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Social Satire and Identity: An Analysis of Irony in Dritëro Agolli's Poetry

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Abstract

Irony plays an important role in the poetry of Dritëro Agolli and represents one of the most consistent ways through which his poetic voice engages with social reality, moral concerns, and questions of identity. This article examines the use of irony in a selection of Agolli's poems written in different periods of his literary activity, with particular attention to verbal, situational, and Socratic irony. Using qualitative textual analysis and close reading, the study explores how irony creates distance between what is stated and what is implied, allowing the poet to reveal contradictions within political discourse, social behaviour, and individual self-perception. The analysis shows that irony in Agolli's poetry does not function merely as a stylistic ornament, but as a reflective and critical tool that challenges false seriousness, exposes hypocrisy, and gives meaning to seemingly simple situations. Through irony, Agolli's poetry invites the reader to question appearances and engage with values.

Keywords: Irony, Dritëro Agolli, Albanian poetry, social satire, identity

Introduction

The analysis of irony within literary works takes on different forms across literary periods, as each era and each author employs irony for distinct purposes. Irony itself, as a logical and rhetorical figure, is not a homogeneous or uniform element within literature; rather, it assumes various forms in poetic and narrative texts, as well as within the literary epoch in which it is shaped. Beyond literature, irony has been used as a means of interpreting and questioning reality in a wide range of fields, including philosophy, social thought, psychology, politics, and theology.

In antiquity, irony was initially conceived as a rhetorical trope based on antiphrasis and later developed into an attitude or mode of behaviour.

One prominent example is Socratic irony, in which Socrates employed a dialectical discourse (as seen in Plato's dialogues) to convey meanings different from those expressed literally. During this period, irony held an ambiguous status, reflected in the uncertainty with which Socrates' interlocutors perceived him (Schoentjes, 2001, p. 23), as he adopted a stance of feigned ignorance or naïveté to expose the inconsistencies in others' arguments or to reveal truths that they themselves did not know.

During the European Renaissance, irony served not only to ridicule social customs, religious morality, authority, and ignorance, but, above all, to enlighten the mind and stimulate critical thought. In Shakespeare's works, one encounters dramatic irony, where the audience or reader possesses knowledge unknown to the character, thus creating tension and deepening reflection on fate and social values. Irony became a vehicle for articulating refined, freethinking critiques of dogma, religious fanaticism, and royal servility.

In the nineteenth century, the aesthetic discourse of the era gave rise to romantic irony, shaped by the paradox between reality and imagination.

Throughout modernism and postmodernism, irony has resisted a definitive theoretical categorisation, partly because of the radical shift introduced by Friedrich Schlegel during the Romantic period. Schlegel tied everyday irony to a variety of epistemic forms, such as liberal irony, romantic irony, absolute irony, postmodern irony, judicial irony, irony of New Criticism, rhetorical irony, dramatic irony, poetic irony, classical irony, and tragic irony (Dane, 1997).

Modern irony is no longer understood merely as antiphrasis but rather as its antipode, sometimes to the extent that irony cannot be localised in a single phrase or fragment but permeates the entire structure of the work. This implies that both modern and postmodern irony transcend the limits of a simple trope, becoming a structural principle. In modernist works, irony reveals the incoherence of the text and reality, whereas in postmodernist texts it becomes irregular, heterogeneous, and structurally embedded in the very fabric of the literary piece.

Within Albanian literature, irony has generally been examined in relation to broader literary traditions and the historical circumstances in which texts are produced. In the writings of Dritëro Agolli, irony holds a strong presence, not only in the short prose (stories) and in the satirical novel *The Rise and Fall of Comrade Zylo*, but also in his poetry, where irony serves multiple functions and enables the exploration of diverse ideas. It appears as linguistic irony, situational irony (contextual), Socratic irony, and others, each with distinct functions.

The aim of this paper is to:

- Identify the different types of irony present in the poetry of Dritëro Agolli;
- Explain the reasons for its use and its function within poetry marked by both realist and modernist features.

Although irony in Agolli's poetry intersects with psychological, sociological, philosophical, and political dimensions, it remains fundamentally a poetic strategy that shapes meaning and tone.

