

Ironie și putere socială în „The Little Sister” de R. Chandler

Irony and Social Power in R. Chandler's 'The Little Sister'

Claudia PISOSCHI

Facultatea de Litere

Universitatea din Craiova

claudiagabrielapisoschi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The article focuses on the various facets and values of irony as a figure of speech, used to express power relations. The corpus is excerpted from Raymond Chandler's novel „The Little Sister” and it regards characters united by their social power which derives from their professional status as representatives of state authority. Nevertheless, they have distinct individualities determined by the cultural and discourse community they belong to. Irony typology, social effects and dramatic values in context intermingle resulting in a pungent text meant to reflect those individualities.

Rezumat

Articolul se axează pe multiplele fațete și valori ale ironiei ca figură de stil utilizată pentru a exprima relațiile de putere. Corpusul este selectat din romanul „The Little Sister” de R. Chandler și reunește replicile unor personaje unite prin puterea ce derivă din statutul lor social ca reprezentanți ai autorității de stat. Cu toate acestea, ele au individualități distincte determinate de comunitățile culturale și discursive cărora le aparțin. Tipologia ironiei, efectele ei sociale și valorile dramatice în context concură la realizarea unui text caustic care să reflecte tipologiile menționate.

Key words: *irony, figure of speech, power relations, discourse community, role identity*

Cuvinte cheie: *ironie, figură de stil, relații de putere, comunitate discursivă, identitate de rol*

1. Quintilian revisited. Irony as a figure of speech

The term and concept of irony has been defined from various perspectives ever since ancient times. For the purpose of our analysis we have chosen to adopt the view on irony as a figure of speech, the term deriving from the Greek word *eironeia* 'dissimulation'. The Latin writer and rhetorian Marcus Flavius Quintilian [1] includes irony among the figures of speech, more precisely, he defines it as a type of allegory. This Greek term, corresponding to the Latin term *inversio*, implies giving words a different meaning than the usual one, sometimes opposed to it. Its basic realisation is the metaphor. A mixt allegory contains words with metaphorical meaning combined with words used literally, the latter ensuring the context its clarity.

The interesting and very modern aspect highlighted by Quintilian is his concern with the pragmatic coordinates of allegory, implicitly of irony, i.e. with its usage, frequency and role in communication. In everyday Latin spoken by Quintilian's contemporaries, allegory is „at hand even for those with little talent” and is encountered very frequently in „everyday speech” [2]. The reason for it being so largely used is that novelty, change are pleasant in communication and „the unexpected has a lot of charm”. Quintilian observes that, because of that reason, allegory had become overused and lost its power of suggestion, of capturing the interest of the interlocutors.

The role of the co(n)text is emphasized as an essential condition of interpreting any figure of speech, allegory included: „Generally we must pay attention to what is said and to each character, because what we had previously said was true; we can blame somebody by praising him and we can praise him by blaming him.” [3]

The belief in what had previously been said corresponds to Grice's maxim of quality, whereas the last part of the quotation explains the definition of irony as an obscure allegory, viewing this oratorical means as a more indirect, and thus more polite communicational strategy.

When an allegory is obscure, it is called a mystery [4]. From this perspective, irony (in Latin *illusio*) is a type of allegory which is to be understood as the opposite of what is literally uttered. Sometimes, it is claimed, we mean the opposite of what we say, as a joke. Also, an allegory (irony included) helps saying unpleasant truths by using terms which diminish their effect or leading to the opposite meaning, at the same time being polite. [5] Politeness is the criterion considered when discussing the position adopted by some rhetors, referred to by Quintilian, who considered that allegory, in all its forms, is a distinct type of figure of speech, rather obscure in meaning and more often than not expressing a dissimulated mockery or offence. In other words, its use collides with politeness rules.

2. Irony typology

In *Institutes of Oratory*, the concrete means by which irony is to be understood are: the tone, the character, the topic nature. These elements can be considered as determining various subdivisions of irony, in point of the linguistic or extra-linguistic (contextual) level involved in expressing it.

K. Wales [6] refers to irony as a two-side concept: first of all, irony (i.e. verbal irony) is to be viewed as a trope, its functions being equally pragmatic (basically contradicting the literally meaning) and stylistic (sarcastic, satirical etc) -this corresponding to Quintilian's reference to the tone- and secondly, irony as a dramatic device used in fiction, allowing a double perspective (of the reader and of the character and/or narrator). The discrepancy is between appearance/belief and reality. Within this latter category we can include what Quintilian called irony based on the character and topic nature.

