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**REPÈRES IDENTITAIRES EN CONTEXTE**  
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## GRAMMATICAL AMBIGUITIES IN REALIZING HUMOUR

Mădălina CERBAN\*  
Georgiana REISS\*

***Abstract:** Language is mostly used for serious business, but it can also be source of amusement. We use it to be funny, to be witty. Most people use a lot of colloquialisms for a start, funny idioms and other linguistic constructions that create comic situations. The humour and the play are part of normal language use. There are only a few situations where they are excluded, for example business letters. Interpreting a sentence involves taking each word to be a certain part of speech (for instance, noun or verb) and assigning some kind of structure to the sequence. However, it can happen that a certain sequence of nouns, verbs or other parts of speech can be assigned more than one structure, and the would-be comedian will immediately exploit this. In this paper we analyse the grammatical ambiguities as a source of humour. The paper discusses the morphological structures formed with the help of nouns and verbs, the suffix -s, the -ing forms of the verb, pronouns and their references and syntactic structures such as -ing clauses, coordination, and also the scope of these ambiguous structures.*

***Keywords:** humour, grammatical ambiguities, scope*

### I. Introduction

Humour is a widely attested aspect of human social communication. Because the point of language is initially to communicate successfully with other speakers, it is obvious that the ability to appreciate and to engage in humour is part of human language behaviour. Theories of humour do not tend to respect disciplinary boundaries, though writers often address themselves to the concerns of disciplinarily-restricted audiences. Moreover, no particular theory or disciplinary perspective seems to have been completely successful, and in fact many consider that a single, simple theory of humour is impossible. It would seem that all these theories and approaches have their own useful perspectives, none of them monopolizes the truth. This is the generally accepted view.

The use of humour is a complex and intriguing aspect of human behaviour, and the use of humour is highly valued in interactions between people. Studies on humour or what makes people laugh are countless. Over the centuries, writers of diverse interests have attempted to define it.

As an aesthetic category, humour is subtle, evasive, and extremely difficult to describe. Descriptions of humour are variable from analyst to analyst. Nevertheless, humour, like music, must surely have some underlying fundamental principles. Humour, in particular linguistic humour, presupposes a highly developed intellect and can only exist within the framework of specific sociolinguistic conditions, the most important among these being a love for the mother tongue and the aesthetic pleasure derived from its use.

Generally, the humour can be divided into situational humour and linguistic humour. In this paper we are concerned of linguistic humour, discussing the parts of speech that can create certain grammatical ambiguities at the level of humour, and the scope this humour structures affect.

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## II. Grammatical ambiguities

### II.1. Grammatical structures

There are several types of grammatical constructions that can lead to grammatical ambiguities and, as a result, to humorous situations. The first aspect is related to the parts of speech that can have the same form, for instance, noun or verb, and be assigned some kind of structure to the sequence. However, it can happen that a certain sequence of nouns, adjectives, verbs can be assigned more than one structure, and the speaker could exploit this.

For example, the word *free* can function both as adjective (e.g. *free people*) or as a verb (e.g. *Free the animals!*). This ambivalence can lead to humour, as in a sequence such as *free agents* where the word *free* can be interpreted both as an adjective as well as a verb.

#### II.1.1 Nouns and verbs

The most common parts of speech that can be confused are those which have the same form as nouns and verbs. For example, *run* can be verb as in *I will run to school* or a noun as in *I will go for a run*. In normal English, determiners like *the* or *a* indicate the presence of a following noun, and auxiliary verbs such as *will* or *may* indicate the presence of a following verb, but these clues are generally omitted in headlines or advertisements. Sometimes inflections help sort out whether a word is a noun or a verb. However, in our example, *-s* or *-es* can mark the plural of nouns (*He made many runs*) or occur with verbs (*He runs*), so it is no help.

#### II.1.2 suffix -s

Suffix *-s* is used when forming the plural of the nouns and the present tense simple for the third person singular. In some cases, inflections help sort out whether a word is a noun or a verb (*-ed* for past tenses) but in the following example there is no hint about the role of the suffix:

e.g. *Ford exports rocket.*

*Export* can be a noun or a verb, and the *-s* on the end is no help in determining which it is, and *rocket* can also be a noun or a verb. If *export* is a verb, that means Ford is exporting a rocket. If *rocket* is the verb, that means Ford exports have increased a lot. Probably the latter interpretation is correct, but the sentence is nevertheless ambiguous.

Ambiguities are often encountered in headlines due to their typical elliptical construction. In an example such as *Man wanted to kill the king*, there are two interpretations of the infinitive. Firstly, the infinitive functions as an adverbial of purpose (it was the man's intention to kill the king), and in the second case, the infinitive functions as an adverbial of reason (the man had already killed the king and this is why he is wanted).