2. Literature Review

Dritëro Agolli was born in 1931 in Menkulas, Devoll, near Korça. For many years, Agolli worked as a journalist for the daily newspaper *Zëri i Popullit*, while simultaneously serving as Chairman of the League of Writers and Artists of Albania (1974–1992). He was also a member of the Albanian Parliament for thirty years, until his voluntary withdrawal from political life. Dritëro Agolli is a key figure of the second half of the twentieth century. He wrote mainly during the communist regime, and his work could not often escape the methods of socialist realism, but in some poetry, he brought radical changes. This is also confirmed by the scholar Marisa Kërbizi, who distinguishes three poets: F. Arapi, I. Kadare, and D. Agolli. The peak of lyric poetry was achieved by Fatos Arapi, Ismail Kadare, and Dritero Agolli, followed by a new generation of talented poets. Notwithstanding the strict ideological circumstances, quite a number of outstanding books were published. (Kërbizi, 2010, p. 246)

Together with Fatos Arapi and Ismail Kadare, Dritëro Agolli helped create the so-called Generation of the 1960s—poets who distinguished themselves through innovations in versification, powerful metaphors, and a newly formed poetic lexicon that had not been previously encountered in traditional Albanian literature.

Agolli's poetry is rich and diverse; it represents a distinctive style within Albanian literature, introducing a poetic model deeply rooted in rural life and a bucolic atmosphere. His verses reveal a delicate sensibility and an intimate perception of everyday human existence, with particular attention to small yet meaningful details.

He is known for the profoundly humanistic spirit that permeates his entire poetic oeuvre, for his appreciation of beauty, and for his tendency to move beyond the rigid boundaries of socialist realism. Agolli is a poet of lived experience and tangible reality, which sets his work apart—particularly when compared to that of his contemporary Ismail Kadare, who is more often associated with abstraction and symbolic narrative structures.

It is also true that Agolli wrote poems in which, due to his own political and social convictions, he glorified socialism and communist ideals. Nevertheless, despite this ideological dimension, Agolli remains one of the most significant innovators of Albanian poetry. Among his most widely recognised collections are *Udhëtojt i menduar*

(1985) and the post-1990 volumes such as *Pelegrini i vonuar* (1993), *Lypësi i kohës* (1995), and *Vjen njeriu i çuditshëm* (1996).

As noted earlier, Agolli's poetry is distinguished by its continuous and direct engagement with life, with the everyday, and above all with people. He discovers poetry within the most ordinary and commonplace events of life. Indeed, he sees the role of the poet as a mission. Agolli is explicitly an engaged poet who believes that poetry should directly influence the life of the individual and of society. His work encompasses politically and socially oriented poems, odes, and poems that convey meaning through moments, episodes, images, and situations, creating a meditative lyricism in which the lyrical "I" is deeply involved. He also wrote landscape lyrics and erotic poetry. His poetic line often relies on symbolism and allegory, and he is well known for his humour, satire, and sharp wit.

Agolli is widely recognised for poems in which the stance and experiences of the lyrical subject are revealed through human portraits, drawn from childhood memories, youth, Albanian history, or world culture. The concrete embodiment of these human figures constitutes one of his defining poetic traits. His poetry avoids uniformity because, through his interior world, the poet filters his experience and reality, transforming both into creative expression. His poetry has been translated into approximately ten languages, becoming universal in scope. This is where the strength of his poetry lies, as noted by the scholar Alma Dema; the poetry does not need a fixed language, dialect, or under-dialect to be written and to be perceived. (Dema, 2021, p. 28). So, the poetry communicates with a broad horizon of expectations. Dritëro Agolli is one of the most important poets of Albanian literature and a leading representative of contemporary Albanian poetry.

3. Methodology

This study is focused on poetry written during Albania's transition from the communist system to democracy and on poetic works that have received sustained critical attention.

It is based on a qualitative analysis of selected poems by Dritëro Agolli, with a focus on the use of irony in poetic expression. The analysis relies on close reading as the primary method, allowing for careful attention to language, tone, context, and figurative strategies through which ironic meaning is constructed.

The poems included in the analysis were selected from Agolli's poetic corpus on the basis of their clear use of ironic and satirical elements, as well as their engagement with social themes and questions related to identity. This selection was not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide representative examples that illustrate recurring patterns in Agolli's poetic treatment of irony.