3. Irony and pragmatics

We will further enlarge upon some modern pragmatic considerations on the definition of irony as negation, since we believe it to be the adequate theoretical frame of analysis for our corpus and purpose. Paul Grice (1978) takes over the definition given to verbal irony as a form of negating what is said. The concept of 'negation' takes the form of the distinction between literal meaning and speaker's meaning, i.e. meaning in context. Giora (1995) has also agreed to the explanation of irony as negation, but a form an indirect negation, without using any negation markers.

Enlarging upon the concept of speaker's meaning, we must say that any speaker makes an utterance with some intention, therefore semantics itself can be considered as based on intentions. Successful communication is reduced to the acknowledgement of the speaker's intention by the interlocutor. Grice offered a model for the explanation of irony seen from the perspective of speaker's intention retrieval: irony is a form of substitution – the interlocutor cancels the literal meaning of the utterance replacing it by the speaker's meaning, resulted from a series of contextual elements.

Therefore, the cancelation is made by the speaker him/herself. At this point we disagree with K. Wales' way of expressing her observation [7]: irony is found when „the words actually used appear to contradict the sense actually required in the context and presumably intended by the speaker”. We think that Wales' syntagm 'intention of the speaker' should be understood as the literal interpretation of the utterance, according to the hearer's expectations.

Irony exists through language and its expression is linguistic. Therefore, the propositional content of the utterance does not change, on the contrary, it is the point of departure in changing its usage, i.e. its typical associated illocutionary value, generally expected by the interlocutor. The speaker only pretends to use the utterance with its typical illocutionary value, he dissimulates a speech act. Irony becomes a form of conversational implicature which violates the maxim of quality. The speaker says something which he knows not to be true. The interlocutor's communicational competence is required to recognize the dissimulated communicational behaviour of the speaker. P. Grice acknowledges that irony implies expressing an attitudinal component which

is supposed to be understood by the interlocutor in spite of the fact that it is not overtly stated. Anolli (2001) considers that the simulation aspect of irony requires a 'social pact'.

4. Irony as a device of enacting social power

Social power expressed linguistically through irony illustrates the link between ideology and rhetorical figures viewed both paradigmatically, as selection, and syntagmatically, as combination. Any utterance is the product of an evaluative categorization which includes ideological components. (van Dijk, 1995) Irony is an effectual means of expressing *power behind discourse* as opposed to *power in discourse*. [8] Power in discourse represents a realisation of exercised, enacted social power. Non-powerful people can equally acquire social power and/or power in discourse as a result of social struggles. Thus, access to the discourse type and to discursal positions of power, typically limited by so many constraints, is continually re-defined and negotiated.

Viewed as a politeness strategy, whether used as an euphemistic means of expressing disapproval or as an apparent mocking or even offending joke, irony can be efficiently approached by interlocutors found in a vertical type of relationship. If the speaker is in a position of authority, irony allows him/her to reprimand a subordinate without overtly jeopardising his/her own public image. If the speaker is in a subordinate position, he/she can express his/her disapproval without being accused of being out of line or of violating politeness principles.

Somebody found in a position of non-power can emancipate from it and from its conventions through rational communication and this mechanism interweaves with the inculcation mechanism of dominance (power behind discourse) in order to achieve *commonality of practice*. [9] Power holders may apparently concede to their 'enemies', but power inequalities still hold true and sometimes indirect ways of asserting power positions are preferred for the reasons mentioned above. Constraints on utterance contents and subjects, reflecting constraints on relations, are hidden behind apparent solidarity. There is a permanent conflict between what Fairclough calls *standardisation*, the use of widely accepted structures, and *free speech* (viewed ideologically rather than strictly structurally, we would add).

Socially speaking, irony is a paradox because it is an elitist act of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion [10]. What Frye meant by this statement was that irony creates an elite, i.e. a group of 'believers' in Booth's terminology, people brought together by their sharing the same type of discourse and being able to interpret and enjoy their particular ironical style. At the same time, other people will be excluded from that group. Since the use and interpretation of irony depends on coordinates of time, place, social situation and general culture, it is clear that the necessary condition to be fulfilled for understanding irony is that the hearers/receivers should constitute a group sharing the above-mentioned coordinates.

