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### IRONY AS A TOOL FOR REFRAMING THE CONTEXT IN JULIAN BARNES'S NOVEL "METROLAND"

### ІРОНІЯ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ СТВОРЕННЯ РЕФРЕЙМІНГУ ЩОДО ЗМІНИ КОНТЕКСТУ РОМАНУ ДЖУЛІАНА БАРНСА «МЕТРОЛЕНД»

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The authors highlight the role of irony as a tool for reframing as a defining marker of postmodern literature in Julian Barnes's novel "Metroland". The authors state that postmodernism captures the details of modern existence, frequently highlighting incoherent human connections and a prevailing sense of existential disconnection, all while challenging conventional ethical frameworks. Irony as a tool for reframing appears as a distinctive and prevalent element of J. Barnes's idiosyncrasy, shaping multiple layers of the narrative – from dialogue and reflection to description and commentary.

A close analysis of numerous linguistic units with ironic undertones reveals that Julian Barnes employs irony as a shift in the context across lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, which collectively form the contextual meaning of the entire novel. The consistency of the author's ironic perspective, especially about youth and human relationships, is sustained through both situational irony (demonstrated lexically and syntactically) and associative irony (realized at the textual level); the aim of each is to reframe the contextual level of the text. The reframing effects are achieved through a range of stylistic devices, including the author's neologisms, parenthetical insertions, detached constructions, contrast, repetition, and quotation. The selected utterances, marked by subjective ironic evaluation, interact and reinforce one another, as well as contribute to the novel's broader aesthetic and conceptual framework.

The conducted research proves that through the strategic use of irony as a device for reframing, Julian Barnes reveals contrasting layers of perception of the characters of the novel – Christopher Lloyd and Toni Barbarowski, carefully selecting language means that expose alternative sides of their experience.

**Key words:** irony as a tool for reframing, author's occasionalisms, contrast, insert words, postmodernism, narrative strategy, stylistic devices, retrospective evaluation, characters.

Автори статті розглядають іронію як інструмент рефреймінгу (переосмислення), що виступає визначальним маркером постмодерністської літератури в романі Джуліана Барнса «Метроленд». Автори стверджують, що постмодернізм відображає деталі сучасного існування, часто підкреслюючи непослідовність людських зв'язків і відчуття екзистенційної роз'єднаності, одночасно кидаючи виклик традиційним етичним рамкам. Іронія як інструмент створення рефреймінгу постає як виразний і домінуючий елемент ідіостилю Джуліана Барнса, який формує різні рівні наративу – від діалогів і роздумів до описів та авторських коментарів.

Детальний аналіз численних мовних одиниць з іронічним забарвленням демонструє, що Джуліан Барнс використовує іронію як механізм зміщення контексту на лексичному, синтаксичному та текстовому рівнях, що, у сукупності, формує смислову цілісність усього роману. Послідовність авторського іронічного погляду, зокрема щодо молодості та міжособистісних стосунків, реалізується як через ситуаційну іронію (виявлену лексично та синтаксично), так і через асоціативну (текстову), метою яких є переосмислення контекстуальних рівнів тексту. Ефекти такого рефреймінгу досягаються за допомогою різноманітних стилістичних засобів, серед яких – авторські неологізми, вставні конструкції, відокремлені звороти, контраст, повтор і цитування. Відібрані висловлювання, позначені суб'єктивною іронічною оцінкою, взаємодіють між собою, підсилюють одне одного та сприяють формуванню ширшої естетичної й концептуальної структури роману.

Проведене дослідження доводить, що завдяки стратегічному використанню іронії як інструменту для рефреймінгу Джуліан Барнс розкриває контрастні шари сприйняття персонажів роману – Крістофера Ллойда і Тоні Барбаровскі, ретельно підбираючи мовні засоби, що розкривають альтернативні сторони їхнього досвіду.

**Ключові слова:** іронія як інструмент рефреймінгу/переосмислення, авторські оказіоналізми, контраст, вставні слова, постмодернізм, наративна стратегія, стилістичні засоби, ретроспективна оцінка, персонажі.