The analytical process involved a detailed reading of each poem, with particular attention to moments where meaning is produced through contrast, inversion, or

implicit critique. Emphasis was placed on how irony operates within the text as a whole, rather than on isolated rhetorical instances.

Interpretation was guided by the internal coherence of the poems and by their broader literary and cultural context. The poems were also read comparatively, which made it possible to observe similarities and differences in the use of irony across texts and to identify its recurring functions. Through this approach, the study seeks to clarify how irony contributes to social satire and to the exploration of identity in Agolli's poetry.

4. Results

Analysis of the poems shows that irony in Agolli's poetry is closely linked to the figure of the ironic speaker, who often appears modest, naive, or seemingly disengaged, while implicitly expressing sharp observation and critical distance. This strategy allows the poetic voice to articulate meanings that are not stated openly and to suggest contrasts between appearance and underlying intent.

In the poetry collection *Pelegrin i vonuar*, irony emerges in different forms, including linguistic and situational irony, which function as key tools for conveying implicit critique and shaping the overall tone of the poems.

4.1. Verbal Irony

Various theorists have offered different definitions of irony. Muecke explains that *the concept of irony is vague, unstable, and multiform* (Muecke, 1969, p. 7). Cutler believes that an ironic utterance conveys a meaning *which is the opposite, converse, or reverse of its literal meaning* (Cutler, 1974, p. 117). In this sense, she highlights the role of intonation in an ironic sentence as a means of resisting the literal meaning of the expression. Later, Corbett and Connors categorised irony as a trope—a device of literary language that creates *a deviation from the ordinary and principal signification* (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 379).

Analysis of the poems shows that verbal irony is one of the most frequently employed forms of irony in Agolli's poetry. If we observe the function and usage of verbal irony, we understand that it is the most frequently employed type in poetic discourse. In Agolli's work, verbal irony is deliberate, subtle, quiet, and never descends into full sarcasm.

This approach is evident in many poems, such as the poem "Populli" ("The People"), in the lines of the first stanza:

*As long as not a bit of thought is given to the people,
As long as the enigma of the people remains amidst the fog,
The cry "What should we do with the people"
Pursues every desire and every policy
And the smoke over the people does not dissipate.
They shout: "Care for the people!"*

*As if they were children
And need to be taken by the hand,
For they must be fed, for they must be entertained,
As if they were thieves for whom a guard must stand
With weapons raised.*

(Translated by us, in "Pelegrin i vonuar" p. 154)

In the poem "Populli", verbal irony functions as a central strategy for exposing the gap between political rhetoric and social reality. According to Abrams (1985, p. 97), verbal irony is "a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed."

Expressions such as "What should we do with the people" and "Care for the people" construct irony in both the political and ethical spheres simultaneously. These expressions are common in political rhetoric, and the use of irony transforms the language of power into something artificial, manipulative, and fundamentally revealing that "the people are not really being considered." As readers of the poem, we penetrate the verbal irony through innuendo, mockery, double talk, or ambiguity, understanding that the irony targets both politics—the frontage of political rhetoric—and the people, who obediently follow such populist phrases. In this case, irony becomes a subversive critique of the language of politics and its rhetoric.

Verbal irony is also revealed through the text's relationship to the cultural context of the poem's composition. The above expressions were widely used in the context of Albanian socialism, and irony here produces subversion, employing the words of power to ridicule and undermine authority. Political rebuke takes the form of political praise through irony, allowing the reader—the people—to perceive declarative statements as meaningless. This is the function of irony in Agolli's poetry: to expose the hypocrisy of political language.

Moreover, irony is constructed toward the poetic voices present in the poem: irony directed at the poetic self, naive and powerless; irony toward politicians appearing in the cited lines; irony toward the silent and indifferent people in the face of political rhetoric. This can also be considered *dialogic irony*, as the truths of the various voices emerge, prompting reflection in the reader rather than expecting a response.

Irony in this poem is also created through its imagery. The poem builds three ironic images:

1. The people as an enigma, incomprehensible;
2. The people, as children, incapable of self-management, under someone else's control;
3. The people as thieves, requiring surveillance and armed guards.

Through these images, linguistic irony transforms into a deforming irony of political reality, with a bitter, sharp tone that also functions as critique, turning it into an act of resistance.