A common background *is* necessary but it might not prove sufficient to interpret irony if the hearers don't belong to the same discourse community as the speaker. Different styles, registers, jargons can contribute to the exclusion of a certain individual from the category of pertinent irony interpreters. Irony can have beneficial effects by creating an attitude of solidarity based on agreement, which might lead to a higher degree of intimacy between the interlocutors who discover common intellectual and affective values. The negative impact is not to be neglected; nevertheless, we must blame it on the lack of common discourse community, not on irony in and of itself. Irony operates as a catalyst which facilitates the process through which interlocutors become aware of their distinct discourse community identity. Apparent common points, such as profession, sometimes prove totally inefficient. 'Ideological complicity' [11] is a much more important factor to ensure communicative success as far as irony is concerned.

5. Irony functions

Basically, both the linguistic strategies involving irony and its effects are similar whether we talk about everyday communication or about fiction. This idea can be linked to the opinion of Clark and Gerrig (1984) who consider that the speaker who uses irony, plays a game in front of a naïve public, whether present or absent, real or imaginary, and assumes a false identity of role: that of a sincere speaker who means only what his/her words mean. This idea corroborated with the

definition of dramatic irony in Wales' view would imply including any type of irony within this latter category.

An ironical utterance always contains a certain degree of *humour*, which makes the message more easily 'swallowed' by the receiver. At the same time, humorous irony tends to be interpreted as a proof of the speaker's detachment and distance in relation to the topic, which would mean control maintenance and rationality in judging people and situations. C. Popescu [12] agrees with Raskin (1985) that the communicative mode of 'joking' is a reaction resulted from failing to reconcile the utterance heard with one's beliefs and knowledge. Of course, humorous attempts can fail too, because of the audience communicative incompetence or unavailability for such purposes. Raskin [13] even introduces the concept of *humour competence*. However, joking, Popescu says, is more acceptable socially than lying or not making sense. As we shall see below, the relationship irony-humour can be interpreted by some as an opposite inclusion to the one presented at this point, humour functioning as *genus proximum*.

Humour might be placed at one end of the axis representing the range of values covered by irony. This humoristic value is the least hearer-harming. Using K. Wales' words [14], when „directed against another person, irony is often sarcastic, serving as an oblique polite form of criticism”. In our opinion *sarcasm* is placed between humour and satire. When irony is a form of criticism addressing an entire group/community/society rather than an individual it turns into satire. Other linguists, like Attardo (1994), don't consider irony as a hyperordinate term including satire, but gives them equal rank as members of the semantic field of humour. Elena Negrea [15] mentions the fact that the mitigation value of irony can function both ways, i.e. both in case of compliments and of pieces of criticism. An ironical compliment means using an utterance with a negative meaning to diminish the effects of an overt approval. Ironical criticism, much more frequent in communication, is resorted to by the speaker to "soften" the negative effects on the hearer and also on him/herself, criticism being a face threatening act.

6. Facets and values of irony in 'Little Sister' A mystery novel offers the opportunity of analysing irony in point of its typology and characteristics, social effects (of inclusion or exclusion) and, last but not least, of stylistic values. The corpus of examples selected from the novel *The Little Sister* by Raymond Chandler reflects the relationships among the various representatives of law (policemen, private detectives) and also between them and the outlaws. There is a permanent balance between solidarity and overt antagonism, the identity of role assumed by the characters being ever surprising and captivating to the reader.

We will focus on two major types of antagonistic relations involving social power: the representatives of state authority (policemen, private investigators) vs outlaws; policemen vs private investigators.

6.1. For the first type of opposition between the representatives of state authority and the suspect of murder, the policemen (Fred Beifus and Christy French) and the private eye (Philip Marlowe) act solidarily according to an ideological complicity manifested in relation to the suspect (Flack). Any person whose social function is 'to serve and protect' tends to adopt the linguistic behaviour characteristic to a member of a discourse community.