#### II.1.3 -ing forms

The *-ing* form of a verb is useful to make up jokes. A word like *singing*, for instance, can be a participle of the verb *sing* and take an object (*singing a song*) or it can be an adjective and qualify a noun (*singing bird*). This means that sequences of *-ing* forms plus a following noun can provide further ambiguities.

e.g. *Do you like bathing beauties?'*

*'I don't know. I've never bathed any.'*

#### II.1.4. *-ing clauses*

In a sentence like: *Flying over the plain, we saw a flock of geese*, we assume that the subject of the *-ing* form is *we*, but if we put the constituent at the end of the sentence, the construction becomes ambiguous: *We saw a flock of geese flying over the plain*. It is not clear if *we* fly or the geese fly.

#### II.1.5. *Coordination*

When nouns are joined by *and*, it is not always clear exactly what Noun phrases are co-ordinated:

e.g. *I saw a woman carrying a baby and a doorman.*

*The defendant was accompanied to the court by his brother and his girlfriend.*

In the first example, we don't know if *doorman* is coordinated with the woman or with the baby, and in the second example, we don't know whose girlfriend the woman is.

Sometimes, the nouns are preceded by adjectives which can create ambiguity:

e.g. *Low prices and services*

#### II.1.6. *Missing subjects and objects*

The abbreviated language of headlines, advertisements, particularly classified ads, recipes and instructions accompanying medicine provide ample scope for ambiguity caused by missing subjects and objects. In the first example it is a question of whether *flies* is the subject of the second sentence or whether the subject is missing.

e.g. *Minister for the Environment delighted. Flies to wed.*

#### II.1.7. *Pronouns and reference problems*

Some jokes are based on the fact that pronouns have variable reference and on the fact that one can sometimes select an unlikely noun for the referent. Consider the advertisement that reads *Once people see our watches / They are sold*. What does *they* refer to? It could be the *watches*, but it could be *people*. The ambiguity is obvious and is designed to capture the attention of whoever reads the ad. Another joke refers to a story about an announcement at the beginning of a mothers' club meeting that read: *For those who have children and don't know it, there's a changing room at the end of the corridor*.

Like no other pronoun, the pronoun *it* offers more scope for ambiguity than any other:

e.g. *Mother, I've just found out that my fiancé has a wooden leg. Do you think I should break it off?*

Sometimes nouns are used in a context where they could be referring to one person or a class of persons. In the first example below 'a man' could, in theory, refer to one particular man or to a series of different men.

e.g. *A: There's a report in the paper here that in New York a man is mugged every three hours.*

*B: But after the first mugging he would have nothing left.*

*Father: I think it is time you took a wife.*

*Son: Whose wife should I take?*

One famous joke involves the ambiguity of the pronoun *one*. It has the form of a riddle and the listener is misled until the very end.

e.g. *What is the subject of the following statements?*

*George Bush has a short one.*

*Arnold Schwarzenegger has a big one.*

*The Pope has one, but he doesn't use it.*

*Cher doesn't have one at all.*

*What is it?*

*A second name.*

Nouns such as *king*, *queen*, *mayor* and *minister* can refer to anyone holding the office. When the President of Soviet Union died in the 80's, another president was elected and when he died a short while after, a paper ran the headline *The President dies again*.

## II.2. Scope

Every simple sentence in the English language must contain a Noun phrase functioning as a Subject and a Finite Verb that fulfils the function of Predicate. Apart from these main parts, a sentence may also contain objects and circumstances indicating time, place, manner, cause, purpose and so on. It is not always clear what the scope of these constituents and phrases is. For example, the following examples are ambiguous and they are syntactically analysed in different ways:

e.g. *Sam managed to touch the man with umbrella.*

It is a question regarding the scope of the Noun phrase *with umbrella* due to the ambiguity of the sentence as we don't know if Sam touched the man with the umbrella or if the man was carrying the umbrella. Other examples of jokes using syntactic ambiguities are:

e.g. *'May I try on that dress in the window?'*

*'Wouldn't you be more comfortable in the fitting room?' replied the shop assistant.*

*'Did I ever tell you about the time I shot an elephant in my pyjamas? How he got into my pyjamas I'll never know.'*

Here the phrase 'in my pyjamas' should go with 'I', but it is placed at the end of the sentence and therefore looks as if it goes with 'elephant'.

In some cases, the location is the source of ambiguity:

e.g. *Where did you feel the pain?*

*In the kitchen.*

## Conclusions

In this paper we have discussed several types of realization of verbal humour that are representative for the general semantic and pragmatic characteristics of humour, paying attention to the parts of speech and grammatical constructions which can create ambiguities, one of the major sources of humour. We can conclude that, voluntarily or not, grammatical ambiguities are an endless source of humour, and they are quite common especially in headlines, abbreviated text of ads, particularly classified ads.