In the poem "*Frutat e Adamit*" ("The Fruits of Adam"), the speaker declares:

*And I do not feel remorse for the fruits I picked,
Nor am I regretful. It happened, so be it!
I ate them and entered the jungles
And did not leave until a long time had passed.*

*I lost nothing, only gained effort,
While Adam lost immortality.
Nevertheless, he also gained thought,
Sin, curse, grief, and love...*

(Translated by us, in "Pelegrin i vonuar" p.63)

The poem is built on verbal irony, with a gentle, calm tone that is, nonetheless, deeply ironic. It confronts individual sin, framed within a public discourse, alongside the archetypal sin of Adam. Distinct markers of irony in the poem include tone, displacement, simplification, and paratext. The tone appears free, unrepentant, clear, yet self-aware and lightly playful. This tone, incongruous with the notion of "sin," is a source of irony. While the reader expects remorse, moral reflection, or penitence, the poet presents an almost transparent indifference, which serves as a critique of traditional moralizing narratives.

Based on the idea that every ironist is an idealist (Schoentjes, 2001, p. 73), the lyrical hero in the poem embodies this perspective. He believes in human perfection, even when wandering amidst sins, taking pleasure in carrying the "first sin" while simultaneously disengaging from traditional moralism. Through irony, he plays with the notions of original sin, universal guilt, and biblical figures. In the lines: "*And I do not feel remorse for the fruits I picked, / Nor am I regretful,*" the lyrical subject treats his seemingly minor action as almost naïve transgression. In the second stanza, this action is contrasted with Adam's monumental sin: "*While Adam lost immortality.*"

This contrast generates irony: the poet places an everyday mistake alongside a mythic catastrophe that altered the fate of humanity. The shift between the trivial and the grand, the mundane and the transcendental, creates an ironic effect and sophisticated humor.

Verbal irony thus liberates the hero from conventional guilt and produces a "*neutralization of seriousness.*" The way the act of picking fruits is perceived by the speaker versus the biblical worldview creates a coexistence of two interpretations; irony inherently expresses both affirmation and negation simultaneously (Schoentjes, 2001, p. 78).

The poem shifts the reader's expectation from the dramatic to the ordinary: the myth of Paradise is replaced by daily toil, without solemnity or hyperbole, but in a natural way. In the line: *"I lost nothing, only gained effort,"* the poet employs irony where "gain" is reduced to mere "effort." This semantic play turns ordinary words into a satirical backdrop: the "forbidden" experience brings neither punishment nor reward, only fatigue. Irony challenges the action-consequence relationship, highlighting a disproportionate "gain-effort" dynamic. Humanity has lived under the weight of inherited guilt; biblical sin is treated as a heavier fate than any human error, yet people gain awareness and love through error. Irony thus humanizes sin.

In modern literature, myth is often re-functionalized and demythologized. The poem demythologizes by comparing the poet to Adam, treating him as a human being rather than a biblical figure. The line *"While Adam lost immortality"* represents the climax of irony in the poem. The shift from verbal irony to dramatic irony occurs because the contemporary individual's sin is juxtaposed with a biblical loss. Values are inverted: the lyrical subject emerges unscathed, while the biblical figure tragically loses. Similarly, the phrase *"I entered the jungles"* functions as an analogy to the lost garden, bringing the myth into everyday reality, subjecting the poet's action to human rather than divine judgment.

This juxtaposition of the minor personal loss ("I gained only effort") and the cosmic loss (Adam lost immortality) is followed by a surprising twist: *"Nevertheless, he also gained thought, / sin, grief, love..."*

Here, irony becomes existential: even Adam's great loss is not merely tragic; it grants human consciousness, sorrow, and love. Paradoxically, sin becomes a source of humanity. Irony thus moves from a literary device to a philosophical reflection on life and human nature.

Stylistic devices further enhance irony, including antithesis, hyperbole, and litotes. Antithesis emerges from juxtaposing terms: *gained/lost, effort/immortality, minor sin/fundamental sin*. Hyperbole serves biblical irony: the contrast between picked fruits and the loss of immortality exaggerates reality to highlight irony. Litotes appears in: "I lost nothing," an understatement emphasizing the disproportion compared with the biblical myth.