**Introduction.** The concept of postmodernism and, consequently, postmodern literature, encompasses a range of artistic tendencies and phenomena that emerged in the final third of the twentieth century and continued into the early twenty-first century. The Latin prefix *post-* etymologically means something that follows or continues, while the French word *moderne* conveys a sense of modernity and progress. Postmodernism arose both as a response to and a development of modernism, simultaneously borrowing its concepts and challenging its traditional aesthetic norms. Just as modernism once challenged the conventions of Victorian realism in the early twentieth century, postmodernism marks a shift toward a distinct literary and artistic paradigm.

Postmodern literature reflects the complexity of contemporary life, often focusing on fragmented social relationships and a sense of spiritual alienation, while questioning established moral codes. Rather than aiming for coherence or unity, it emphasizes uncertainty, disintegration, and the collapse of meaning, mirroring a world marked by chaos and existential doubt. This perspective on the postmodern era presents a picture of chaos and bewilderment, frequently leading to sentiments of confusion and dissatisfaction. The disorienting effect usually conveyed in postmodern texts is reinforced through spatial imagery, such as twisting passages, gaps, and boundaries that reflect the collapse of stable meaning and challenge the reader's expectations of narrative resolution.

Postmodern narratives often construct their own artistic realities deliberately and self-reflectively, frequently employing metafictional techniques. The boundaries between the "text" and the world blur, with the narrative treating the world as the "text" and the text as the world, emphasizing their mutual dependence. Such texts are seen not finished with dynamic processes, continuously redefined through the interaction of the author, the reader, and intertextual references. This symbol of postmodern writing draws attention to the constructed nature of representation itself.

As a result, postmodern texts often function as "conditional worlds" governed by the rules of an aesthetic game. Many postmodern works emphasize playfulness, giving the impression that characters do not live but instead "perform" life, while the author does not write but "plays" with literature and

the reader. Within this framework, events frequently unfold at the intersection of reality and the surreal, allowing for fluid transitions between different temporal dimensions, dreamlike states, and subconscious realms.

**Analyses of recent research and publications.** Postmodern literature presupposes a multiplicity of ideologies, blending various narrative strategies, stylistic devices, allusions and intertextual links into its structure. The postmodern worldview, marked by its ambiguity and contradictions, implies that the notion of a single, definitive truth about reality is unreachable. According to J.F. Lyotard, "knowledge in postmodern culture no longer operates as a universal truth but becomes a commodity, shaped by shifting perspectives and the logic of the marketplace" [9]. The literary scholar D.Zatonskii states that "there is nothing definite in this world, completely complete: neither a moral leak, which cannot be revised, nor moral encouragement, which never seems to anyone unfair" [11].

A bright representation of postmodernism can be found in the works of Julian Barnes, one of the most renowned and widely read contemporary English writers. J.Barnes has been honored with several distinguished literary awards, such as the Booker Prize, the Somerset Maugham Award, and the Prix Médicis. Since 1995, he has also held the title of Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters. His strong following in France highlights his well-known sympathy for French culture. Consequently, J.Barnes's literary work has attracted considerable scholarly attention, both in foreign and Ukrainian academic discourse. Regardless of the chosen analytical perspective, both foreign (S.Baron, M.Peatman) and Ukrainian (Ya.Bystrov, O.Doichyk, O.Tupakhina) researches emphasize the significance of postmodern worldview in Julian Barnes's works. Particular attention is given to his sustained engagement with themes of national identity and historical memory, as well as to the prominent role of irony in his critical position toward traditional values and his parodic reworking of both national and universal myths and stereotypes.

At the same time, a comprehensive understanding of Julian Barnes's worldview, particularly in terms of its poetic and stylistic expression, remains insufficiently explored. This can be attributed to the complexity and multidimensional nature of his creative method of writing, as well as the ongoing

evolution of his literary output, which resists classification as a closed or fully formed system. J.Barnes's postmodern outlook incorporates both traditional and innovative elements. Among the former are mythology, classicism, and Christianity – three foundational paradigms that have profoundly influenced the development of Western civilization over the past two millennia.

The research aims to examine the role of irony as a tool for reframing in Julian Barnes's novel "Metroland" and to explore how it contributes to the development of the novel's central themes, particularly those concerning identity, personal development, and the critique of cultural and ideological conventions.

