

UDC: 811.111-26

**IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY:  
TRAUMA AND IRONY IN THE COGNITIVE LIGHT**

**Seda Gasparyan, Mariana Sargsyan  
(Yerevan State University, Armenia)**

**S. Gasparyan, M. Sargsyan. In search of identity: trauma and irony in the cognitive light.** For many decades Scottish Literature has produced characters that fitted well within the atmosphere of despair and inferiority undergone by the Scottish nation in the course of its history. The question of identity being at its heart, Scottish Literature has revealed a specific feature consisting in the frequent occurrence of traumatized, dual and split personalities. These are protagonists who in the force of Scotland's history are traumatized and symbolize Scotland's remarkable tradition of despair and the feeling of inferiority and powerlessness. However, a closer look at the contemporary Scottish female writing permits to take a new angle for exploring identity. Our approach accounts for the role of irony and humor that the characters provide. The fact of incongruity / trauma vs. irony/ creates a basis for insightful explorations of the dual essence of identity in A.L. Kennedy's and J. Galloway's writing in the light of such counter-concepts as emotional fulfillment vs. isolation, feminist vs. domestic expectations. Thus, our research within the frames of "Caledonian polysyzygy" aims at showcasing how and in what ways the cognitive study of the ironic component can contribute to the revelation of different aspects of identity crisis and survival. The features of the expression of irony are brought out with the help of cognitive metaphor, hyperbole, comparison, etc. It is argued that irony is based on the author's vision of the world and is characterized by the presence of explicit and hidden meanings which accounts for the clash between the vision and the reality. It is established that irony, a crucial aspect in the works of the mentioned authors, is a multi-layered cognitive and discursive phenomenon that aims to highlight the collision between thinking and reality.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistic approach, identity, irony, Janice Galloway, A. L. Kennedy, trauma.

**С. Гаспарян, М. Саргсян. У пошуках ідентичності: травма та іронія в когнітивному світлі.** Протягом багатьох десятиліть у шотландській літературі створювалися персонажі, які добре вписувалися в атмосферу відчаю і неповноцінності, якої протягом своєї історії зазнала шотландська нація. Шотландська література, орієнтуючись на проблему ідентичності, розкриває специфічну особливість, яка полягає в частій появі травмованих, двоїстих і роздвоєних особистостей. Це герої, які відповідно історії Шотландії є травмованими і символізують відчай, почуття неповноцінності і безсилля. Однак більш уважний погляд на сучасну шотландську жіночу прозу дозволяє по-новому поглянути на проблему ідентичності. Наш підхід пояснює роль іронії, яка забезпечується персонажами і ходом їх думок і дій. Несумісність травми і іронії створює основу для дослідження двоїстої сутності ідентичності в прозі А. Л. Кеннеді і Дж. Геллоуей з точки зору таких контр-концептів, як емоційне задоволення проти домашньої відособленості, фемінізм проти побутових обов'язків. Наше дослідження в рамках "каледонської полісізігії" направлено на те, щоб показати яким чином когнітивне вивчення іронії сприяє розумінню різних аспектів проблеми виживання і кризи ідентичності шотландської нації. Виявлення особливостей іронії за допомогою когнітивної метафори, гіперболи, порівняння тощо дозволяє стверджувати, що іронія заснована на авторському баченні світу, і наявність в ній явних і прихованих значень пояснює зіткнення ідеалізованого бачення і реальності. У статті встановлюється, що іронія, як найважливіший компонент творів згаданих авторів, є багатошаровим когнітивним і дискурсивним феноменом, через який підкреслюється протистояння мислення і реальності.

**Ключові слова:** ідентичність, іронія, Дженіс Галлоуей, А. Л. Кеннеді, лінгвокогнітивний підхід, травма.

**С. Гаспарян, М. Саргсян. В поисках идентичности: травма и ирония в когнитивном свете.** В течение многих десятилетий в шотландской литературе создавались персонажи, которые хорошо вписывались в атмосферу отчаяния и неполноценности, которой в течение своей истории подверглась шотландская нация. Шотландская литература, ориентируясь на проблему идентичности, раскрывает специфическую особенность, заключающуюся в частом появлении травмированных, двойственных и раздвоенных личностей. Это герои, которые в силу истории Шотландии, травмированы и символизируют отчаяние, чувства неполноценности и бессилия. Однако более внимательный взгляд на современную шотландскую женскую прозу позволяет по-новому взглянуть на проблему идентичности. Наш подход объясняет роль иронии, обеспечивающей персонажами и ходом их мыслей и действий. Несовместимость травмы и иронии создает основу для исследования двойственной сущности идентичности в прозе А. Л. Кеннеди и Дж. Гэллоуэй с точки зрения таких контр-концептов, как эмоциональное удовлетворение против домашней обособленности, феминизм против бытовых обязанностей. Наше исследование в рамках “Каледонской полисизигии” направлено на то, чтобы показать каким образом когнитивное изучение иронии способствует пониманию различных аспектов проблемы выживания и кризиса идентичности шотландской нации. Выявление особенностей иронии с помощью когнитивной метафоры, гиперболы, сравнения и т. п. позволяет утверждать, что ирония основана на авторском видении мира, и наличие в ней явных и скрытых значений объясняет столкновение идеализированного видения и реальности. В статье устанавливается, что ирония, как важнейший компонент произведений упомянутых авторов, является многослойным когнитивным и дискурсивным феноменом, через который подчеркивается противостояние мышления и реальности.