Irony also creates ambiguity of thought, as in: "Nevertheless, he also gained thought, sin, grief, love..."

Through irony, the poet demonstrates that both the biblical figure and the contemporary sinner are incapable of grasping the absolute. Irony continues within the enumeration: among losses is also love, leaving it unclear whether the poet refers to Eve's, God's, or human love. The interplay between seriousness and humor highlights that Adam's first sin simultaneously brings consciousness, sorrow, and love. The verb *"gained"* with "sin, grief, love" presents sin as both punishment and gift—a typically ironic juxtaposition of evil and good, negative and positive. This

polysemy gives irony a philosophical dimension: sin becomes the foundation of human consciousness.

In conclusion, verbal irony in Agolli's poetry functions as a key strategy for ironizing social, political, and biblical situations. It is directed toward different subjects within the poems, including the lyrical hero in his various forms, and serves to reveal contradictions, question established norms, and humanize mythic and moral narratives.

4.2. Situational Irony

Analysis of Agolli's poetry shows that situational irony frequently emerges from everyday circumstances in which expectations are overturned by reality, creating a tension between appearance and actual experience.

In poetic texts, situational irony can arise in multiple ways:

- From the inversion of logical, emotional, or descriptive images, especially when the beginning and end of the poem conflict.
- When the poetic tone does not match the underlying ideological content.
- When a symbol is stripped of its classical meaning and endowed with an ironic meaning unfamiliar to the reader.
- When the lyrical subject is placed in contradictory or illogical situations to highlight their absurdity.
- When there is a mismatch between the poem's start and conclusion, producing multiple contradictory situations where the poetic reality clashes with the ideological reality.

Situational irony is clearly illustrated in Agolli's poem "Pasqyra" ("The Mirror").

in Agolli's poem "Pasqyra" ("The Mirror"):

*What to say, dear friend,
We are guilty ourselves,
That we sit at the tired table
With a cup of rakia and an onion.*

*That we emptied all the words,
Just as we emptied the plates of meager food,
And silence, like two dry trees
Rising above the wet field.*

*What to say, harsh friend,
We are guilty of ourselves
For the silence of the dry table,
This mirror of life,*

*Left like sheep shorn with scissors,
Old scissors completely unsharpened!
Do you nod, generous friend?
This is hardly something to laugh about!*

(Translated by us, in "Pelegrin i vonuar" p. 186)

Situational irony in this poem is revealed through the motif of hospitality. On one hand, there is the expectation of a warm, sincere meeting with a "friend," but on the other hand, the table is sparse—only rakia and onion—and the atmosphere is bleak and impoverished. The ending reveals that there is no "second self" or ideal reflection, but rather a mirror of the self. Situational irony arises not from spoken words but from the fact that the reality of the situation contradicts the expected norm of a friendly meeting.

The line: "*We are guilty ourselves*" also carries verbal irony, as the poet does not express genuine conviction but rather a bitterly playful self-mockery directed at both him and the friend. For each factor—poverty, lack of camaraderie, and the sense of being undignified—the poet softens the drama of victimhood and self-blame. This functions as **self-accusation**, recalling the expression "laugh, scoundrel, while your heart breaks."

According to Hutcheon, situational irony arises when reality conflicts with cultural norms or context. In the Albanian context, hosting a guest implies generosity, abundant food, humor, and conversation. In this poem, however, the poet subverts this expectation: the meal is meagre, the atmosphere is cold, and the table is a "mirror of life," empty and harsh. Situational irony thus creates in the reader a sense of guilt or responsibility for the circumstances.

Furthermore, Frye emphasizes that situational irony often emerges from placing characters in lowly, undignified positions. In the poem, this is evident in grotesque imagery—impoverished table, night animals, shorn sheep with old scissors—which turns the poetic hero into a caricature of himself.

In terms of narrative voice, the poem employs dialogue for ironic effect: the absence of conversation is more powerful than the spoken words. The poet speaks, while the reader remains in suspense, creating a tension between humor and the lyrical hero's inner drama. Verbal irony and emotional drama are intertwined and often collide. On one hand, irony masks pain, loneliness, and reality, creating an objective distance from the self; on the other hand, it exposes emotional drama, erupting in moments of vulnerability.