The first set of excerpts are from a dialogue between Beifus, Christy French and Flack, the manager of a squalid outskirts hotel:

• *Leave us do the thinking, sweetheart. It takes equipment.'* [...] *You mustn't deny our little pleasures, Mr. Flack.'* (chapter 11, p. 57)

Irony is structurally expressed at the level of the addressing term used, *sweetheart*. Its standardised usage implies an intimate relationship with the interlocutor but in this case Beifus's false identity of role is evident. He apparently tries to include himself within the same discourse community as Flack, but actually the addressing term is exploited as a marker of social power to evince detachment. The addressing term must be interpreted within the utterance it is part of: the humorous tone conveyed by the addressing term is combined with the sarcastic tone of the sentence: the policeman expresses the power behind the discourse by emphasizing his identity as a member of the

police force, automatically superior in thinking to the crime world Flack is suspected to belong to. It is not solidarity which is emphasized but its opposite, the distance between *us*, the authorities, and *you*, the suspect. Nevertheless, the character still preserves shades of humour, using an informal register, which is familiar to the interlocutor, and expressing his rather harsh criticism in the form of an offer determined by an objective reason, *lack of equipment*, i.e. of intelligence. The end of the reply shows an apparent change of tone and register; the interlocutor is addressed extremely politely now (*Mr Flack*), the distance is overtly marked by the deontic modal *must* used in a dissimulated speech act expressing a strong invitation. The mechanism of dominance continues to function and the sentence should be interpreted as a form of sarcasm, its meaning being 'You cannot possibly deprive us of our pleasure of investigating you'.

- 'Thanks for the murder, *honey*', Beifus told him. 'You get any more in your *nice hotel*, *don't forget our services*. *Even when it ain't good, it's quick*.' (chapter 11, p. 61)

- 'You don't even have to pass the desk to get to the elevators. Beifus said: 'Maybe that was one reason he came here. That, and *the homey atmosphere*.' (chapter 11, p. 60)

Beifus continues in the same humoristic tone, using another addressing term which connotes the highest intimacy degree between interlocutors. It is obvious that irony must be interpreted here as the opposite of the denotative meaning of *honey*. Not only that Beifus doesn't love criminals, he fundamentally hates them. The conflict is not between two individuals with opposite value systems, they are antagonists as members of two opposite categories: defenders of law vs law-breakers. The ironical use of the syntagms *nice hotel*, *homey atmosphere* is meant to define the whole sordid world of illegal activities. The unusually free speech of Beifus functions as a border-setter between him and the other. Humour continues to be the best strategy to maintain a 'social pact' when Beifus becomes self-ironical up to the point of sarcasm: he identifies himself with his professional category and also with their failure to be efficient: it's about *us* and *our services*. In this case irony is 'as thick as butter' since, at a more profound level, Beifus questions the whole police system if he views it as a supply-demand system; police 'serve and protect' the citizen, but the meaning of the verb *to serve* is degraded and policemen tend to simply pick up after the criminals. The dramatic value of irony lies in the rebellion of a member of a category against a state of affairs he cannot seem to defeat. Taking aim against a system, the reply becomes a satire.

The satirical tone is maintained in a dialogue between another policeman, Christy French and the already mentioned suspect, Flack (chapter 11, p. 58):

- 'Mayer's a gentleman now. [...] Just between *us girls in the powder room*, he said, we never even proved the guy we had *was* Mayer. But don't broadcast it. Nobody's supposed to know but him and his lawyer and the DA and the police beat and the city hall and maybe two or three hundred people.' The reply is actually a bitter satire against the justice system whose corruption leaves no chance of defeating criminality. Information leaks are the general rule, so that French uses self-irony: allegedly tough and incorruptible, the policemen who operate with secret information, which are vital for their success, turn everything into gossip and this justifies the usage of the appellation *us, girls in the powder room*. Police secrets have as many chances to remain so as a boudoir secret. French is solidary with his colleagues but, at the same time, excludes himself from their category; his identity of role is changed since he criticises this state of affairs, the complicity between the underground world and the justice system.

The attitude of Beifus towards Flack is extended on a dead man presumed to belong to the same world of outlaws: 'I didn't see you in so long I forgot. But you know me, pal. Once a softy, always a softy.' (chapter 11, p. 61) The addressing term *pal* is apparently familiar but its ironical interpretation leads to the opposite meaning: we have nothing in common, the exclusion between *my* world and *yours* is total. The first and the last sentence are to be linked pragmatically. The only ironical word is *softy* but it governs the whole linguistic context; the propositional content of the two sentences is not changed but is centered on the ironical meaning of *softy*: 'I have always been merciless even if a long time has passed since I found out about your crimes.' The exclusion

meaning of *pal* underlies the reply, the apparent familiarity marks authority and distance from all the likes of Flack, thus indirectly addressed.