**Ключевые слова:** идентичность, ирония, Дженис Галлоуэй, А. Л. Кеннеди, лингвокогнитивный подход, травма.

### 1. Introduction

The paper *aims* at the study of the cognitive function of irony in fiction. The material is based on the contemporary Scottish female writing. The underlying argument is that the theme of identity in contemporary Scottish female writing can be interpreted with the help of counter-concepts of *emotional fulfillment vs. isolation* and *feminist vs. domestic expectations*. The clash between the counter-concepts brings forth the effect of irony. It is argued that irony is based on the author's vision of the world and is characterized by the presence of explicit and hidden meanings which accounts for the clash between the vision and the reality. On the large scale, the paper demonstrates that irony deeply lies within the idea of dualism that has traditionally been used to describe the deranged protagonists. The framework of “Caledonian antisyzygy” (Smith, 1919) and the recently introduced notion of “Caledonian polysyzygy” (Kelly, 2009) provide a new ground for taking a new look on the issue of identity from female perspective. The objectives of the research are: 1) to discuss the notions of identity and trauma in the frames of such concepts as emotional fulfillment vs. isolation and feminist vs. domestic expectations, 2) to highlight the role of irony in interpreting the mentioned concepts from the female perspective, 3) to discuss the cognitive features of irony in A.L. Kennedy's and J. Galloway's fiction.

The present research anchors on the previous research initiated by the authors (Gasparyan, Sargsyan, & Madoyan, 2017) and is aimed to further expand on the cognitive aspects of text creation and interpretation.

### 2. Research background

According to many critics, Scottish literary tradition holds a predilection for the desperate and the deranged protagonists who are “rarely, if ever, fully in control of their existences and morbidly aware of the fact” (Wallace, 1993, pp. 217-218). Also, G. Wallace argues that these protagonists fit well within the atmosphere of despair and inferiority that Scottish nation has undergone in the course of history. This definition seems a most appropriate one for describing Scottish Literature and most protagonists.

Unarguably, the question of identity having at its heart, Scottish Literature, has given rise to another peculiarity consisting in the frequent occurrence of traumatized, dual and split personalities. Gifford states about a trend in recent Scottish fiction that still uses the traditional dualism (Gifford, 1988). Smith's term "Caledonian antisyzygy" describes an essential psychological condition or worldview which is a quintessential aspect of the Scottish temperament. The term is fully applicable to all the spheres of the Scottish life (religion, politics and other realities), involving "the existence of contradictions and contrasts inherent to Scotland's political and ecclesiastical history which have been marked by upheavals and aptitude for adaptability which is also reflected in literature" (Smith, 1919, pp. 4-20). The contrast, the dualism and the trauma have resulted in a split of Scottish personality. This partly accounts for the loss of the vernacular language which in turn resulted in the division of thoughts and feelings.

The state of dualism would continue to be a dominant line if it were not for the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s, when a new surge of writing emerged. According to Kravitz, the protagonists moved beyond the sense of doubleness, and the predominant theme of fiction became the sense of *alienation* from social values and *alienation* from oneself (Kravitz, 1998; March, 2002, pp. 108-153). A closer look at the contemporary Scottish female writing particularly permits to take a new angle to explore the theme of alienation and consequently the issue of identity. In some writings we can easily observe the occurrence of new dualism or incongruity expressed in trauma vs. irony, which creates a new agenda for insightful explorations of the dual essence of identity, particularly in A. L. Kennedy's and J. Galloway's writings. This agenda incorporates a cognitive approach in the light of such counter-concepts as emotional fulfillment vs. isolation, feminist vs. domestic expectations, which make up a whole unity with two opposite poles pulling together. In this respect the notion of Caledonian antisyzygy loses its relevance, giving way to the notion of 'polysyzygy' to proliferate. Polysyzygy, according to Kelly's definition, supposes "multiple alignments, plural connections, a web of interlinked ideas and words" (Kelly, 2009), which practically provides a new ground for understanding the multilayered structure and the polyphonic nature of Scottish women writers, who raised and introduced into the text interesting issues about sexuality, gender and nation.

In the late 1970s and 80s Alasdair Gray and James Kelman through experimentation with alternative narrative and linguistic structures redirected the existing urban Glaswegian trend. Scottish novel became synonymous with working-class urban novel, strongly different from that of English middle-class. Working-class features are more important because they are more identifiably Scottish than their anglicized urban middle-class counterparts. The working-class is identified hugely with the Scottish identity (March, 2002, pp. 108-153). C. L. March concludes that the works created by Kelman "gave working-class Scots confidence in identity by championing the Scottish language and suggesting that the role of the language was long marginalized". The Scottish writing of that period did not only include innovations of style, syntax and narration, but was also a means of extracting underlying questions and concerns of urban and rural areas (March, 2002, pp. 108-153).

Building on the innovative approach as introduced by James Kelman and Alasdair Gray, Alison L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway investigate the lives of urban Scottish women opposing to the male vision of identity. Galloway's and Kennedy's novels and short stories center around women who desperately try to build their identity and find their signification. This trend makes it possible to consider these women as writers in the male-dominant social and literary Scottish tradition. The literary traditions of Kelman and Gray have been transformed to exposing the gender issue which is a powerful driving force for the characters. Both writers present women struggling hard to define their roles within the expectations of urban working-class life. Galloway's and Kennedy's works have gained acclaim for the 'reimagination' of Scotland, where the gender issue is the cornerstone for the contemporary Scottish experience to open from within and reveal what has long been disregarded during the previous decades of Scottish writing. For

Galloway the 'symbolic' presence of women in male-authored books is indicative of a notion that women were not interesting themselves and that art did not concern itself with "them", and she confesses that it took her long to identify 'them' with 'us/me' (March, 2002, p. 108).

Galloway and Kennedy have been hailed for creating 'an important' voice in Scottish fiction, a fearful and outraged woman's voice. Ali Smith comments that "this voice created a terrible dilemma of identity"<sup>1</sup> within Scottish culture and the imposition of a masculine literary tradition that has always excluded that voice. By writing, women writers, "through feminism, reveal the fictional women who know societal traps, see the potential lives they feel they ought to have, but are unable to escape from cultural confines" (March, 2002, p. 110).