This interplay between appearance and reality clearly parallels verbal irony, where the apparent meaning of words does not conceal the true meaning (Schoentjes, 2001, p. 47). Thus, situational irony reveals subtle mockery alongside the drama emerging on the surface.

Situational irony can also serve political purposes. While theorists distinguish situational irony in tragedy or comedy, in Dritëro Agolli's poetry, it is often created by dramatic circumstances. It can also serve ethical purposes. In subsequent analysis of Agolli's poems, situational irony frequently exposes the tragedy of war, politics, and life.

The Importance

Step on it! It's nothing: an ant;
Step on it! It's nothing: a ladybug!
Step on it! It's nothing: a cricket;
Step on it! A fly has no value!

Human, do you understand what it means
For a breath, however small, to be extinguished in vain?
Your careless strike against the fates in the world
Remains shameful forever!...

(Translated by us, in "Pelegrin i vonuar", p. 153)

The poem is built on two contradictory elements that give life to the situational irony: the force of the word "step on it" and the tiny creatures—ants, ladybugs, crickets, and flies. Furthermore, the situational irony is reinforced by the ironic contrast between the opening lines—where the lyrical subject incites violence against small creatures ("Step on it! It's nothing...")—and the moral message of the second stanza, which dismantles and exposes this attitude. This creates what theorist Wayne C. Booth calls *stable irony* (Booth, 1974), as the reader immediately understands that the poet does not truly believe in the orders presented in the first lines; they are merely ironized voices.

The situational irony in this poem arises from a small, everyday, seemingly insignificant act—such as stepping on an insect—reinforced by the phrase "it's nothing" and by the second stanza, which transforms into a verse with universal weight *regarding the ethics* of relations between living beings. Irony functions is to display the moral condemnation of human violence against the weak. The transition from one stanza to another, from one meaning to the next, is accompanied by a change in tone: in the first stanza, the tone is commanding and conversational, while in the second, it becomes a strong moral reprimand.

In Henri Bergson's terms (Bergson, 1911), who conceptualized the comic as "the mechanical imposed upon the living," the dry commands, short sentences, and categorical rhythm of "Step on it... It's nothing..." create a comic effect, almost satirical, which conceals a critique of the human mentality that sees life as worthless when it does not belong to them. Irony is used precisely to show dehumanization as cold, mechanical, and careless.

According to theorist Wolfgang Iser, who considers the reader a co-creator and emphasizes the aesthetic effect that completes the gaps of an open text, the tools that create irony include punctuation marks. The reader interacts with the text through the rhetorical question: *“For a breath, however small, to be extinguished in vain?”* which is essentially an ironic rhetorical question. In the absence of special markers of irony—such as emoticons or inverted question marks—punctuation serves as a signal of irony: the exclamation marks and ellipses are understood through tone in spoken discourse. The first form of punctuation exaggerates the unacceptable proposition, while the second introduces doubt in the reader’s mind through the blank space it leaves (Schoentjes, 2001, p. 144).

For communication with the reader, the warning words and repetition of the phrase *“Step on it! It’s nothing”* are important, as is the shift from a harsh, mechanical, cold tone in the first *“step on it”* to the action imposed on a fly or a cricket (the archetype of the weakest), which makes the situation comical. Moreover, the shift from the commanding tone of the first stanza to the moral reflection of the second creates ironic and parodic notes of a political situation. The language is deconstructed within the verse and from stanza to stanza. This corresponds to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, i.e., the coexistence of two voices: the commanding voice and the ethical voice. Situational irony is created precisely by the clash between these two voices.

The poem overturns with irony the logic of power: extinguishing even the smallest life is a grave act, and human indifference is shameful. Situational irony functions to stigmatize violence, and the poet uses this element not only stylistically but also to convey a social, political, and ethical message. It is thus a critique of superiority and anthropocentrism.

In this logical progression, Dritëro Agolli has many other poems, such as *“Të qarat”*, *“Bubazheli”*, *“Gjethet e fundit”*, *“Në shtëpi”*, which construct poems with multiple ironic situations. In most cases, the irony is in the social and political sphere, but also in literature itself. The aesthetic surface of these poems serves deeply ethical purposes. Irony is a tool the poet uses to create a moral pedagogy and to provoke a certain reflection in the reader.

