

University of Miskolc

Ph.D. Programme in Literary Studies

Mariann Hortainé Sereg

PARODY AS AFFIRMATION:

The Role of Frigyes Karinthy's Parodies in Propagation of Poets and Writers of *Nyugat*

THESES

Miskolc

2013

I. The aims of the research

The pieces of Frigyes Karinthy's very popular book entitled *Így írtok ti (That's How You Write)* are widely considered to be the prototypes of parodies in Hungarian literature. In my dissertation I examine the question if parody, this essentially subversive and critical phenomenon can function as affirmation concerning literary canon.

The structure and significance of the book publication of *Így írtok ti* from 1912 have been studied by many researchers. First of all, they examined the omissions and discrepancies of the texts in relation to their first form of publication in *Fidibusz*, and this thesis contains a philologic-textologic comparison of the different editions of the work. The latter examination is also illustrative concerning the analysis of the texts and helps to understand the structural changes of the book.

We know that Karinthy began to write his parodies parallel to the start of *Nyugat*, but the periodical had nothing to do with the book, however, it played a role in the propagation of its poets and writers. The hypothesis of this work claims that the genre of parody is suited for affirmative effect in point of the parodied subject, which also determines its norm-conveying potential. Through the examination of the book's role, its contemporary reception and Frigyes Karinthy's position amongst the writers and poets of *Nyugat* were also key questions.

II. Methods and sources of the thesis

To approach the work of Karinthy and its significance we cannot avoid thinking about parody, and to define it we need to study its origins. I examined our ability to parody using the psychology of behaviour as it is a primal manner in everyday communication in the form of exaggerated imitation, in which I found the roots of the secondary nature of parody.

First of all, I searched for the origins of parody in the comic or humorous-satirical works of Greek and Roman literature, then I provided an overview about the role of comic genres, especially parody in the most significant concepts of aesthetics. In the course of showing these concepts I used the theories about humour and comedy to describe parody, but unfortunately this method was not satisfying, although it brought into focus some general points of the theory of the comic, but it analysed parody only partially. Then I gave a brief review of Margaret A. Rose's book, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, which traces the changes of the concept of parody from the beginnings to postmodern interpretations, and Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody*, which defines the concept of parody in a wider sense in the case of pieces of the 20th century art and literature. By

studying the social function of parody in different ages I used Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of laughter in the first place, and I found that the liberating laughter of carnival is also present in the case of parody, where the authorised transgress of norms takes place as well.

By perusing those parodic Hungarian authors who worked before Karinthy's era I aimed to exhibit the permanent characteristics of the genre through Hungarian examples and sketch the changes that happened to the definition of parody itself. My purpose also included collecting the biggest possible number of theoretical works dealing with humour in our literature, thus setting Karinthy's parodistic and theorizing work within the Hungarian tradition. We must take note that Karinthy himself was preoccupied with the concept of humour, and apart from his private notes he also published a surprising new theory in his essay *Nevetés (Laughter)*, which must be further analysed regarding the contents of *Így írtok ti*.

Frigyes Karinthy's first book is an open work in several sense of the word. Upon comparison it is conspicuous that the text corpus is constantly changing. There are two possible ways of dealing with this situation: by accepting the first publication of 1912 or the collection of 1928-9 based on the principle of *ultima editio* as 'the' main work, disregarding the future variants. Most often editors chose a third way by regarding all comical works of Karinthy as a part of *Így írtok ti*. In this dissertation the third option is analysed through comparing the different editions, but the analytical section is predominantly occupied with the publication of 1912, its reception and the situation its author was in. In the fourth chapter of my essay I examine the parodizing procedures in Karinthy's first publication, both in poems and prose. The question itself is no novelty, though, as Károly Szalay also compared some parodies in his monograph to find out what makes Karinthy's works more auspicious and relevant than others'. In the text analyses I strive to find the key to his success by separating the three different levels of parodies and identifying some parodic and poetic methods.

Several Hungarian authors have attempted to tone the relationship between Frigyes Karinthy and the *Nyugat*. Whilst discussing this I found it necessary to point out what the poet's own thoughts and beliefs were regarding the importance of literature and the purpose of art, as found in *Így írtok ti*. Through terms of marketing psychology the emergence of the *Nyugat* brand name and the exuberant popularity of *Így írtok ti* is elucidated. I traced the norm relaying and propagating property of Karinthy's parodies back to the intermediating and affirmative properties of the genre, the canon-forming editing of the book, the aligning to the *Nyugat's* propaganda and the unique position of the author and his book, being in and out of literature at the same time.