The conflict between domestic and feminist expectations dwelt upon in many works presents women as confused and in constant search for harmony between self-respect and happiness in relations. It seems that balance between dominant masculine cultural expectations and feminist expectations is unattainable, hence women are alienated. Women struggle to fulfill the role expected of them by their families or partners, but they fail to do so. The paradox of the confrontation of the individual with the society has provided prolific ground for the development of irony or humor, which leading female writers often resort to. Both humor and irony involve cognitive and rational processes, which, as it were, help protagonists fight against the rooted social values.

### 3. The cognitive study of irony

According to Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms (RDLT), *irony* is a "mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from, and usually opposite to, the professed or ostensible ones". Several kinds of irony can be distinguished, though they fall into two main categories: situational and verbal. All irony, however, "depends for its effectiveness on the belief in and exploitation of the difference and distance between words or events and their contexts."<sup>2</sup> (RDLT, 2006, p. 123).

Irony has long attracted the attention of researchers, thanks to which various approaches to the study of this phenomenon have been put forward. In the XX century irony became an object of close attention of not only literary scholars, philosophers, psychologists, but also linguists. At the beginning of the XXI century researchers were attracted by the intellectual side of irony – the cognitive aspects of its production and sense perception by the recipient (Kotjurova, 2007). The cognitive potential of irony in fiction is realized in the vertical context – a system of norms and rules for the reflection and reception of facts of the surrounding reality on the mental level; irony is explicated on the structural-semantic and pragmatic levels, while the phenomenon itself is realized in various cognitive models, primarily in logical contradictions.

The cognitive potential of irony is determined by the worldview of the discourse participants reflected mentally in the form of cultural and historical information, socio-cultural norms, individual characteristics of the communicants themselves. Successful discursive situation, in particular, the specificity of ironic communication, depends in many respects on the conventional nature of the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, their shared background knowledge.

From a linguistic point, the cognitive potential of irony in literary speech is based on the ability of words to actualize their polyphonic nature (the ability of simultaneous realization of the semantic, stylistic and associative capacities of the word in one and the same context) (Gasparyan, 2008) and expressiveness (the ability of a linguistic unit to express the variety of emotional and evaluative relations of the subject of speech), which adds to the semantic globality of the literary text. Indeed, the realization of irony would be impossible if words in a piece of literature were devoid of the aptitude of expanding their semantics.

The main mechanism for the existence of irony in an artistic discourse is the play of meanings. In this play, truth is expressed not by the direct meaning of the utterance, but the opposite, implied by the author indirectly and expressed in various linguistic forms. Thus, literary

discourse is a kind of communication between the author, the reader and the text. This communication is extremely rich in meanings and shades of meanings, revealing the interaction of the author's intentions, the complex of possible reader reactions and the text structure.

Irony is not contained in the statement itself or in a separate word, but becomes understandable to the reader from the context or the situation constructed by the author. The prosody plays a crucial role in the emergence of the ironic meaning. Other markers of irony in the text of a work of verbal art can be violations of style, repetitions, direct instructions in the text ("he smiled ironically"), facial expressions or rhetoric (raised eyebrows, smirk). Irony is a complex phenomenon relying on the cognitive perception of the author, who has a certain linguistic picture of the world. The effect of the ironic context in a piece of literature largely depends on the cultural and historical conditions and individual psychological characteristics of the reader's personality, as well as the structural and communicative features of a particular utterance (Potyomina, 2010).

At the present stage, most researchers propose to distinguish two concepts: irony as a stylistic device and irony as a result – an ironic meaning created by a number of different language means whose interaction ensures the unity of the text. It is this latter type that contributes to the development of the polyphonic nature of postmodernist texts and thus merits our special attention.

#### **4. Cognitive modeling of irony in J. Galloway's narrative technique**

Irony is well established in the history of Scottish fiction, as Gifford explains. He suggests that the ironic modes of expression in the XIX century were due to the failure to sustain convincing serious projections of the Scottish heroic identity and the very nature of the Scottish society. He lists two basic ways in which ambiguity and irony functioned in the "fiction of Scottish social degeneration" of the period: firstly as a parody of the insipid hero and secondly as "the contrast of two sets of cultural values, embodied in the confrontations of the traditional and the modern alienated protagonist, the two entangled in positions of mutual moral and social destruction." (Gifford, 1988). The latter of these is in some ways applicable to *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* by J. Galloway, where there is an ongoing clash between the protagonist's and the social values. Unarguably the narrative technique of the debut novel violates all the norms of traditional literature. The broken syntax and fractured narrative hinder a fluid reading of the text creating the impression of several texts merged into one. Every clash between the protagonist's expectation and the imposed values can be regarded as a separate story or fragment of life, story in a story, linked with each other through the thread of irony that turns the text into an organic unity.

*Joy Stone* is struggling desperately against herself and the society. The young woman is almost at the brink of destroying herself because of the burden of numerous traumas she has experienced throughout her life, the last blow being the unexpected death of Michael, with whom she was having an illicit relation.

"Joy", the name of the protagonist itself, is indicative of the incongruity. The feelings of exultation and extreme happiness the word 'joy' is associated with at the semantic level are incompatible with the feelings of grief and melancholia that the traumatized protagonist feels. While "Stone", her surname, metaphorically hints at the state of misery and malaise she is experiencing as a result of numerous traumas.

Because of the permanent expanding of inferiority complex, Joy begins to perceive the surrounding world through the prism of irony. Her thoughts and her judgments acquire ironic interpretation throughout the text. In force of Joy's ambivalent attitude, life manifests itself in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS MOTION where the sub-schemas *Movement is Up and Stasis is Down* are realized (Lakoff, & Johnson, 1980). Joy is afraid of stasis, and we witness this on different pages throughout the *Trick* (*Stasis scares me; I go stiff when I stop, I have to get a lot of*

moving around out of my system now), while “stillness keeps me contained, I prefer it busy, so I do not get bored”.