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## **IRONY AND HUMOUR IN “THREE MEN IN A BOAT”. APPROACHES TO ROMANIAN TRANSLATIONS**

**Adela DUMITRESCU\***

**Abstract:** *Literature on humour and translation reveals that an attention should be given to produce academic studies problematizing the issue of humour translation. Having been inspired by the research in the academic studies, my paper aims to provide a systematic analysis of both humorous devices and their translations.*

**Keywords:** *humour translation, humorous devices, humorous effect, irony*

The purpose of this paper is to analyse some of the strategies developed by the translators to recreate humorous effect in the target text. In addition to this main target, this study will also try to provide different humorous devices for translation. The fact that different humorous devices require different methods for evaluation and translation, involves the classification into more specific types with their own idiosyncratic features. For this purpose, the paper will deal with the linguistic analyses of the humorous devices based on irony, wordplay and metaphor. The translation strategies will be evaluated in order to recreate the humorous effect in the source text, taking into account transference process between different languages and cultures.

The corpus has been chosen in accordance with this purpose: Jerome K. Jerome' world famous novel, *Three Men in a Boat*, has been written in 1889 and this novel is rich in different types of humor, including irony, wordplay and metaphor-based humor.

The popularity of the novel throughout the world and its rich content has transformed it into a productive elementary source text. The novel could be an interesting source for evaluation of the humorous translations because of the versions in the Romanian literary system. Here are some of the Romanians Translations of the novel:

- Levițchi, Leon (1967), *Trei într-o barcă (fără a mai socoti și câinele)*, Editura Tineretului, București
- Decei, Lia (2004), *Trei într-o barcă (fără a mai socoti și câinele)*, Leda, Corint, București
- Berbeceanu, Alina Loredana (2014), *Trei într-o barcă fără a mai socoti și câinele*, MondoRo, București

We have selected the first and the third translation to be analyzed in this paper because we found the most significant differences between the two variants. The first translation was published in 1967 by the famous translator, Leon Levițchi and the latter chosen, by Alina Berbeceanu in 2014.

The selection of translations enables us through their analysis to contribute to the development of translation theories regarding the rendering of humour in another language. With this research we can provide the kinds of tendencies translators have in translating culture and language specific humorous devices into English. The analyses offer the lexical choices, grammatical constructions and the contexts created by the

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translators and will be studied as they have a strong consequence on the translated texts. The strategies adopted by translators can enable us to reflect on other aspects such as:

- translator's competence to interpret the humorous content,
- translatable or untranslatable elements,
- the translated versions according to the target culture conventions and target reader expectations.

Before presenting the comparison of the translations of humorous devices in the novel, a brief summary related to the field of humour translation, both in Romania and other countries, would be beneficial in order to present the current condition of the relevant academic research.

*The Translator* (2002) made a special issue entitled *Translating Humour* under the editorship of Jeroen Vandaele, who has brought important contributions to understanding the conceptual complexity of defining humour and offered practice-oriented tools for analyzing source text meanings (Vandaele, 2002:169). This issue presents different types of "humorous effect" through some cultural and linguistic analyses. These publications introduced new analytical tools to be adopted in translating humorous texts and also comparing them with their source texts. Thus, translators were provided with some useful tools that have in terms of grasping and rendering the "humorous effect" of a source text by devising strategies helping to rebuild similar or comparable effects in the target text.

In May 2003, a workshop to Humour and Translation was held at the University of Bologna dedicated (Chiaro, 2005, p. 140). According to him, the researchers emphasized the importance of touching upon different viewpoints regarding the cross-cultural transfer of humorous texts unlike the previous attempts that focused simply on the descriptive aspects of the translation process and product. (Chiaro, 2005:141). Scholars started to study the perception of humour translation, which will provide useful tools to test similarities and differences in the responses of the target audience to the verbal humorous stimuli in texts.

Apart from the above-mentioned academic studies, it should also be mentioned that the only academic study carried out on the translation of humorous devices in the novel was presented by Veronika Steidlova in a MA thesis titled "Humour in Czech Translations in of *Three Men in a Boat*" (Steidlova, 2010). Steidlova deals with the problem of "untranslability" of humorous elements by focusing on the main humorous devices adopted by the author. Her study clarifies the possible reasons why translating humour into another language can be difficult, her explanations and results regarding the strategies of the translators are not based upon a theoretical framework. In addition, most of her remarks include descriptive analyses of translator's decisions without mentioning their direct consequence upon the translation of humorous effect in the target language.

Before investigating the stylistic features of *Three Men in a Boat*, I would like to talk about the general characteristics of Jerome's humor. There is a recurring phrase used by the author which expresses the idea behind his humor: "pity is akin to love".

Jerome style has been called "the new humor" characterized with its casual and simple style, as our author tends to use contractions to a great extent in all of his writings. (Markgraf, 1983: 83).

What is new about the Jerome's humor, it's the fact that he introduces a very fresh and modern style which "has none of the tiresome convolutions associated with many such Victorian novels", focusing mostly on the ordinary things in life, and presenting them in a simpler manner (Fowler, 2014, p. 16). In his humorous paragraphs,

he prefers to use a clear and informal language, decorated with some excessive details in order to “turn mundane experiences into comedy” (Lind, 2014: 25-27).