The critical attitude towards illegal activities is ironically expressed in a dialogue between French and the private eye Philip Marlowe, the addressee of the message being Flack, a representative of an opposite social group. French and Marlowe assume an identical role, their ideological complicity being at work to emphasize their position of power:

- It had to be something legitimate. That right, Marlowe?’ ,You could leave out the semi,’ I said. (p. 60)

Verbal irony is to be interpreted as the opposite of what is said. The prefix *semi-* should be omitted but the resulted word *legitimate* is to be read as opposite in meaning. The prefix *semi-* must be replaced by *il-*.

6.2. A rather prototypical conflict, equally exploited in literature and movies, is the one between policemen, whose main mission is to catch lawbreakers – some doing that at all costs-, and private detectives, whose main purpose is to protect and help their clients, sometimes at all costs, too. That is the source of a conflict with a high dramatic potential, sarcasm being the favourite oblique polite form of criticism. The professional category of policemen, with the prototypical characters in the novel (Beifus, French, Maglashan) generally shares the same social status, cultural background and discourse community as the category of private eyes. Ideological complicity functions to ensure the social pact Anolli was referring to but the two categories take distance from each other and use irony to dissimulate a solidarity which is to be interpreted as a sign of competition and despise. Each category excludes the other; the former, policemen, accuse the private detectives of protecting all sorts of people and indirectly encouraging vices to become virtues, the latter, private detectives, are convinced of police brutality, bias and corruption.

The narrator, through the main character, Philip Marlowe, places himself in opposition to the prototypical policeman defined by the above mentioned features. Irony is used as an oblique, polite form of criticism to covertly describe the referent, not regarding his individuality but as a member of a professional and discourse community which shapes his way of thinking and acting. Sarcasm does not exclude humour which enhances the involvement of the reader in the process of discovering the oppositions created: author- narrator- character, character – character.

The following description of French’s office and especially of its lack of perspective must be interpreted as a humorous and sympathetic though ironical solidarity of the narrator who tries to be somehow understanding of the character’s narrow- mindedness and limitations, at least in part determined by the physical, social and cultural environment: ‘the window, which was open and afforded a magnificent view of the police parking lot and the back of a billboard’. The confined physical space acts as a mold of the way French thinks and feels. The relaxed attitude of the character might signify his acceptance of reality and his resignation, hidden behind a false identity of role, that of a powerful man who is completely in control.

- At the other desk, which was endways to the window, Christy French sat in a tilted back swivel chair with his feet on the corner of the desk. He was looking out of the window, which was open and *afforded a magnificent view of the police parking lot and the back of a billboard*. (p. 165)

Another character ironised by the character-narrator and implicitly by the author is police lieutenant Moses Maglashan. Irony has a powerful dramatic effect in the next excerpt; the character-narrator indirectly satirizes the power of the press which has in view only the sensational aspect of a murder. The contiguity between the murder article and the meat price suggests that the victim is also regarded just as a piece of meat. A person’s value is reduced to the material aspect. Within this materialistic world, the police lieutenant is just a man who takes advantage of his position of power and takes all the credit for the work of his colleagues. The adverb *only* is the marker of the ironical reading of the utterance illustrating that ‘there is no such thing as too much’. The false identity of role assumed by Maglashan in the paper photo is meant to induce the idea of *profound thought, his wrinkling brows* being stereotypically interpreted as such. In fact he is a symbol of self-sufficiency, stupidity and despise for anyone who is not part of his community:

- The Bay City News wasn't too busy to write up a murder. *They put it on the first page, right next to the price of meat.* It was a nice piece and *only mentioned Maglashan's name 12 times in the text and twice more in the picture captions.* There was a photo of him on page three holding an ice-pick and *looking at it with profound thought wrinkling his brows.* (p. 96)
- Lieutenant Moses Maglashan [of the Bay City] took the carpenter's pencil out of his mouth and looked at the teeth marks in the fat octagonal pencil butt. His eyes went over me slowly exploring me, noting me, cataloguing me.' (p. 165)

Maglashan's attitude is ironically satirized by the detective Philip Marlowe who points out that the absurde desire to solve a case is meant to excuse the means of accomplishing this objective even if the suspects and all interrogated people are brought to the point of losing their life during the questioning. Maglashan and all those policemen adopting his methods and ideology have no remorse whatsoever, their victims are indirect casualties:

- Then there's the type that won't go to the can at all,' I said. They try too hard. Sit in a chair like this for thirty hours straight. Then they fall down and rupture a spleen or burst a bladder. They over-cooperate. And after sunrise court, when the tank is empty, you find them dead in a dark corner. Maybe they ought to have seen a doctor, but you can't figure everything, can you, Lieutenant?' (p. 167)

Since the conflict of interests between policemen and private detectives opposes the novel characters not as individuals but as members of a category, depersonalisation operates on both sides and ideological complicity helps the interlocutors understand each other's ironical replies.

- A girl called me this evening [...] 'Somebody with a name?' French asked, 'Who's your client? [...] She have a name?' 'Not yet.' 'New rules, huh?' he said softly. '*We don't give you any undertaking whatsoever.*' (p. 208)

Policemen adopt a position of power and assert it, they act solidarily (*we don't give you...*). The *new rules* are in fact old rules called ironically, the natural rules a private detective should follow to protect his/her client. The first of them is not to reveal the client's identity if that is considered harmful to him/her. This reply is an example of irony as negation. New rules are old rules that police expect people to break out of their fear of authorities.

In their turn, police, through their representatives, are not willing to give in in any way even if that is in the interest of justice; the humorous and also sarcastic irony *I wouldn't give you the dirty end of a burned match* is a new example of the explicit manifestation of social power. Marlowe's reply illustrates the common discursive community of the two, humorous irony being the best solution of showing power behind discourse in Marlowe's case:

- 'Give me that much at least [...]. I wouldn't give you the dirty end of a burned match', French said. [...] (p. 208) 'Don't tell me you're all out of the quick stuff, Marlowe. (p. 210)
- '*You're a man eater tonight*', I said. 'You want to break me in half. But you want an excuse. And you want me to give it to you?' (p. 211)
- 'Now, if you are in the mood', Beifus told me, 'you could start in at the beginning [...]. Don't try to sort it out. Just let it flow natural [...]' 'You want me to make a statement?' 'A very full statement', Beifus said. 'Fun, huh?' 'This statement is to be voluntary and without coercion?' 'Yeah. They all are', Beifus grinned. (p. 166)

Examples of humorous irony abound in the previous examples, the pragmatic meaning of the key words being quite the opposite of their denotational meaning: *man eater* means cowardice hidden behind the social function of the individual; *a very full statement*, a syntagm which is pleonastic in meaning, is a marker of power behind discourse, the policeman threatens Marlowe that, in a way or another, he will be forced to tell everything they want to know; *fun* is to be ironically interpreted as meaning 'dead serious', since this dialogue mirrors the prototypical dialogue between any members of the same categories discussing matters of life and death; finally, the same opposite and generic meaning is to be associated to the adjective *voluntary* and to the phrase *without coercion*: they mean 'involuntary, obtained by force'. The author feels it necessary to combine verbal irony to dramatic irony resulting from the policeman's attitude. His grin, relaxation, lack of understanding or mercy

denote his trust in the solidarity of the professional community, a closed community operating on the basis of its members' will.

In the previous excerpts the conflict was generic, depersonalised, between two professional categories whose differences tend to surpass their commonality of goals; the next set of examples brings the conflict to the level of the individual. The identity of the characters remains fundamentally molded by their social role or by the identity of role assumed by each of them; we continue to witness a personal conflict maintained by using authority assertion as main weapon.

Philip Marlowe's individual identity is ironised, starting with his name, the 'label' which identifies him from the rest of the people and continuing with a feature typically associated to men in his line of work and not only, sex-appeal. Both (name and sex-appeal) can be essential in a rather superficial world and Beifus's sarcastic irony aims at denying Marlowe any authentic identity. The first reply below can also be interpreted as a type of mockery at Marlowe's attempt to obey the laws and be as correct as possible.