However, at some point Joy confesses: “I am *too tired to force myself to stay in one place*” (Galloway, 2015, p. 39), which indicates her inability to take control of her thoughts and actions. Thus, the image schema *Life is Motion* involving sub-schemas MOVEMENT IS UP and STASIS IS DOWN is in constant conflict, because of the discrepancy between the protagonist’s thoughts and the reality. The cognitive model of irony<sup>3</sup> can thus be presented as follows:

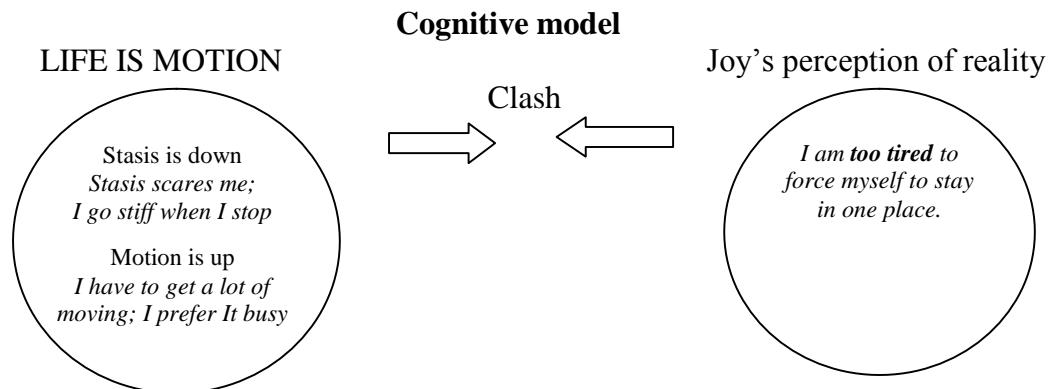


Figure 1. Cognitive modelling of the ironic use of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS MOTION

In this model we can observe the clash between Joy’s thoughts and the reality, which hints about her fragility and the lack of determination to orient herself in the reality and take full control of her actions.

The concepts of TIME and LIFE and their conceptualization in TIME/LIFE IS MOTION schema can be interpreted from two different perspectives. From one perspective, the passing of the time is considered as a change-bringing, healing and consoling phenomenon, but from the other, it takes too long and wastes too much time to get your pain soothed, and waiting does not always result in healing. To approach this dilemma from both perspectives, let us firstly mention that the universal concept of *time as being a healer* can be found in almost every culture, which uses personification to imply that *Time* as an event can cause changes, heal the wounds and relieve the pain, or, in particular, take up the role of the agent and perform an action.<sup>4</sup> The reflections of the metaphor TIME IS A CHANGER/HEALER can be noticed throughout the narration. Joy, is one among the others, who subconsciously admits the truth of the concept. Random questionings of the relevance of time scattered across the pages of the novel demonstrate that Joy believes in her final recovery (*I have to put up with this. Time passes in little ways, things alter for no reason* (p. 96); *Sometimes all that happens is passing time* (p. 196); *I used to spent a lot of time waiting. Women do. Women have this tendency to think things will be better if they wait longer* (Galloway, 2015, p. 193).

Joy is surrounded by people who are holders of the same idea of TIME IS A CHANGER / HEALER (Lakoff, & Turner, 1989, pp. 40-41). The society that gives such a central role to TIME as *solver of all the problems*, evaluates TIME as a limited and very valuable commodity which should not be wasted<sup>4</sup>. Thus Joy is in dilemma as she finds herself entrapped in the numerous discourses that control her: she wants to rely on the common assumption that time heals, on the other hand, she hates wasting time in idleness and wants to take actions to improve her situation (*It's always OK, just a matter of waiting. I get nervous waiting; Time is not a healer*). The existence of too many discourses realized through the conceptual metaphors TIME IS A HEALER / CHANGER vs. TIME IS A THIEF results in the clash between Joy’s life and the reality.

Irony in postmodernism is radical, skeptical, it undermines stereotypes, banalities and habits of people. *The Trick*, a vivid example of postmodern text, exploits various techniques to provoke criticism to the established mode of life and the way people think, and this criticism is voiced not straightforwardly, but rather through covert irony. Irony for Joy can be regarded as a means of self-assertion. It helps the protagonist get rid of the overwhelming feeling of discontentment and failure:

*I like routines. You can get **cosy** in a **rut**. You can pretend things are the same when they are not. Knowing I need to live with lies makes me more anxious, depressed and guilty. This way I need the routines more.* (Galloway, 2015, p. 156)

This passage reveals Joy's conformist character, but at the same time it covertly expresses the ironic message containing the clash between what is 'to feel cosy' in reality and what it is like to feel 'cosy' in a rut. The cognitive model of '*cosy in a rut*' looks as follows:

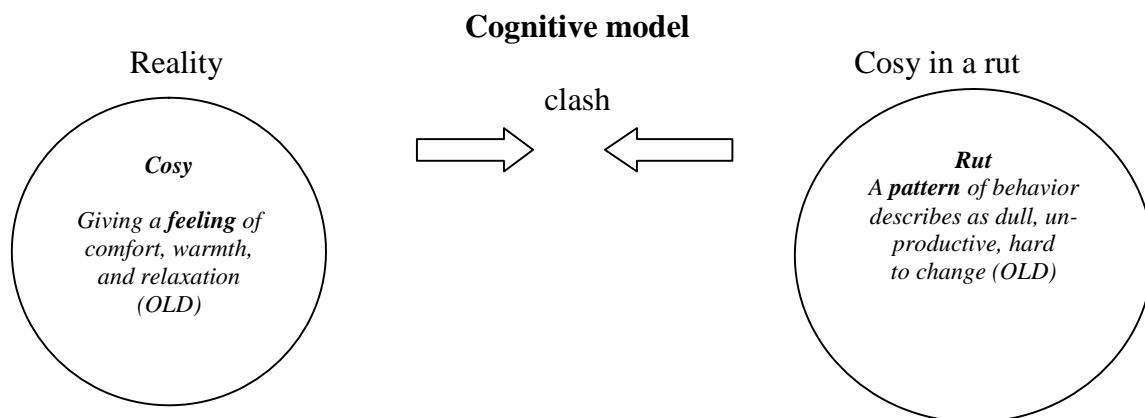


Figure 2. Cognitive modeling of the ironic use of "Cosy in a rut"