*Three Men in a Boat* uses different types of humorous devices, irony has the highest importance in rendering the humorous discourse of the novel. If we analyze the whole writing, we will find out that irony plays a leading role in the representation of the humorous tone. Jerome’s irony is mostly related to the hypocrisy of certain social conventions, the pretensions of the middle and upper classes as well as the characters in the novel.

Jerome also makes use of metaphorical devices in order to create a comic effect. In his sarcastic remarks about a person or event, Jerome especially uses idioms, similes, personification and hyperbole to transform ordinary situations into comic experiences. Thus, our author humour is built by ambiguities created on lexical and syntactic levels. Another device used by Jerome is wordplay in order to create humour by causing misunderstandings or misinterpretations on the part of the audience. (Steidlova, 2010: 57).

The challenges caused by humorous texts in the translation process involves different factors, which is briefly mentioned by Dirk Delabastita in the following statements. He tries to clarify the main reasons for the difficulty of translating humorous texts:

[...] the translation of a playful text confronts the translator with the unique semantic structure not just of a text but of a language as well. Wordplay can therefore be seen as a kind of signature, epitomizing, each language’s unique individuality and therefore quite naturally resisting translation –but at the same time calling for the authenticating gesture of translation as a counter signature in another language. (Delabastita, 1996:13).

What he wants to mention is the fact that humorous elements are difficult to render in another language, coming from their culture and specific nature of language. Thus, the translator of humour has to be aware of the fact that humorous elements of a language are mostly group or culture particularities, which require a shared knowledge between the sender and receiver for the humorous content to be understood. The culture in which the humorous elements are produced determines which humorous equivalents is appropriate in a given context.

It is a known the fact that translation’s choices are affected by textual and extra-textual concerns, bringing forth the significance of the familiarity with the cultural and social context of the source and target languages (Popa, 2004, p. 154).

Translators have an important role in the process of rendering humour into other languages because they affect both the perception of humour and the audience’ response in various ways. They have a significant impact upon this transfer process. For this reason, it is of high importance to enter into their personal world that gives us some idea regarding their personality, knowledge, worldview, background, education, ideology, etc. In other words, the reproduction of humour in another language depends on many variables related to the translators, ranging from their personality to the sense of humour they have.

The deviations of registers with regard to the incongruity between the context of the situation and the language used represent an example of irony. In one of these digressions, for instance, J. talks about an anecdote related to a woman’s request to keep the cheese for him that smells awfully. In his answer, it is possible to recognize the humour caused by the overstatement in his language.



“Madam,” I replied “for myself I like the smell of cheese and the journey the other day with them from Liverpool I shall ever look back upon a happy ending to a pleasant holiday. But in this world, we must consider others. The lady under whose roof I have the honor of residing is widow, and, for all I know was possibly an orphan too. She has a strong, I may say an eloquent, objection to being what she terms “put upon”. The presence of your husband in her house she would, I instinctively feel, regard as a “put upon” and it shall never be said that I put upon the widow and the orphan.” (p.14).

T1 “– Doamnă, am răspuns eu, mie, unuia, îmi place mirosul de brânză. Și de la călătoria pe care am făcut-o cu brânza de la Liverpool la Londra, mai zilele trecute, îmi voi aminti totdeauna ca de un final plăcut. Totuși, în lumea asta trebuie să ținem seama și de ceilalți. Doamna sub al cărei acoperiș am cinstea să locuiesc e văduvă și, după câte știu, s-ar putea să fie și orfană. Dumneaei se împotrivesc cu vehemență – așa zice chiar cu elocvență, oricărei tentative de a i se impune ceva, cum spune dânsa. Îmi dau seama instinctiv că prezența brânzei în casa ei ar socoti-o o astfel de « impunere » ; și nu trebuie să se spună despre mine niciodată că am căutat să jignesc o văduvă și o orfană”. (p.60)

T2 “– Doamnă, i-am răspuns, mie unul îmi place mirosul de brânză, iar de călătoria de zilele trecute de la Liverpool îmi voi aminti mereu ca de un final fericit la finalul unei vacanțe plăcute, însă trebuie să ne gândim și la alții pe lume. Doamna sub al cărei acoperiș am onoarea să locuiesc este văduvă și, din câte știu, se prea poate să fie și orfană. Ea se împotrivesc cu tărie, așa zice chiar cu elocvență, oricărei încercări de « a i se impune ceva », cum se exprimă ea însăși. Intuiesc că ar privi prezența brânzei ca pe «ceva impus», iar eu nu voi fi acuzat niciodată că i-am impus ceva unei văduve sau unei orfane.” (p42)

Humour depends very much on the structural features of the language which has a great importance in the process of translation. In the Romanian versions, the translator in T2 does not pay attention to reflect the language variety of the source text and instead produces a freer version in Romanian. Thus, the seriousness of the problem of maintaining cheese at a woman’s house becomes less important because of the simplicity of the language. The first version T1 is closer to the formal language of the source text. The translator uses the polite pronoun “Dumneaei” which is obvious more formal than the personal “Ea” from the second version. Both translations follow the formal structure of the expression “The lady under whose roof I have the honor of residing...” as close as possible: “Doamna sub al cărei acoperiș am cinstea să locuiesc...” (T1) , “Doamna sub al cărei acoperiș am onoarea să locuiesc...”.