**Results and discussion.** Irony stands out as a defining feature of postmodernism in Julian Barnes's writing. Its role extends beyond postmodernist expression, carrying wider stylistic and rhetorical importance. Before delving into a detailed analysis of irony in his writing, it is essential to provide a clear definition of the concept.

The Cambridge English Dictionary interprets "irony as a rhetorical tool that conveys meaning opposite to the literal sense of words, often used to express subtle criticism, contradiction, or humor through context and tone" [8]. Irony is a type of mockery, critique, or denial that seems to express agreement or approval. It functions as both a literary device and a figure of speech by assigning qualities to something that it lacks but arguably should have. The true meaning of irony frequently depends more on the surrounding context, tone of voice, and writing style than on the words themselves.

According to the Great Explanatory Dictionary of Modern Ukrainian Language, "irony is understood both as indirect sarcasm or mockery and as a stylistic device in which words convey opposite meanings to produce comic or critical effects" [2, p. 506].

In literary discourse, irony often serves to reveal underlying defects or contradictions by adopting an outwardly approving or neutral tone, thereby creating a double-layered interpretation. The challenge of interpreting irony lies in its subjectivity – it requires an evaluative position from the reader, who may either accept or reject the implied meaning. Irony functions as a subjective authorial code, shaped by the author's worldview, cultural background, and philosophical perspective in J.Barnes's novels. This subjectivity allows to provide multiple interpretations, making irony a crucial element of the postmodern aesthetic in his literary works.

The objects of ironic evaluation in Julian Barnes's works encompass a wide range of themes and social phenomena. These include youthful maximalism

and the teenager's desperate desire to transition into adulthood ("Metroland"); family relationships ("Metroland", "Staring at the Sun", "Love"); various aspects of friendship ("Metroland", "Love"); pseudo-heroes, pseudo-intellectuals, and individuals with limited spiritual depth ("A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters", "Arthur & George"); and the process of acquiring knowledge and studying history ("Flaubert's Parrot"), among other aspects of the real world.

The novel "Metroland" is structured as a memoir-like reflection, in which the protagonist recounts his process of self-formation, self-discovery, and search for meaning. This narrative framework enables the author to create a distanced perspective, allowing for ironic self-evaluation on the part of the narrator, both about his own youthful experiences and the idealism of youth in general.

The study of Julian Barnes's use of irony, specifically its linguistic and stylistic displays, requires an integrated approach, as irony typically arises from the interaction of various linguistic layers such as vocabulary, syntax, style, and textual structure.

J.Barnes's depiction of adolescence and personal growth in the novel "Metroland" is shaped by a set of defining characteristics, including maximalism, egocentrism, deep self-reflection, and a lack of knowledge and experience in relationships. Each of these traits is examined by the narrators of each part of the novel primarily through good-natured irony, as it reflects the mistakes and illusions of the characters' youth as they growing up, till the time they become adults. Many examples of irony in the novel shift the meaning to reframing the context to the points at which the narrators retrospectively reinterpret or reassess past experiences, often through an ironic lens that contributes to the novel's tone that deepens and explains the issues of maturity, self-perception, and the illusions of youth of the main characters.

The Cambridge English Dictionary interprets reframing as "the act of changing the way something is expressed or considered" [8]. In the context of text analysis from both literary and stylistic point of view, this implies a shift in perspective that allows characters and readers to reevaluate earlier experiences, often illuminating fresh interpretations or revealing the innocence of youth, an impact significantly intensified by the irony.

Further analyses of the novel justifies that irony as a tool for reframing the context in the novel "Metroland" serves to reconsider the situations the characters appear within the novel during the stages of their coming-of-age – a round character Christopher

“Chris” Lloyd and his friend Toni Barbarowski, a steadfast character who rejects societal norms and canons that makes him a complex character. Irony as a tool for reframing is used in dialogues and actions of both characters to show that they took different paths in their maturity following and not their adolescent ideals.

“We sipped our milk during break the next morning with the *habitual, affected disgust of gourmets* (you never knew, there might be someone watching)” [6, p. 72] – irony is embodied in lexical (a combination of type (A) N of (A) N, where the center of implementation of irony is the application of gourmets) and syntactic (insert words that help to detect ironic evaluation) means. It is also an example of reframing as the narrator mockingly reinterprets a childish action as a parody of adult sophistication. J.Barnes underlines that what was once performed with self-importance by Chris is now seen as performative and naïve.