'*Cosy in a rut*' reveals Joy's conformist, timid and non-rebellious type of personality with no definite aims in life. The irony of this utterance lies in the binary opposition of the semantics of the two words – '*cosy*' (*giving a feeling of comfort, warmth, and relaxation*) and '*rut*' (*a habit or pattern of behaviour that has become dull and unproductive but is hard to change*) which hardly fits within the boundaries of common sense and thus questions Joy's sanity. The discussed case of irony identifies the relation between the thinking and the reality.

As mentioned above, irony in postmodernist works is one of the means employed for self-assertion. The ironic disposition helps the characters get rid of discontentment and failure often by voicing criticism and questioning the existing values. Irony is a tool to lift the dialectic controversies that exist between the reality, the desired and the possible. In *The Trick*, for instance, the critical disposition towards authorities of social or religious institutions is palpable through the deviation of the norms of narration and fragmentation which by and large are aimed at enhancing the ironic effect. This is clearly seen in the text, when Joy attends the service at church rendered to support Michael's bereaved family. The fragmented representation of the church minister's speech and Joy's interpretation of the whole process bring the confrontation between Joy and the society to the fore and indicate the day by day deepening of the abyss between her feminist and social expectations:

THE SERVICE HAS BEEN ONE OF  
JOY AND CELEBRATION AS  
WELL AS SORROW

*I noticed he rolled his eyes  
unpleasantly*

THROUGH THE SORROW IS  
UPPERMOST IN OUR HEARTS, AS  
WE CLOSE, LET US THINK OF  
WHAT MICHAEL FISHER  
BROUGHT TO OUR LIVES. BUT  
MORE ESPECIALLY IN THESE  
MOMENTS OF SILENCE

*and his arms began to  
stretch out toward the front  
rows*

EXTEND OUR SYMPATHIES, OUR  
HEARTS AND OUR LOVE

*the arms stretching further  
like Jesus commanding  
Lazarus*

ESPECIALLY OUR LOVE

*a split-second awareness that  
something terrible was about  
to about to  
happen*

TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY

*Half way into the silence for Norma Fisher, my arms were weightless. The rest came piecemeal as the moral started to compute (Galloway, 2015, pp. 78-79).*

In this case, the deviation is an interesting pairing of discourses presented in the form of columns. It helps the reader get a visual image of the confrontation: the left column demonstrates the authoritative discourse of the Church delivered by Rev Dogsbody (*church minister's name is evidently an imagined one, coloured with ironic overtones too*) and presented in the narration in capital letters stressing the authoritative voice of the church; on the right are Joy's disjointed and unfinished comments that predict the worst to come (*something terrible was about to about to happen*): Joy acknowledges her illicit status as mistress, for the minister has a word for the widow and Michael's family only (TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY). Reflecting upon the aftermath of that ceremony,

1. *The Rev Dogsbody had chosen this service to perform a miracle.*
2. *He'd run time backwards, cleansed, absolved and got rid of the ground-in stain.*
3. *And the stain was me. I didn't exist. The miracle had wiped me out (Galloway, 2015, p. 79).*

Joy is questioning the doctrines of an institution that preaches love and defense for the miserable and the rejected ones. There is an aggressive and self-destructive bitterness within the confines of her thinking. She compares her signification with that of a *stain* (irony realized through deliberate understatement by comparing objects of different classes), which was wiped out as something temporary and unnecessary. The service in the church "hails" the moment of her extreme alienation not only from the community, but from her own self. This is the moment the young woman realizes



she has no social position – no parents, no boyfriend or husband, no children, no particular vocation or fulfilling career.

The irony in respect to social expectations is largely based on hyperbole, i. e. the deliberate exaggeration of quality, quantity, size or dimension. Joy exaggerates the societal expectations which transformed her into an unProtestant:

*I can't think how I fell into this unProtestant behaviour. I used to be so good all the time.*

*where good= productive/ hardworking/wouldn't say boo*

*where good= value for money*

*where good= not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank, unobtrusive*

*where good= neat, acting in a credit-worthy manner*

*where good= patient, thoughtful, uncomplaining*

*I wanted people's approval. Good girls reap rewards.*

*All I wanted to be civilized and polite. I wanted to be no trouble. I wanted to be brave and discreet" (Galloway, 2015. pp.81-82).*

At the beginning of the story she is depicted as a conformist type of personality and she teaches her students the same way. However the burden of the societal expectations and her failure to meet them have left her with broken will and no power to resist. The explicit exaggeration of the quality of "being good" and her failed desire to comply the accepted norms of behavior hints at the emotional and evaluative overtone of the utterance which gives birth to the ironic meaning.