In order to create a comic effect in the novel, Jerome uses irony as we could see in the previous example and also metaphorical devices such as: idioms, similes, personification and hyperbole to turn down ordinary experiences into comic situations. Both the metaphorical and humorous expressions rely on the notion of duality and opposition (Kyratzis, 2003, p. 15).

Metaphor may create some problems when rendered in another language because “another language means another cultural and value system” (Dobrzynska, 1995, p. 595-596). Personification is also another important figure of speech through which metaphorical expressions are constructed together with the personified similes that increase the overall humorous effect of the novel. If the likened image does not have similarity with that of the compared object, it creates a humorous effect. In the following example the year is likened to a young maid.

It was a glorious morning, late spring or early summer, as you care to take it, when the dainty sheen of grass and leaf is blushing to a deeper green; and the year seems like a fair young maid, trembling with strange, weakening pulses on the brink of womanhood.” (p.48)

T1 Era o dimineață minunată, pe la sfârșitul primăverii sau începutul verii, cum vreți să-i spuneți, când nuanțele gingașe ale ierbii și frunzelor se preschimbă într-un verde mai compact, iar anul seamănă cu o fată tânără și frumoasă care, în pargul feminității, simte primii fiori, nelămuriți și vestitori de viață nouă. (p.86)

T2 Era o dimineață minunată, ca la sfârșit de primăvară sau, dacă vreți, început de vară, când frumoasa sclipire a ierbii și a frunzelor capătă un verde mai intens, iar anul pare o frumoasă domniță ce, aflată în pragul feminității, vibrează din pricina unor stranii fiori care o trezesc la viață. (p. 62)

Analyzing the fragment, it can be evaluated as humorous as it comprises a simile that compares the year (or the earth) to a young maid who trembles with strange pulses that wakens her up. It is obvious that the author resorts to the narrative strategy of false analogy in order to create a comic effect.

Translators generally tried to render the sense of humour and irony into the target language even if the cultural referents in some jokes made it impossible to create a similar humorous effect in the target text. Translators can evaluate how different the target humour is from the source humour and adapt their translation strategies accordingly.

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## HOWLERS IN TRANSLATION

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**Abstract:** *The present paper is meant as a continuation of several previous papers that illustrated and analyzed the career of (recent) anglicisms in Romanian, and the place held by calque and clichés, etc., specifically in as far as they occur in translation (i.e. texts that, avowedly or not, were the result of translation). Far from advocating prescriptivism or linguistic purism, the author of this paper observes that correctness is a matter of efficiency and opportuneness in the act of communication, and one of its many manifestations is of course translation. Although nowadays the contrast between the prescriptive and the descriptive approach tends to be over-emphasized, and the public at large as well as most experts in linguistics typically resent severe prescriptivism, the long linguistic tradition of language cultivation (or linguistic ecology) still claims its rightful place. The following general remarks about linguistic standardization, linguistic norms, prescriptivism (vs. descriptivism and relativistic laxity) highlight the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity in standardization; yet the functional structure of a system, such as language, manifests itself objectively – which is naturally and essentially opposed to relativization. The main topic of the paper, the howlers in translation (from English to Romanian), gave us the opportunity for remarks about, and illustrations of, the opposition between technical terms and denotative anglicisms, on one hand, and connotative terms and unacceptable usage or downright solecisms, on the other hand – implying false friends, calque, clichés, etc. – with some (literary) translators providing simplistic, poor-quality renderings, in which instances of incredible howlers are in plenty.*

**Keywords:** *Anglicism, calque, translation, correctness, prescriptive vs. descriptive, howler.*

**1. Introduction.** This paper is by no means a plea for prescriptivism or linguistic purism. The author is an avowed votary of tolerance in matters of standardization. On the other hand, simple linguistic reality faces us with obvious cases of usage that is incorrect, inconsistent or illogical in view of the overall functionality and systematics of the linguistic code (i.e. natural language) in question – and, as such, are censurable. And one of the most evident manifestations of the need for *correctness* (meaning the efficiency and the opportune character of the act of communication) is translation; it is in translation that the language levels – semantic, grammatical, stylistic – should felicitously combine to create the general meaning of the interlinguistic (and inter-cultural) rendering.

In (both academic and “informal”) linguistics, the contrast between the prescriptive and the descriptive approach is often unduly emphasized or extrapolated. Moreover, in this country (very much as in most other Eastern European nations) the linguistic tradition of *language / speech culture*, or *cultivation* of language, also called *linguistic ecology*, is still strong and respectable. That is why both the public and most experts in the field typically resent severe, intolerant prescriptivism, preferring (descriptive) tolerance, nay even laxity – cf. also the situation in English-speaking nations.

