first doctor, whereas the two other doctors appear anachronistic, the epitome of medical dogma alienated from the life and principles of science. The old world in this work consists not only of two doctors, but also of other negative figures. Such is the Minister Salembosa, typical representative of anti-nationalistic backward forces, ridiculous tyrant type, the wily schemer, wakeful and agile. While the environment and oriental mindset of the capital's elite find their expression in tyrant aghas figures such as the Zylfikar Muhedin Agha.

In the stark and heavy atmosphere of the Albanian life the author faces with people who inspire sympathy and reverence. Remain unforgettable in the readers' mind two peasant girls, the old martaneshas man, customs police, Arifeja and Ali Bibi. Despite a kind of skepticism that is felt in their appearance, they come in a warm light, true human values, the beauty of spiritual purity and noble habits. The writer's opinion is that people, being ignorant and crude, need to train the soul and mind. "Doctor Needle" is a powerful satirical work. Given the reality of the Albanian heavy, anachronistic mentality and backwardness of life, the author opposes them, banters and strikes them without mercy. The denying idea-affective attitude makes you feel mockery and irony, satire and sarcasm in the written pages the work. They are shown strongly embodied in artistic force, in scenes and characters, situations and incredibly striking portraits. Masterful use of detail, plasticity of language and nuances of the word, make the satire of Konica original and natural.

Sharp social themes and issues, the negative flow of some social phenomena and powerful satirical notes make "Doctor Needle" a work with outstanding realistic features and representative of modern literature.

Konica wants to plow human minds and to inject novelty. Dr. Needle is the messenger of fate and knowledge, to inject in the blood of people, the concrete time. It's ridiculous even in the edge of death, that compatriots understand his language, but do not want to hear its meaning. Therefore Konica in reality and in art is, and becomes the injection of this society, which surprisingly does not give signs of desired recovery.

"The holder of such a war against the corrupted society and against backwardness is young doctor Dr. Needle, who was educated in the West and has a European-wide culture and an ideal Albanian heart"³

That's why Konica calls to "Hush, civilize, join, do not trust the reports that say good things about us, and maybe one day we will come out as adults in the eyes of the world. The path that leads to honor, freedom and salvation is not paved with flowers but with thorns; he who reaches the roof reaches there torn, bloody, sweat, tired; and roses, laurels, the cold water, lawns where good and smooth you lie, are all found on the top only, and up there you often can't enjoy it because you may fall dead from the weary, but with the awareness that you opened a new path for people. We, brothers, are poor nevers, without any importance at all ... No meetings, the pickaxe. No missions, but the pickaxe. But enough

³ Kiseri, Vedat, *International Symposium...*, Pristina, 2003.

with praise"⁴

This is the comprehensive message of the Konician prose, of Konica himself. It is this, his potential power as an artist, to predict the adequate future and to show the direction in which we should move; to be what it needs, and not a prey of vice, of conceit, of self-appraisal, but fairly reasonable beings, the face of the nation virtue, through work and knowledge. Faik Konica penetrates in the psychological analysis of the Albanian race which is done to face the miserable reality and irony that accompanies reluctance to change, therefore, this showdown deals, is done and understood as criticism.

"... his compatriots ... were extremely poor reflections of the human race ... people annoyed by the world and themselves, who do not see..."⁵

These lines clearly show the irony that uses Konica to his compatriots, who did not want to see nor change. By defining people as such: "... who do not see", presupposes symbolically and ironically, that his compatriots didn't have their sense of "seeing", as imitative reflection of the human race model; this thing psychologically "doesn't make any service to them" as social beings. The reluctance to have this sense disallowed compatriots to search, to be at least not the miserable imitation, but normal beings who want to see. At this point in the psychology of race, fellows search only the wrong version of everything. Parable of their dismal compared to other human races, stimulates anger and revolt in Konica, seeing them satisfied and convinced up to absurdity, not to see themselves, not realizing their existence as beings outside of time. In "their heads", they did not accept the eyes of thought inside it, as every rational being. Instinctive stubbornness had made them choose to stay as they were, biological beings without eyes, as an exception to the rule of human wholeness.

Sadly the "elite" nicknamed "camorra", "... cannot grant permission to any essential change in Albania."⁶

"...Essential change!..." This right, as a request, as a change feature is essentially an aggressive feature, but its positivity in relation to what Konica sought for his compatriots with the immediate necessity to overcome the paradox of Albanian time, the paradox of the being "without eyes".