4.3. Socratic Irony

Socratic irony appears less frequently in Dritëro Agolli’s poetry, but it is nonetheless present. In certain poems, the lyrical voice adopts a position of apparent modesty and limited self-awareness, which allows the poet to expose the limitations of the surrounding context. This deliberate modesty functions ironically, as it invites the reader to perceive meanings that go beyond what is stated directly. In this way, irony becomes a subtle mode of communication between the lyrical hero and the reader.

In this approach, the poem *“Bari”* (“The Grass”) is exemplary in the following lines:

*I have never wanted to be an oak or a plane tree,
Only a blade of grass over the stone.*

*Grass is honest and simple,
Grass never perishes; it teaches something every day,
The dew teaches it in autumn
To endure snow and frost in winter.*

*I have never wanted to be an oak or a plane tree,
Only a blade of grass over the stone...*

(Translated by us, in "Pelegrin i vonuar", p.109)

As is known, Socratic irony operates through pretended limited knowledge, to encourage the reader to see more deeply than what is superficially stated. In this spirit, the poem "*I have never wanted to be an oak or a plane tree...*" creates a quiet but highly significant contrast between false grandeur and true simplicity.

The poem begins with the definitive declaration: "*I have never wanted to be an oak or a plane tree,*" which presents the lyrical hero as modest, almost naïve, as if he rejects grandeur. Yet at its core, the poem provokes the reader to feel the opposite: why would it be worthless to be an oak? In Albanian poetic tradition, the oak and plane tree symbolize strength, pride, and deep roots—qualities worthy of admiration. But the lyrical subject, through a half-Socratic sarcasm, relinquishes these heavy and noisy qualities. Here lies the irony: the height of the oak is criticized through the humility of grass.

The poet's identification with "*a blade of grass over the stone*" is a small act, yet it carries ethical weight. Grass is ordinary, silent, simple qualities that in Socratic irony are emphasized precisely because they are often underestimated. Through the symbol of grass, the lyrical hero constructs an ethical profile, valuing simplicity over grandeur. In fact, grass becomes a metaphor for a person who chooses a life not for appearance, but filled with patience, experience, and endurance.

In traditional Albanian culture, oaks and plane trees are considered unbreakable; the poem uses Socratic irony to overturn this myth. Grass, which appears weak, gentle, and trampled, turns out to be more resilient than giants because it is shaped by hardship, survives adversity, and lives under harsh conditions. True beauty and strength reside precisely in persistence and quiet endurance.

The rhythm of the lines, the simple words, and the repetition at the beginning and end of the poem ("*Oak and plane tree...*") create a tone that imitates the behavior of grass: gentle, calm, without thunder. This style reinforces Socratic irony because it speaks softly about great things, without proclaiming them.

The circular structure (beginning and end) functions like a lesson: what is true does not need to be elevated; it is enough to exist.

Read in light of Socratic irony, the poem is not merely a hymn to simplicity but a philosophical counter-lesson: apparent grandeur is fragile; smallness is enduring;

simplicity is wise; and humility, expressed as denial, becomes the highest form of knowledge.

In this way, grass is not a symbol of weakness, but of wisdom that continues to grow quietly—a wisdom that Socrates himself would have approved.

At the opening of the poem, the lyrical subject denies grandeur (“I have never wanted to be an oak or a plane tree”). This is entirely in the spirit of what Plato describes in the *Apology*, where Socrates claims that the only thing he knows is that he does not know. This deliberate denial functions as an ironic strategy to question the apparent value of “the great.”

Thus, when the poet renounces monumental figures, he follows the Socratic model of what Plato calls “eironeia”—a feigned modesty that serves to reveal a deeper truth.

Conclusion

Irony in the poetry of Dritëro Agolli functions as a deliberate strategy for creating tension between appearance and underlying meaning. Through this tension, the poetry reveals the inner values of the lyrical subject and challenges false social, political, and existential assumptions.

Across the poems analysed, irony serves to expose contradictions, to question established norms, and to redirect attention from external seriousness toward deeper ethical and human concerns. Seemingly simple situations acquire significance through ironic distance, allowing the poems to convey meaning beyond their immediate surface.

In this way, irony becomes a central element of Agolli’s poetic vision, transforming simplicity into insight and enabling a form of reflection that is both critical and humanising.

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