**2. A few general remarks about linguistic standardization, linguistic norms, prescriptivism vs. descriptivism, and relativistic laxity.** In the name of *objectivity* and *impartiality*, when it comes to *standardization*, undue emphasis seems to be placed,

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quite visibly and somewhat obsessively, on such topics as *idea*, *concept*, *image*, *construct* (hence on *subjectivity*) – rather than reality itself. Everything tends to be shifted into the area of *myth* and *concept* or *conceptualization* (that is, something built / *construed* – something that should therefore require or even impose *deconstruction*).

On the contrary, the (functional) structure of a system – such as language – acts / manifests itself / works in an *objective* manner (cf. Saussure's theory, which held that *structure* is defined as a system that functions according to a set of laws – as he defined language as a system of signs, whose elements establish certain relations among them). That systematic character is something provable and demonstrable, no less provable and demonstrable than the fact that a system is based on traceable, detectable, analyzable – and therefore scientifically *provable* – facts / items / details.

*Language* has its own specific laws, its own rules and regularities – that can be proved, too – which are not, of course, immutable, sacrosanct (and by no means divine). They are actually a matter of functionality and interconnectivity, pertaining to the logic of human operation and activity in the domain of *things human*. Today, however, nearly everything in the field of human knowledge and reflection seems to be challenged and *relativized*... in an *absolute* manner – as one could say, using a rather lame witticism.

The *official authority* (viz. the Romanian Academy) seems to represent the supreme model / the very symbol / the absolute image / the *paragon* of dictatorial powerlessness: academics are seen as mere puppets (typically, with their heads full of husks and oakum), a bunch of tyrants possessing unlimited but (naturally) undeserved powers. We can then wonder what was left of the effort (and also the hopes and trust in the future) of those who have for centuries worked, fought, and even sacrificed themselves for the standardization, regulation and unification of the Romanian language (also called *standard* or *literary* Romanian). After all, the very reason that the Romanian Academy was founded, some 160 years ago, was to generate a unified, scientific grammar of our language, as well as a comprehensive (i.e. general or complete), usable and *correct* dictionary of the Romanian language.

We must admit there is also a commendable effort (which is either conscious or involuntary) aimed at *synchronization* / *updating* (especially in view of today's period of globalization that we all live in); the same synchronization existed in the past, following various (especially Latin and Romance) models, and it has eventually led to the Romanian vocabulary as it is nowadays.

**3. Anglicisms** are undoubtedly *the stars* of today's neological influx in Romanian (too), and it sounds rather tristic to say that they are making a massive contribution to the renewal and updating of the vocabulary of our language, but also to achieving a certain degree of prestige via connotative means. *Denotative* anglicisms look and sound all the more welcome as they are closer to the more specialized areas of speech, behaving as *technical* terms – when the efforts made to adapt or translate them seem useless or at least insignificant. Thus, the distinction between those striking, unusual anglicisms, assimilable to barbarisms, and the anglicisms fully suitable for the context of use, appears as most evident. Let us analyse the following instances of comparatively recent anglicisms: “o *sesiune* de cumpărături” (TV); “Serviciul secret ucrainean a *blurat* fața unei pisici ‘spion’ într-un comunicat (...)” (<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/...-2179047>); “Pământul *proiecțiilor* noastre *high-end* este străin de oameni”, *au scris ei*”; “mergem să vedem *priviuurile* acestor partide” (TVR1); “*Procrastinarea* în sport (...) De ce *procrastinează* sportivii?” (<https://romaniaforgold.ro/gandire-pozitiva/procrastinarea-in-sport>).

There are seemingly *useless* Anglicisms (viz. futile, dispensable terms that are supposedly used to mark a note of *cultural prestige*) which are beginning to get into the Romanian language more and more consistently, establishing themselves and taking root as *specialized* terms, e.g. *chef* (instead of Rom. *maestru-bucătar* – culled from the Romanian subtitles (!) for a TV5 documentary film). Conversely, there also exists the opposite case, when some (extreme) anglicisms are used simply to astound or flabbergast the reader, or to mark a special style, a more stylistically colourful lingo – which does not occur only in the specific language of the media, e.g. “Kate Middleton, apariție *wow* la premiera mondială James Bond”.

Even if essentially *unsuitable* to what may be called the spirit of the language (and sometimes even appearing as genuine *howlers*), some anglicisms seem to be – upon closer analysis – acceptable and useful, nay even creative from a strictly functional standpoint, e.g. “o bucată pierdută a Lunii, care *orbitează* Pământul”.