III. Results of the research, possible future usage

Subversion is the basic relation of a parody to its original. As a subversive phenomenon it is peripheral at the same time, too, as it is only marginally linked to solemnity and order, usually it cannot overcome it. The secondary function of parodies is very conspicuous, as it is no independent genre, being able to copy the form and characteristics of any genre at all. (Nonetheless, there are some solidified structures to take into consideration: for example, the parody of an epic is called a comic epic and is regarded a genre on its own.) But if it is not a genre, according to the technicistic approach we can still regard it as a method, whereas the humanistic approach considers it a habit or an attitude towards a work of art. It can be defined as a hyperbolic or ironic repetition of a procedure, method or form of an original piece. A parody is hyperbolic as it is up to the reader to recognise the nomination. It can only be regarded a grammatical-logical conformation if the readers notice the similarities and differences between the opus and the parody – but if the differences go unnoticed, it remains innominate and is not read as a parody. A parody as a habit is the recreation of an original piece with the distinct purpose of ridicule, criticising, paying homage, or any other reasons. The difficulty of this approach is that one can only grasp the parodic habit by assumption.

By investigating the genre's origin I could trace it back to the formal elements of ancient comedies, whereas in poetry it shows similarities with iambic pentameters and satires. But the closest to today's definition of parody are the mythic or epic comedies (where there is a sharp contrast between the majestic and the commonplace) and works mocking a real person (there are few examples left of this). Although the portrayal of these types is also a stylistic parody in itself, it belongs to the broader definition of the concept. It is remarkable for it shows an important phase of writing a parody: upon portraying a character the author highlights and exaggerates characteristic points, the same way it is done in parodizing a work of art or a writer. In the antique parodies there is a clear thematic division between those depicting slices of life and society and those mimicking a piece of literature or a style, the latter of which are called parodies in the strict sense of the word. Based on their purpose we can distinguish entertaining and criticizing comical pieces of literature, both gestures prevailing in today's concept of parody. By analysing the social background we were led to believe that the free democracy favoured parodies; a facade of freedom facilitated stereotypes and insinuations (*fabula palliata*); whereas in a despotism only hidden criticism could prevail.

Frigyes Karinthy's parodies are not unprecedented in Hungarian literature, as their author must have been familiar with the facetious works of Mihály Csokonai Vitéz or János Arany, and sources indicate that Viktor Rákosi, Marcel Proust and Stephen Leacock also influenced his work. In

this essay I analysed the humorous newspapers of the 19th century as Karinthy's predecessors, as they had paved the writer's way to publishing in the *Fidibusz* by creating different types of parodies and elaborated viable forms of travesty and parody. In the chapter dealing with Hungarian literature such Hungarian writers are also discussed, who had dealt with parodies, the most important of which are the study of Ferenc Kölcsey *A leányőrző* published in 1827 and the extensive work of István Szigetvári from 1911 called *A komikum elmélete (Theory of Humour)*.

During the textological comparison of the different editions of *Így írtok ti* I contrasted the earlier editions with the latter ones, which strived for completion, morality and popularity. The applied editorial principles in these works were also contrasted with each other. I found that the publication of 1912 has a different composition than the frame story of those previously published in *Fidibusz*; also forming a transition between press releases and his latter publications based on how well-layered their fictional space was. The portray of a novice writer in the serial publications entitled *Egy kezdő író vázlatkönyvéből (From the Notebook of a Novice Writer)* was overshadowed in the published tomes, and due to the paratext its interpretation is more of a fictional anthology. This process can be observed in latter publications, too, from which the 'novice writer' had been completely eliminated and the works rearranged to an alphabetical order within the subgenres, thus disrupting the flow of fiction. The emphasis shifted from the original fictional space to favour a style much like an anthology in the case of *Így írtok ti*, too – a tendency which had been started by the author himself in 1921 in the new, augmented editions. At the same time, the arbitrary work of the editors and the disruption of the original structure within the volume removed that exciting layered composition of meaning which have been reintroduced in the newest publications (Matúra, facsimiles).

Karinthy's works are open not only because their texts have been constantly changing, but also because their genre cannot be unequivocally categorized. The author called his own works 'literary distortions and caricatures', which draw upon the traditions of travesty, parody pastiche and satires, as well as from the humorous newspapers popular in the turn of the century. Thus I distinguished four categories in case of *Így írtok ti*: the parodies of a style or genre and travesties are rather seen as methods or procedures, while other writings showed generic traits of satires and humoresques.

Whilst analysing Karinthy's parodizing strategies on a poetic-stylistic level my criterion for grouping was whether the elements from the original pieces were hoisted, imitated or referenced. In parodies the thematic characteristics are important for prompting reader recognition; all the poems, dramas and prose stories remodelled a well-known work or topic. In most cases we can find the

themes and motifs fully imported, which in most cases do not remain unchanged, their trans-contextualization is the parody's main motif or punch line. There are parodic elements among the gags on a thematic level which strive to convey the purpose of the author as well as regard the reactions and taste of their audience, whereas at many times the parodizing of poetic-stylistic elements cannot be separated from the other two layers, as they can turn into the topic and a referential gag at the same time. *Explicitatio* is the term I used to define how a parody can make the predictability and desired effects of the literary pieces apparent. In case of parodizing dramas the author's instructions provided a great source of theatrical clichés, dramatic plot twists, characterization and stage effects to show.