Her thunder against social institutions is voiced in her conversations with the health authorities, whom she ironically refers to as Dr One, Two, Three, etc. In her letter to Marianne, Joy writes:

*I'm not feeling too good right now... I've seen three different doctors in the past fortnight, none twice. Dr Four says I need ECT, Dr Two thinks I need a good holiday and a career move, Dr Three thinks I take too much caffeine – a bit less and I'd be fine. Also a Dr Five turned up and suggested maybe we could have a chat. A CHAT. They increased everything sedative. This means my hands and legs take me by surprise occasionally: I have to remind myself they are attached. Yesterday Dr Four bumped into me in the corridor and didn't know who I was. It struck me after as pretty profound. Anyway, they think maybe I should stay a while longer. This is probably what the anti-depressants are for. (Galloway, 2015, p. 179)*

Joy understands that doctors are unhelpful and indifferent to her and not able to offer any long-term solution to her problem. The irony is aimed to reveal the poor quality of mental health services and is suggestive of the incapability of psychoanalytical theories and pills to relieve human sufferings. The apparent demonstration of this incapability and Joy's failure to meet the social expectations is seen in Tony's joke:

*Q. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?*

*A. One. But the light bulb must really want to change. (Galloway, 2015, p. 173).*

In some way or other no matter how fragile the protagonist is, by challenging the institutional and social values she also tries to change the society that seems so callous to her, and this is perceivable for the reader through irony which in the novel is largely dependent on the clash between Joy and society around their incompatible values.

Joy considers drugs useless and ironically refers to the pills she takes as "*Red and yellow pills: two thirds of a traffic light*" (Galloway, 2015, p. 87). First of all, irony here is visualized by the graphical means, by the insertion of a colon (:) between the two parts of the utterance, which points out the metaphor underlying it: the comparison of the pills to the traffic lights is much

indicative of the aimlessness of Joy's life, where *green*, not surprisingly, is missing. She is always stuck in between and is withheld by either the yellow or red light. Ironic disposition towards maleruled institutions (church, hospital, school) is a means to survive and remain true to herself. Irony for Joy is a shield protecting her from extreme alienation and snowballing depression. Humor and irony are those features of the text that provide the space, the life buoy between the character and the society giving the chance to overcome the crisis.

### 5. Trauma and alienation through irony in A. L. Kennedy's *What Becomes*

A. L. Kennedy is another prolific master of short fiction, whose writing, according to critics, has a "measure of intellectual skepticism, where intelligence, political and moral, are combined with each other with an exquisite emotional sensitivity" (Dunnigan, 2000, p. 145). Her stories in *What Becomes* concentrate on the issues engaged with introspection, fear, domestic violence, guilt, obsession, with traumatic memories of the past, claustrophobia and alienation caused by the lack of communication. Her characters speak rarely which accounts for the excessive presence of free indirect narration and allows the narrator to manipulate with irony to reveal the traps in which the characters find themselves.

Engaging cases of irony can be discerned in A. L. Kennedy's *Saturday Teatime*, where the story dwells upon the hopelessness and despair of human existence, which are often intermingled with the constant striving for happiness. The protagonist questions the reason of her existence and draws pessimistic conclusions about the inevitability of death. In the meanwhile, she recalls her childhood traumas, hard relationship between her mother and father who used to be quite aggressive. The story stands out for the fragmentary writing, lacking a single storyline. It is built on the free indirect narration, and through those abrupt, unrelated and emotionally tinged break-ins a woman slowly opens before us: "*the solitary solitary, there on the lookout for fun*", as she would refer to her own self. Irony, at times cynical, at times gloomy, is most obviously discernable in the *Container* metaphor (Lakoff, & Johnson, 1980)<sup>6</sup>.

The burden of the past failures and numerous traumas makes the protagonist shift her own values and consider happiness as something material which can be bought and even increased through "floatation and relaxation". In pursuit of her happiness the protagonist buys an hour of relaxation in the floatation tank (a typical attribute of modern consumeristic culture), a container that promised to ensue an amount of happiness.

*And who doesn't like being happy? Happy's why I am here. I am trying something new that should increase my happiness. This time it's floatation and relaxation. I've walked in and bought an hour of both* (p. 57). Happy is something that she has "*walked in and bought an hour of*". "... (t)his is something I'll enjoy: floating, relaxing, unwinding, enjoying the benefits of salted water" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 57).

The irony is compounded by the naturalistic description of the pleasure and Kennedy's concentration on this episode: *There's only myself in a peaceful setting, peaceful cupboard, with an hour to reflect on the knowledge that I must have more money than sense* (Kennedy, 2010, p. 59). The protagonist sharing the values of the consumerist culture is inclined to think that everything can be bought and sold, even happiness. She is ready to exchange money for happiness. This excessive concern with material possessions and pleasures makes people spend lesser and lesser time on introspection and assessing their real needs.

The association of the container – the floatation tank ("*a warm, wet, safe cupboard*") which was expected to effuse "*an amount of happiness*") – with happiness ends the moment when the door shuts leaving the tank in darkness (*as dark as nasty thinking* (Kennedy, 2010, p. 59). The uncontrolled flow of past memories violently crashes upon her mind and the tank turns into a dark horrifying container of her past traumas and memories. Sinister thoughts start creeping into her

head; she wonders how “*this must seem only snug and homely, buoyant*”. The container, which promised snug and homely feelings, suddenly engenders “*overtones of drowning, suggestion of creatures that rise from unlikely depths, hints of noise underneath the silence, eager*”. The feeling of solitude and the fact of being trapped in a container overwhelms her with thoughts. In silence she has to face the monster awakening inside her and making her completely powerless.

Lack of communication and alienation are the central themes of *What Becomes*. The state is typical of both male and female characters. In *Edinburgh*, Kennedy’s play with language again results in irony and parody of modern trends embracing pseudo-psychological ‘supportive workshops’ which promise everything, from healing all sorts of disease to solving all problems and artificial food flavors and food substitutes containing numerous arcane materials that promise complete thriving.