As we have repeated over and over again (in our numerous papers dealing with anglicisms, poor translation or mistranslation, decalcomania, etc.), failing to render *False Friends* represents an absolutely prevalent phenomenon, especially from the perspective of linguistic norms, e.g. “Cred că tot ce a făcut Novak în ultimii zece ani, câștigarea Grand Slamurilor, *consistența* arătată, terminând de șapte ori sezonul pe primul loc (...); “Totodată, **nu a existat nicio *evidență* a faptului că Paul Manyasi ar fi lucrat vreodată pe aeroportul Jomo Kenyatta”, etc.**

Unfortunately, some translators, who are (over)active in the press, in publishing houses or online, exhibit extreme lack of concern for the result of their work, and such a poor command of both the English and the Romanian language, that they seem simply eager to make fools of themselves in public, e.g. *palate* (pl. of *palat*), used instead of “cerul gurii” – in the subtitles of the Hollywood film *The Merchant of Venice*: meant to translate English *palates* in the context “let their *palates* be gratified with such viands”.

**4.** Even though we have to repeat this statement (see also some of the articles we published in the past, e.g. C. Manea, 2021, C. Manea & M. C. Manea, 2019), it is apparent that **calque** provides (mainly as a result of the general activity of translators) a highly diversified and interesting general panorama – whether semantically, phraseologically, or syntactically, also including collocation, e.g. “Aici exista o fabrică de vinuri *masivă* care domina cândva peisajul”; “Va fi, însă, foarte dificil dacă vor fi negocieri în cazul reformelor, susține Cioloș. *Cel din urmă* a mai declarat că alocările bugetare sunt legate de niște reforme (...); “vina pentru timpul lung de *livrare*...” [referring to a letter] (instead of “timpul de/pentru *distribuire*” – TV); “De exemplu, multe trăsături faciale și alte trăsături *observate în* [instead of *observate la*] fosilele umane din Asia de Est din Chiban diferă de cele *văzute în* fosilele europene și africane de aceeași vârstă”; “un obiect cosmic ciudat continuă să explodeze *din nou și din nou*” [cf. Eng. *again and again*]; “Știi că există o *linie fină între* a fi excentric și a fi nepoliticos”<sup>11</sup>; “Rusia poartă discuții pentru un nou gazoduct către China prin Mongolia,

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<sup>11</sup> For the calqued phrase “*linia (fină, etc.) dintre...*”, let us notice that Eng. *a fine line* “A very narrow division two deceptively similar things, one of which is (much) worse than the other” has a synonymous counterpart: *a thin line*. • (Cambridge): If you say that there is a fine line between one thing and another, you mean that they are very similar. You often say this when one thing is acceptable and the other is not: *As a parent, I knew that there was a fine line between panic and caution.*

într-o mișcare de a înlocui Europa cu Beijingul” (internet) [cf. Eng. *a move* (an action taken to achieve something)]; “Iritat de faptul că Rafael Nadal și-a luat prea mult timp pentru a servi (...)”.

The following instances can count, we believe, as special cases in point: *grammatical-idiomatic calque*, e.g. “Cu o inimă grea îmi anunț retragerea din Roland-Garros anul acesta”; *syntactic calque*, e.g. “Chiar dacă o mulțime de fani se așteptau ca **Robert Lewandowski** (...) să câștige primul **Balon de Aur** din carieră, ceremonia de decernare s-a încheiat cu **Lionel Messi** fiind marele câștigător al prestigiosului trofeu”.

The main issue with respect to semantic calque seems to be meaning usurpation, e.g. the more and more frequent occurrence of Rom. *alibi* as in: “Ziua Unității Naționale – *Alibi* pentru mai multă diviziune” (Linkedin article by Michael Laitman); “Știința ca *alibi* pentru politică” (<https://www.dw.com/ro>), etc. Note that the above meaning is not in line with the usual (and older) meaning of the term, i.e. *alibi*, substantiv neutru 1. Dovadă de nevinovăție rezultată din constatarea că, la data săvârșirii infracțiunii, cel învinuit se afla în altă parte decât la locul săvârșirii ei. 2. Mijloc de apărare care aduce în sprijin un alibi. 3. *figurat* Justificare, pretext, scuză. Compare the above meanings with English *alibi* (meaning “a claim or piece of evidence that one was elsewhere when an act, especially a criminal one, is alleged to have taken place”); see also (Cambridge, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>): *alibi* noun [C] /'æɪ.lɪ.baɪ/ US /'æɪ.lɪ.baɪ/ 1) proof that someone who is thought to have committed a crime could not have done it, especially the fact or statement that they were in another place at the time it happened: He has a cast-iron (= very strong) alibi – he was in hospital the week of the murder. 2) an excuse for something bad or for a failure: After eight years in power, the government can no longer use the previous government's policy as an alibi for its own failure.

Some calqued words or phrases are used quite intensively, and thus they have become genuine, distinctly recognizable *clichés*, e.g. “Ce notă a primit Ianis Hagi după prestația *solidă* din meciul (...)” (internet); “**Mai am un mic șarpe pe ceafă. Pe glezne mai am niște stele și o semilună. (...) Toate înseamnă câte ceva foarte puternic pentru mine**”.