- 'Name's Philip Marlowe', Beifus said. 'With an „e” on the end, if you're fussy.' (p. 165)
- 'Maybe I'm a queer, but for me you don't have no more sex appeal than a turtle.' (p. 165)

Not only Marlowe's physical appearance and name are ironised but also his cognitive abilities. He is indirectly considered not to be intelligent enough to decode a message which is less direct. Ideological complicity is again at work in this case and Marlowe's reply uses a type of familiar discourse; the illocutionary value of the utterance is apparently not the opposite of what is uttered but derived from it. Marlowe is far from being a fan of the policeman and, consequently, since only his admirers -if any- would bother to understand him, under no circumstances would Marlowe concern himself with that. Following the logic imposed by the situational context, a policeman would hardly have any fans, considering the consequences of his job, therefore subtlety is of no use in his profession:

- 'Or am I being too subtle?' 'I don't know', I said, 'I haven't read you fan mail.' (p. 57)

In the previous subchapter, the conflict policeman-suspect was linguistically expressed by using a familiar register meant to hide the social power under the appearance of intimacy and solidarity. The same strategy is used by policemen in the following excerpts only that now the antagonistic character thus addressed is the private detective. A series of means of addressing sharing the common feature [+affection] and ordinarily used as terms of endearment are turned by irony into devices of expressing power behind discourse, connoting hatred and threat, i.e. quite the opposite of their denotation. These addressing terms are: *sweetheart*, *kid*, *baby*. While the first term is used strictly within a relationship which implies romantic love, its usage in the context under discussion connoting sarcasm, the other two can be used within a relationship of the type parent-child. The paternalistic attitude of the policemen is a form of patronising and diminishing the interlocutor. Not only addressing terms are used ironically but also farewell gestures such as kissing, which become sources of dramatic irony:

- 'So you are the sweetheart that phoned in about Clausen. You are quite handy with a pay phone, ain't you, *sweetheart*?[...] I'm talking to you, *sweetheart*, Maglashan said. 'I asked you a question, *sweetheart*.[...] Get that, *sweetheart*?' (p. 167)
- 'See you, again, *sweetheart*. In my town.' (p. 172)
- 'There's a dozen ways we can find out, *kid*,' Beifus said. 'Why go into this routine that makes it tough for all of us?' (p. 208)
- 'Come along, *baby*,' Beifus said. (p. 212)
- 'What you standing there for?' Beifus asked sharply. '*You want us to give you a great big spitty kiss? No snappy come-back, huh? Too bad.*' (p. 176)

Maglashan's replies in the next excerpt add a new value to the ones already mentioned in point of irony. The syntagm *lovely business* and the last two sentences of the excerpt usually have a literal meaning implying a positive connotation. The last sentence, expressed in a formal register and opposed to the addressing term *baby*, acquires an ironical meaning, the contrary of its literal interpretation. The subject's determination is no longer linked to a good purpose, it becomes

obstination to the point of using violence to get what one wants. The detective is perceived by Maglashan as being as much of an enemy as criminals are:

- ‚I could do *lovely business* with you’, he said, staring at me. ‚Just lovely’. ‚I’m sure you could, Lieutenant. *I’ve always had a swell time in Bay City – while I stayed conscious.*’ ‚*I’d keep you conscious a long time, baby. I’d make a point of it. I’d give it my personal attention.*’

The similarity in perceiving the detective and the criminals is revealed in the last two quotations, too. In spite of the fact that private detectives and policemen are supposed to have the same social function of serving the law, the latter exclude the former from their category, and the distance is ironically marked: linguistic irony manifests in case of *pal* meaning 'accomplice' and *beautiful friendship* meaning 'complicity'.

- ‚Why would he want to stick you?’ Beifus asked with his derisive grin. ‚*You were his pal*’ [...] *It could have been a beautiful friendship*’, Beifus said with a sigh. ‚Except for the ice-pick, of course. (p. 171)

Any action of Marlowe can be used against him, the last ironical sentence listed below signifies a hidden threat; policemen don’t trust Marlowe at all and at any moment he could be suspected of not paying his income taxes:

- ‚I gave her back the fee. She didn’t have much.’ ‚*That way you don’t have to pay income tax on it*’, Beifus said. (p. 175)

Conclusions

In fictional texts irony can be analysed both as a figure of speech with pragmatic values and as a dramatic device which helps expressing politely an oblique indirect form of criticism with multiple stylistic connotations. Irony acquires a social function and is part of a communicational strategy meant to reflect social power, its continual re-defining and negotiation. A remarkable piece of literature such as 'The Little Sister' by R. Chandler offers uncountable situations of ironical language usage and the typical antagonisms policemen-crime suspects and policemen-private detectives are among the most representatives types of relationships allowing creativity in point of irony.

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