It takes more importance, when the final verdict of an "elite", "Camorrist" mentality, that didn't allow change, less than fundamental change, was the absolute controversy to novelty in principle and concept. This contradiction was expressed by a single word of this "elite": "Meazallah!"

Radical is the novelty, which wants to be introduced by Konica, but equally absolute, is the controversy it faces in relation to society. This kind of paradox, has affected the speech convention simply in Albanian. Irony is the controversy it faces, and paradoxes from it arise successively.

"Dr. Protagoras speaks half Greek; Dr. Emrullahu speaks half Turkish, only Dr. Needle speaks clear Albanian".

According to researcher Sabri Hamiti even the meaning of names is ironic and oriental - *Salep and Boza is the union of two oriental drinks names, Abd-al Katl, which in Albanian would be something like Rob Caterpillars, or Ibn-el-Kalb, which would mean son of Riffraff...*⁷ Konica, achieves to functionalize the name, which selects, as meaning a reality as painful and ridiculous. Names like Salem Boza, Abd-El -Katli, Dr.Habi-bullah, Dr. Emrullahu, Dr. Protagoras Dhalla, Denizullu Serpa, Zullu, Zgjebo etc are deliberately selected by Konica, to have an immediate effect firstly, aesthetic, in the auditive taste of readers. The wonder, which is transmitted by these types of names and ugliness, accompanying them in shape, sound, provoke to understand something beyond the linguistic form. Konica encourages us to search the hidden "why" of the ironic meaning of their tragic message. He creates immediate reaction and instead forces you to see its purpose, to destroy with the typical sarcasm that ridiculous tradition worn from time, stuck up even in names. Konica was so destructive because the ridiculous spiritual taste and nutrition of his compatriots made him suffer; whose governing brain and leaders of the future fate of his fellows stood on the tracks of the past. Everything of them was mastication, as the process of nostalgic ruminating of the past.

The framework and rules of the game, in the Albanian time, for which Konica speaks, were: "Camorrist corruption!" Ironically only he was found appropriate, suitable, and perfect to be Albanian. Konica revealed without fear the archetype Albanian of that time. This model had remained outside of the real time of the human normality and what he would have

⁴ Konica, Faik, *Prose Doctor Needle...*, Tirana, 1983.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Konica, F. *Works*, Tirana, 1983.

⁷ Hamiti, Sabri, *Literary Works 8*, Faik Konica, Pristina, 2003.

wanted for them. Konica observed, identified and confirmed as no one before. For such impression, that gives its land and its people, he became the Needle. He pins without shrinkage to the bone, to give us the effect on the brain. Contemporarily he had its own novelty in concept, from zero to one and so on. So Konica also, requires, with the absurd in the brain and in the mentality, to be toppled; with the need to make the first step in the emancipation of society.

Sabri Hamiti makes a review of Konica saying: "*With Dr. Needle, Faik Konica introduces in the Albanian prose for the first time successfully the western Albanian man who, by learning knowledge is not bewildered nationally...*"⁸

Sharp social themes and issues, denying flows of some social phenomena and powerful satirical notes make "Doctor Needle" a work with outstanding realistic and modern features. Being aristocrat Konica didn't feel near the people, so he made its anatomy. Religion was ignored. "*This was the great Konica and his work: rarely the famous phrase: "Let c'est l'home style meme" finds such an embodiment more appropriate than in Konica; because he was all style. He recognized the secrets of style, with all the turns. His style was essentially satirical. The whole ranges of satire he proved, from the sweetest irony to sarcasm, from humor to lampoon. But he also was awake and sweet, when he wanted to ... Style in art is the main thing. There is no real literature without style*"⁹.

Konica had only one ethic ideal- the motherland. The feature of Konica that distinguishes him from others is the fact that he served the motherland by criticizing it, by pointing out the flaws and weaknesses. His work is so complex and with such high quality that if in other authors you have to depart from the text to reach the author, in Konica you should start from the poet himself to reach his text; text that represents the burden of a society's judgment process that was rotting from century-old oriental rule.

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⁸ Hamiti, Sabri, Literary Work 8, Faik Konica, Pristina, 2003.

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