“There was no ambiguity about the “they”. When I used it, it meant the *unidentified legislators, moralists, social luminaries and parents of outer suburbia*. When Toni used it, it meant their inner London equivalents. They were, *we had no doubt, exactly the same sort of people*” [6, p. 7] – the use of syntactic convergence with the chaotic combination of objects, inserting words and adverbs precisely, claiming the absolute expression, shows an ironic attitude to the generalization and maximalism appropriate to adolescents. As an example of reframing, it highlights how simple teenagers’ views are now seen through an ironic lens, exposing the limitations and immaturity of binary thinking.

“As you can see, we *worried about large things in those days* ... You wouldn’t have caught us fretting about our future careers, because we knew that by the time we were grown up, *the state would be paying people like us simply to exist*” [7, p. 8] – lexically depicted irony is displayed by contrast with the immediate context. The sentence shows the example of reframing, as J.Barnes contrasted youthful idealism with real-world concerns, suggesting the arrogance and impracticality of adolescent philosophy.

“Only a *strongly purifying motive* could explain how hard and how readily *Toni and I pissed on other people*” [6, p. 9] – the contrast between the theme and the rhetoric of expression, the phrase with the semantic center of purifying, the amplified adverb, strongly embodies the ironic meaning. In addition, the associative, concatenation of lexeme *purifies* (from a medical point of view) and piss (“to urinate”) is realized, which further enriches the ironical effect of the utterance. Reframing in the given example can

be explained as a self-justifying, almost high-flown explanation for the characters’ indifferent attitude. The phrase “purifying motive” is deliberately interrupted by the vulgar action – “pissed on other people” showing that the adult narrator Christopher Lloyd, being a grown-up person who has his own family, understands the inherent absurdity of life.

“Dewhurst was a prefect destined for the priesthood, whom Toni had, *we agreed, totally crushed in the course of a vicious metaphysical discussion*” [6, p. 11] – the choice of lexical means (the adverb *totally*, the adjective *vicious*) and the indication of the subject of the assessment of the situation (*we agreed*) express irony about youthful maximalism and the desire to assert itself. The phrase contains an example of reframing – Christopher Lloyd’s views that make teenagers (Chris and Toni) expectations crushed and dramatised by their entry into adulthood.

“Toni looked round the assistants and picked out *the most respectable-looking*: ageing, graying, separate collar, a thick margin of cuff, even a tie-pin. *Clearly a left-over from the previous ownership*” [6, p. 12] – the respectability of the seller is questioned by the introduction of a separate design with a comment on the origin of the stud in the tie. By placing a comment in a separate sentence the author underlines ironic effect of the utterance.

“My mother, though timid in her family and social life, was always precise and authoritarian at shops. *Some deep instinct told her that there was one hierarchy which would never be disturbed*. “A pair of trousers, Mr. Foster, please,” she asked in an unfamiliarly confident voice” [6, p. 15] – the ironical effect of the utterance, expressed syntactically, is displayed in the context in which the behavior of the hero’s mother in the family is described, and is improved by the phrase *unfamiliarly confident voice*.

“As we came out, I allowed the customary minute for us to get over *too-moved-to-speak reactions*” [6, p. 106] – authoritarian occasionalism is used to describe the characteristic emotions after watching the film and symbolizes the irony of the pathetic situation.

Sometimes the irony used by J. Barnes can be expressed grammatically: “But London was where you started from; and it was to London that, finally, *stuffed with wisdom, you returned*” [6, p. 69]. The use of a passive construction implies the existence of a person who must “fill” with knowledge, causing a comic effect and embodying the ironic comprehension of the process of gaining experience.

The frequent use of irony in the characters’ remarks reflects the author’s critical view of the limited knowledge and poor communication between

teenage boys and girls in 1963: "We'd absorbed the great classics of Indian literature (and, *as a result, practiced PT a lot more energetically for some months, with a heaving sense of anticipation*)" [6, p. 69] – irony is realized by insert words.