I found the different methods of parodizing capable of conveying the writer's sympathy or the lack thereof. This was based on a single phenomenon: the closure often brings forth a shift in layers, meaning that after a longer imitation of a certain style the biographically referential punchline is introduced to spotlight the parodized character and reveal a flaw of theirs. The identification of these personal jabs was aggravated by the difference in how the lyrical and prosaic pieces constituted their interlocutors. There is a very strong presence of a lyrical subjects (as it is well-rooted in romanticism in the first generation of the *Nyugat*), which can be exploited in parodies by the interlocutors unveiling their human or artistic behaviour themselves. In prose the interlocutors are a bit different, the presence of the author is more latent and hidden, and the jokes referring to him are delivered by the characters. The parodies of Mikszáth and Eötvös are different as they belong to an older, more conservative line of narrative attitude, where the personal, anecdotizing and yarn-spinning presence is over-exaggerated by the parody, which were considered outdated and outworn at the *Nyugat*'s time.

Generally we believe that a parody can only work if readers have previous knowledge about the parodized piece, so that they can find the well-known original features exaggerated, twisted and trans-contextualized in the parody. But such a writing can convey information of an unknown author, as it is two texts in one: on its own distorted way it carries knowledge from the original piece, so even an unexperienced reader can recognise a certain author's characteristic topics, find the exaggerated features and lead by the adjectives used on the contents page they can form a mental picture of the author. Owing to this duality in information relaying both experts and less informed laymen can enjoy the piece.

In the last chapter I investigated the position Karinthy held in the *Nyugat* and the reception of his work, *Így írtok ti*. Karinthy became famous for his parodies and sketches, but at the *Nyugat* he was a critic and columnist, which duality offers an exciting and untapped aspect regarding his

writings – the portrayal of which exceeded the scope of this essay. Behind the *Nyugat* distancing itself from the tome and some of Kosztolányi's critical remarks we get a glimpse of a clash between elitist and popular literature, which could provide an intriguing line of research in the popular and successful Karinthy's case.

The analysis of how the *Nyugat* became a brand by adapting terms and methods from marketing psychology shows that the *Nyugat* not only became a brand name but also that it could be considered a kind of corporate identity, which used advertising (adverts, special editions), sponsoring (*Nyugat* as a publisher) and PR activity (meetings with the authors, matinés, conferences) as to consciously form and keep up an image of itself. Although it was not meant to be a piece of propaganda, *Így írtok ti* soon became a brand name in itself, and thus it could be utilized in the propaganda as well.

The significance of the norm-conveying effect in *Így írtok ti* is that it could popularize its characters in a much wider range of reader through a peripheral instrument of literature, the parody. This affirmative effect of Karinthy's parodies is based on several factors. Partly it is due to the information-conveying role of the genre, through which the recipients could get acquainted with authors they did not know of beforehand. On the other hand there are Karinthy's unique parodic and poetic processes which could convey sympathy and dislike (for the benefit of the *Nyugat*) through layer-skipping, biographical and referencing gags. Thirdly, this whole process is amplified by the literary standing and prestige the tome possesses, which is somewhere between 'the professionals' and the laymen. *Így írtok ti* portrays how literature works from the inside and outside at the same time, revealing not only the manners of the writers and how writing commences but also the reading habits of the audience and literature as an institution. The result of this is a difficult question: what is art and what is literature if the individual style can be predicted and copied, and the readers' reactions planned?

The multiple paradox of *Így írtok ti* arose from its instant, vast popularity and that it familiarized and endeared a genre less prized for high literature. The popularity of the parodies connected with the fame of the *Nyugat* contributed to this end as well: despite the fact that the young author's art philosophy differed substantially from the views of the *Nyugat* and the tome questioned literature functioning as literature, the parody collection propagated not only the writer, but also the genre, the *Nyugat* and literature as a whole to become more well-known.

IV. The scientific studies in the topic of the dissertation

András KAPPANYOS, Mariann SEREG, *Fordítható-e a paródia? = Docendo discimus: Doktoranduszhallgatók és témavezetőik közös tanulmányai a Miskolci Egyetem Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskolájából*, Miskolci Egyetem Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskolája, Miskolc, 2013, 78–102.

Az Így írtok ti *szövegeinek textológiai vizsgálata*, Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, (5)2012, 554–569.

Az Így írtok ti *fikciós teréről*, Irodalomismeret, (2)2011, 53–63.

(Online verzió: <http://irodalomismeret.hu/linkek/106>)

Poétikai, tematikai és biográfiai szintek az Így írtok ti költő-paródiáiban, Literatura, (3)2010, 258–268.

Parodisztikus típusalkotás: az Így írtok ti előzményei a 19. századi vicclapokban, Miskolc, ME, 2010 (Doktoranduszok Fóruma szekciókiadványa), 71–75.

Az Így írtok ti *szövegeinek textológiai vizsgálata*, Miskolc, ME, 2009 (Doktoranduszok Fóruma szekciókiadványa), 17–21.

A paródia születése, Miskolc, ME, 2008 (Doktoranduszok Fóruma szekciókiadványa), 61–65.