The story written in the third person gets sometimes disrupted by the indirect narrative of the main character. Seeing the cork board at the back of the shop shaggy with leaflets that advertised books about Spirit Guides, organic food and imitation bacon Peter thinks to himself:

*I haven’t got an Inner Child, I’d have known it by now if I did. Likewise with the Spirit Animals – I am not playing host to some interior bloody zoo. And a Spinning Trance would not bring me insight and Reiki would not make me glad. Reiki – that’s the one where someone thinks about touching you and you think about it too and then you presumably both have to keep thinking that all your thinking isn’t an utter waste of time. It’s like paying an electrician for thinking he might fix your lights.* (Kennedy, 2010, p. 38).

For Peter, as is the case for most of characters in *What Becomes*, communication is full of dangers, speaking makes people more vulnerable, and misunderstandings augment traumas and make the gap grow still further. It is in Kennedy’s style to “deliberately focus on mundane things transfiguring the ordinary until it becomes symbolic of something universal.”<sup>7</sup> Peter’s trivial intervention into the third person narrative performs this symbolization. It ironizes people’s inclinations for finding fast solutions involving substitution of real communication and affection with pseudo, artificial interventions. People’s lives are devoid of most ordinary communication, and they even try to reach out to their surroundings, they might be regarded as annoying, strange or even “*senile*” (Kennedy, p. 41). Isolation, that has become a social norm, is typically demonstrated in the conversation between Peter and the shop assistant about an elderly woman (hyperbolically referred to as “*four-hundred-year-old*” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 40)) who inquired what she should do with strawberries: “*It occurred to him that the woman might simply have wanted a company, a chat. If you were lonely enough, you might do that*” (p. 41).

Another wrinkled issue that is highlighted by A. L. Kennedy is the alienation not only from the society, but from one’s biological type. The narrator with a subtle sense of irony justifies the character, saying that from a small shopkeeper like Peter, *trapped with fruit and vegetables for hours every working day it would not be fair to expect he should then go home and cook them, force them down. All of the peeling and cutting and fussing and boiling and chewing and swallowing, it was too much* (Kennedy, 2010, p. 39). So the powdered staff with an impressive range of flavors has come to substitute the real organic food. Peter says: “*but normal human beings could only be expected to tolerate three flavors: Strawberry, Nothing and Chicken. I think Nothing’s my favorite*”. The narrator spares no space to enumerate all the chemical elements contained in the stuff: *numerous arcane materials upon which he was apparently meant to thrive*, for Peter believed that he might have been undernourished previously.

Kennedy’s concentration on the minute details of her characters’ lives draws our attention to the problem of filling the space produced by the lack of communication. And here again cases of irony abound, like the choice of spending spare time on television programs “*about Hitler and sharks*” and going to bed at “*nine o’clock*” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 43).

## 6. Concluding remarks: Polysyzygy at work in Scottish female fiction

The discussed works by Galloway and Kennedy demonstrate fragmentary writing which is evoked by the multiplication of narrative voices in the text and the overlapping of several layers of utterances. Fragmentary writing is displayed as plural, complex, polyphonic, composed of multiple interconnected voices, identities, flashbacks. The polyphonic nature of the works is enhanced by an array of typographical techniques which reshape the page: scribbles in the margins, side-by-side columns of text, different typefaces, text modifications and so on. The plurality of voices seems to be closely tied to fragmentation and non-linearity, typographical experimentation, also explicitly conveyed by the insistence on architectonic figures and metaphor. The whole arsenal of innovative techniques are put to work to enhance the clash between female and societal expectations, fulfillment and disappointment, which uncovers how women are isolated, alienated, and confined to inferior roles because of the failure to meet those imposed expectations.

Another important feature of the discussed works is the play: play with values, words, signs, quotations, involving the reader into that play. The text is born spontaneously and unconsciously through the play. Putting in Bakhtinian terms, there is a constant exchange of text with life, text with text. In postmodernism, the boundary between literature and life is blurred, and this gives the impression of “incompleteness and incompleteness of the creative process” (Bakhtin, 1984).

Irony, the crucial element of postmodernism, relies on the cognitive perception borne out by a certain language picture of the world. The effect of irony in fiction in many ways depends on cultural and historical conditions. Irony is a multilayered cognitive and discursive phenomenon which in the works of the discussed authors aims to intensify the clash between thinking and reality. It demonstrates that women, despite fragility and the inferior role, are able to think, analyze and criticize. Scottish female writing also demonstrates the harsh confrontation between female expectations and the immutable patriarchal order. Moreover, irony in the works of the mentioned female authors is indicative of the constant confrontation of values which results in alienation and isolation though not confined to its depiction only. It is through irony that a web of interrelated issues, such as self-assertion, introspection, dignity, criticism, adaptation to reality, shift of value systems, interpersonal connections, etc. are brought to the surface. This speaks of the multilayered and multifunctional aspect of the contemporary Scottish female writing aimed at discussing the possibilities of transformation and adaptation in the rapidly changing world. In the light of the mentioned, the notion of “Caledonian polysyzygy” proves its relevance to discussing a wider scope of issues underlying Scottish fiction.

### Notes

1. Smith, Ali. “*Four Success Stories*”, Chapman 74-5 (Autumn / Winter 1992).
2. The word *irony* originates from the Greek comedy character called the *eiron*, who was a dissembler, who spoke in understatements and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the *alazon*—the self-deceiving and stupid braggart (see in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957). In most of the modern critical uses of the term “irony” there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects (Abrams M. H. *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Seventh Edition, Thomson Learning 1999 (134:135) ).
3. The cognitive models of irony follow the analysis by R. de Mendoza in *Metonymy and cognitive operations. Defining Metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics*. Ed. R. Benczes, A. Barcelona and F. J. Ruiz de Mendoza. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins 2011 (104-123) and Mapping concepts: Understanding figurative thought from a cognitive-linguistic perspective. *Spanish Journal of Applied Linguistics* 27, (1), 2014 (187:207) cited in Matute L. B. (Universidad de La Rioja, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2014)
4. “EVENTS ARE ACTIONS” conceptual metaphor, in *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Lakoff and Turner, 1989, p 40.
5. This is manifested in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A THIEF, *ibid*: pp. 35-42.

6. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 29-30), people, as physical beings, are bounded and set apart from the rest of the world by the surface of their skins, and they experience the rest of the world as outside them. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and outside. Rooms and houses are obvious containers. Moving from room to room is moving from one container to another, that is, moving *out of one room* and *into* another. But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries – marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface – whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane.
7. Kennedy A. L. in *Encyclopaedia of the British Short Story*, by Andrew Maunder, Second Edition, NY, 2013.

## REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. In C. Emerson (Transl., Ed.). *Theory and History of Literature*. (Vol. 8). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dunningan, M. S. (2000). A.L. Kennedy's Longer Fiction: Articulate Grace. In A. Christianson, & A. Lumsden (Eds.). *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (pp. 144-156). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,
- Gasparian, S. K. (2008). *Lingvopoetika obraznogo sravnenija*. [The Linguopoetics of Figurative Simile]. Yerevan: Lusakn Publishing House (in Russian).
- Gasparian, S. K., Sargsyan, M. S., & Madoyan G. G. (2017). Syntactic and Rhythmic Properties of Representing the Concept of "Loneliness" in K. Mansfield's Short Stories. *Cognition, Communication, Discourse*. 14. 45-53. doi: 10.26565/2218-2926-2017-14-04
- Gifford, D. (1988). Myth, parody and dissociation: Scottish Fiction 1814–1914. In D. Gifford (Ed.) *The History of Scottish Literature* (Vol. 3). Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.
- Kravitz, P. (1998). As It Never Was. Introduction. In P. Kravitz (Ed.). *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction*. London: Picador.
- Kelly, S. (2009). Introduction. In Kelly Stuart (Ed.). *Headshook: Contemporary Novelists and Poets Writing on Scotland's Future*. London: Hachette Scotland.
- Kotjurova, I. A. (2007). Kognitivnyj analiz realizacii ironii v publicistike (na materiale nemeckih statej politicheskoj tematiki) [Cognitive aspect of irony's realization in journalism (on the material of German press article on politics)]. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta*. 9(2). 170-175 (In Russian)
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., Turner, M. (1989) *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press.
- March, L. C. (2002). *Rewriting Scotland. Welsh, McLean, Warner, Banks, Galloway, and Kennedy*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Smith, G. G. (1919). *Scottish Literature, Character and Influence*. London: Macmillan Publishing.
- Oxford Living Dictionaries (OLD). English. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/> (Accessed 29 October 2018 )
- Potyomina, S. M. (2010). Polifunkcional'nost' ironii. [Polyfunctionality of Irony]. *Bulletin of I. Kant Russian State University. Philological Sciences*, 8. 134-137 (in Russian)
- Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms (RDLT). [https://www.uv.es/fores/The\\_Routledge\\_Dictionary\\_of\\_Literary\\_Terms.pdf](https://www.uv.es/fores/The_Routledge_Dictionary_of_Literary_Terms.pdf) (Accessed 10 October 2018)
- Wallace, G. (1993). Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity. In G. Wallace, & R. Stevenson (Eds.). *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies* (pp. 217-218). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## SOURCES FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

Galloway, J. (2015). *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. London: Vintage.

Kennedy, A.L. (2010). *What Becomes*. London: Vintage.

**Seda K. Gasparyan** – Doctor of Sciences (Philology), Professor, Corresponding Member of The National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Honoured Researcher of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan State University (1, Alex Manoogian st., Yerevan, 0025, Armenia, RA); e-mail: [sedagasparyan@ysu.am](mailto:sedagasparyan@ysu.am); ORCID ID 0000-0003-1170-4989.

**Сєда Керобівна Гаспарян** – доктор філологічних наук, професор, член-корр. Національної академії наук Рєспубліки Вірменія, Заслужений діяч науки Рєспубліки Вірменія, Єрєванський державний університет (1, вул. Алека Манукяна, Єрєван, 0025, Вірменія); e-mail: [sedagasparyan@ysu.am](mailto:sedagasparyan@ysu.am); ORCID ID 0000-0003-1170-4989.

**Сєда Керобовна Гаспарян** – доктор филологических наук, профессор, член-корр. Национальной академии наук Республики Армения, Заслуженный деятель науки Республики Армения, Ереванский государственный университет (1, ул. Алека Манукяна, Ереван, 0025, Армения); e-mail: [sedagasparyan@ysu.am](mailto:sedagasparyan@ysu.am); ORCID ID 0000-0003-1170-4989.

**Sargsyan Mariana S.** – PhD (Philology), Associate Professor, Yerevan State University and Head of Laboratory for British Literature and Linguocultures (1, Alex Manoogian st., Yerevan, 0025, Armenia, RA); e-mail: [marianasargsyan@ysu.am](mailto:marianasargsyan@ysu.am); ORCID 0000-0003-3054-1871.

**Саргсян Маріана С.** – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент, Єрєванський державний університет, керівник лабораторії Британської літератури і лінгвокультури (1, вул. Алека Манукяна, Єрєван, 0025, Вірменія); e-mail: [marianasargsyan@ysu.am](mailto:marianasargsyan@ysu.am); ORCID 0000-0003-3054-1871.

**Саргсян Мариана С.** – кандидат филологических наук, доцент, руководитель лаборатории Британской литературы и лингвокультуры, Ереванский государственный университет (1, ул. Алека Манукяна, Ереван, 0025, Армения); e-mail: [marianasargsyan@ysu.am](mailto:marianasargsyan@ysu.am); ORCID 0000-0003-3054-1871