"The children of neighbours did amazing, incredible things, like joining Shell and being posted abroad, or soup in gup bangers, or going to dances on New Year's Eve. *The house equivalent of such disturbances was that my brother got a girlfriend*" [7, p. 69] – ironic meaning is expressed by contrast.

"Tits?" The final part of the triad, *the part to which we brought all our worldly perceptiveness*" [6, p. 73] – the irony is expressed by the attributive structure.

"Dear Chris, *I've ironed the bunting, put the flags to air, set a fuse to the Thames, laid in the red paint*. So you finally got them off 'laid down the burden of your virginity'" [6, p. 112] – the underlined exaggeration is used by the character to embody an ironic attitude towards his less experienced friend.

The use of semantically inappropriate vocabulary (e.g., *fingernails ... wrecked*), a series of emotionally charged epithets (including author's occasionalisms), and passive constructions, combined with a thorough and detailed depiction of the protagonist's physiological responses to nervousness, creates a distinctly ironic effect in describing his psychological state before his first date: "I would just have to get there early and use the *passionately-engrossed-in-a-book* trick. By the afternoon of our rendezvous, I was trembly, *two of my best fingernails were wrecked*, and my bladder had been filling up all day with the speed of a lavatory cistern. My hair was OK, my clothes, *after much self-debate, had been decided on*, my underpants were changed (again) after last-minute re-inspection, and I'd chosen *the book I wished to be discovered with*" [6, p. 103–104]. As an example of reframing, the author ironizes the character's nervous expectation before the date, turning what once felt important into a humorous recollection of awkwardness.

Irony in the language of the text is especially evident in how it depicts youthful aspirations, most notably, the desire to appear mature and independent, particularly to oneself. This effect is achieved through associative irony, using synonymous repetition and parallel sentence structures. The protagonist's self-assuredness, perceived maturity, and strong convictions are often exaggerated and gently undercut, reinforcing the overall ironic tone: "Deconning, as we called it, savouring the pun, was the duty of *every self-respecting adolescent*" [6, p. 40];

"Like *self-respecting maze-rats*, we looked for ways-out" [6, p. 59];

"*With a perspicacity beyond our years*" [6, p. 42];

"*Without in any way compromising our principles*, we agreed to carry on living at home" [6, p. 43];

"Life didn't really get under way until you left school; *we were mature enough* to acknowledge this point" [6, p. 44];

"The ritual objection was always worth registering. It never got anywhere, and I didn't mind that it didn't; I just felt that Nigel and Mary might benefit from *the example of independent thinking*" [6, p. 45];

"This was written *with the confidence of inexperience*" [6, p. 107].

The novel "A History of the World in 10½ Chapters" which is written in the genre of "historiographical metaphases", contains numerous examples of intertextual irony, the most prominent of which is the retelling of the biblical history of the World Flood. The story of the flood, as described by J. Barnes, is presented as an authoritative statement, which can be trusted no less than the Bible, as evidenced by the choice of linguistic material: "I feel it *my duty to record*; I can *vouch* for that. I spoke personally to the carrier-hawk; *My account you can trust; what point is there in not telling you the truth?* How would I be any judge? Again, *I'm reporting what the birds said and the birds could be trusted*; You don't have to believe me, of course; but *what do your own archives say?*" [7, p. 13–30].

The narrator keeps questioning the truth of the biblical story by offering his own variants of the key moments, each one noticeably different from the original. By doing this, J. Barnes reminds the readers that the Bible's version of events is just one way of telling the story: "Now I realize that *accounts* differ. Your species has its much repeated *version*; while the animals have *a compendium of sentimental myths*; *Nursery versions* in painted wood; You've always been *led to believe* that; Noah, *as you will have been told* many times, was a very God-fearing man; even the least subtle mind can decode that *particular euphemism*; *you've got some theory* to make sense of the gaps in animal kingdom; *Your sacred text informs you*; *In the version that has come down to you*" [7, p. 3–30].

The style chosen by the author of the novel is not immediately recognized as ironic. The irony unfolds gradually, revealing itself in comments and details.

An analysis of the linguistic mechanisms of irony in "Metroland" reveals a set of repeated structures used by the J. Barnes. These include:

– At the lexical level: the use of the author's occasionalisms, which contribute to the text's unique ironic tone: "But more often you found yourself noting extrinsic reactions, as a weary file of *name-*

*gloaters, school-sneezers, frame-freaks, color-grouers, restoration-loons and topographers trooped by. You got to know the quizzical chin-in-hand stance; the manly, combative, hands-on-hips square-up; the eyes-down-on-the-booklet position*" [6, p. 27];

– Occasionalisms expressing both the subject and a certain characteristic effect ironically reflect the intrinsic depth of the adolescents, scrupulous analysis, the search for authentic and genuine, sometimes giving rise to absurd nuances, and overly fixing the manifestations of the interaction of representatives of different social strata. "I tossed him *with a heard-it-before smile* "Yes, yes," he went on, *with a more-of-this-to-come look*" [6, p. 205] – authoritarian occasionalism which is taken in the form of circumstances *with*, ironically depicting some of the symbols of communicating people who do not sympathize with each other. The circumstances of the mode of action *with* are most often used to emphasize irony in an already ironical situation and create ironically painted details of an episode due to their structural features.

– At the syntactic level: 1) syntactic convergence (chaotic enumeration or convergence of homogeneous sentences with semantically heterogeneous terms) where the convergent is incompatible and thus achieves an ironic effect: "What, me, sneer at the Victorians? I didn't have enough sneer-room left. By the time I'd finished sneering *at dummos, prefects, masters, parents, my brother and sister, Third Division (North) football, Molière, God, the bourgeoisie and normal people*, I didn't have any strength left for more than a twisted pout at history" [6, p. 36] – irony increases with clarification in brackets (North) (besides chaotic enumeration).

"Life didn't really get under way until you left school; we were mature enough to acknowledge this point. When you did get out there, you started... *making Moral Decisions ... ..and Having Relationships ... ..and becoming famous ... ..and Choosing Your Own Clothes...*" [6, p. 44] – ironic meaning is embodied in restriction to one set of moral decisions and the choice of own clothes;

2) separate structures: "What do you want me to say?" I genuinely wanted to know; *almost*" [6, p. 164]; "Which gives us," I interpreted, 'eight years of sauciness, then a thirty-year wait, with a chance of being killed in the middle. *Terrific*'" [6, p. 55]; Life at sixteen was *wonderfully enclosed and balanced*. On one side, there was *the compulsion* of school, *hated*

*and enjoyed*. On the other side, the compulsion of home, *hated and enjoyed*" [6, p. 64] – the contrast between the choice of attribute (*wonderfully enclosed and balanced*), the subject (*the compulsion*), and the adjective (*hated*) is used for the expression of irony.

Parcelized constructions is used by the author for the expression of irony, since the breakdown of syntactic ties is already a mean of emotionally expressive allocation of the parceled part. In addition, parceling leads to the appearance of an additional remake of the statement, which is its communicative center and embodies the subjective-evaluated author's modality;

3) parenthetical constructions/insert words and sentences:

"Shocking this *knee/foot/liver* of mine, he would observe to Marion Other physical defects – *some long-standing like recurrent dreams, some the dragonfly fads of an afternoon* – prevented him from changing plugs, reaching high shelves, mending his clothes, washing up or seeing us off" [6, p. 191]. Insert/parenthetical constructions express an ironic attitude to the character of the hypochondria, which every ten minutes hurts each time elsewhere, which prevents him from doing his homework: "Some of the Arthur's infirmities, however, must have been genuine – though I wonder if he himself knew the difference – and ganged together to produce a fatal heart attack" [6, p. 192].

**Conclusions.** The analysis of Julian Barnes's "Metroland" demonstrates that irony serves as a tool for reframing and the structural foundation of the novel to show the changes of perspectives in different situations and different periods. It plays a key role in depicting how the characters grow and helps explore themes like coming-of-age, shifting identities, and the different ways people define happiness. By using irony as a tool for reframing, Julian Barnes helps to identify the real and different perspectives of the characters – Christopher and Toni by the way of choosing the words carefully to show the situation from another viewpoint.

The studied examples of subjective evaluation interconnect, reinforce, and reflect the author's artistic vision. In the novel irony functions as a narrative tool for reframing, exploring its contribution to the development of the novel's central themes, particularly those concerning identity, personal development, and the critique of cultural and ideological conventions.

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