5. For several decades now, **translation** has been the predilection ground for inordinate, wildly chaotic Englishing of the Romanian lexicon (and even everyday speech – mainly as used by the media), e.g. “Care ar putea fi acel înlocuitor, Sarma refuză să *speculeze*. Cu toate acestea, el nu vede ‘niciun motiv anume ca *descrierea noastră a modului în care pare să funcționeze universul fizic* ar trebui să atingă apogeul brusc la începutul secolului 21” (internet); “Retragerea dintr-un Grand Slam *este împotriva tuturor instinctelor și aspirațiilor mele de atlet*, dar este decizia corectă și *singura de luat*. Gândul de a nu fi la Paris mă umple de tristețe. Dar îmi voi concentra energia asupra recuperării. *Rămân pozitivă și voi reveni pe teren de îndată ce este sigur să o fac*”, scria Simona pe Twitter”.

What can really concern us (in our capacity as linguists or mere speakers of Romanian) are indeed those cases when the bits of translation we may come across are terrible from the point of view of *quality*: we sometimes find examples on the net that provide totally inept expressions, e.g. (in an article authored by Maria Chivu): “Lovitură dură pentru Prințul Charles și *domnia sa la tron* (...) Prințul Charles are 73 de ani și este cel mai *vechi moștenitor* din istoria Marii Britanii. Când îi va veni rândul la tron, ar putea ca lucrurile să *se schimbe din multe aspecte*. (...) Jonathan Sacerdoti, *comentator regal*, crede că Charles va deveni în cele din urmă succesorul Coroanei și cetățenii

britanii vor resimți asta în dreptul unor modificări consistente. “Această predare a început deja cu Prințul Charles” (...) Știu cu siguranță că monarhia va dori să se mențină modernă și *agilă* în raport cu Marea Britanie și Commonwealth (...) „Mulți dintre ei *iubesc absolut* regina și monarhia și această predare a început deja cu Prințul Charles. (...) este inevitabil, în timp, ca atitudinile oamenilor față de regalitate și monarhie să se schimbe și să se schimbe. (...) Cred că de aceea au fost foarte atenți să încerce să se adapteze și să se schimbe cu vremurile și Charles a arătat, de asemenea, unele indicii că ar putea fi un monarh destul de diferit de mama lui”

Faulty and simplistic translation is also objectionable from the standpoint of what is almost generally called the *ecology* of language (in the present case, the Romanian language) – and sometimes even *verbal hygiene*; one cannot escape the impression that such inferior renderings are apt to undermine the very use and general knowledge of our national language, e.g. “În urmă cu aproximativ 6.000 de ani, mai mulți *fermieri* de pe coasta Mării Egee au călătorit prin Europa continentală, s-au amestecat în zona Mării Mediterane pentru o vreme, apoi *și-au făcut drum spre* Marea Britanie, unde *au declanșat apariția* agriculturii pe insulă. (...) și s-a amestecat rapid cu *nou-veniții*” (net).

Analyzing the reasons that lead to the writing of such texts, the very first phenomenon we observe is unwanted, naively crude *literality*, e.g. “R. a salvat bani timp de 40 de ani ca să (...)” (Metropola TV); “programul național de *literație* (sic!)” ([cf. Eng. *literacy*] – TV advertisement); “Petrov era *captiv într-o stare* de șoc”; “Nu este un OZN ci doar *o bucată de tehnologie* de ultimă generație”; “*În aceste zile*, [cf. Eng. *these days*] 6.000 de zimbri sălbatici trăiesc în Europa”; “*Nu este că ar fi fost* plictisitor dar era un laborator obișnuit care funcționa în același mod ca oricare alt laborator (...) aceasta afirmând că nimeni nu a vorbit *despre vreo boală răspândindu-se* printre angajații laboratorului”; “În anul 1324, *oamenii din Cairo* au avut parte de cea mai uimitoare priveliște din viața lor”; “Tragedia lui Othello, Maurul din Venetia se concentrează asupra *răzbunării unui om pentru a distruge alta*. Iago, un om care simte că a fost nedreptățit de Othello, *stabilește planuri elaborate* care distrug căsătoria lui Othello și duc la multe *decese*” (internet), etc.

One can also notice, however, special cases of calque, such as the (rather infrequent) instances of the so-called *repeated discourse*, which is more often than not signalled by means of the inverted commas, e.g. “De ce să ne mândrim cu Emma?” Ilie Năstase “lovește” din nou”.

Very often though, one can distinguish a number of finer nuances, usually in point of semantics or collocation, e.g. Fostul ministru conservator a spus: “Trebuie să *eliberăm* toate documentele legate de Holocaust care sunt clasificate în prezent până în ianuarie viitor” (the infelicitous phrase *a elibera documente* was misused instead of *a da publicității*). Yet the real *howlers* are the most concerning (though interesting) cases in point – and some of them are really *incredible*, e.g. “Țările din întreaga lume au *raportat date* privind numărul infecțiilor cu coronavirusul și al deceselor cauzate de COVID-19, informații cruciale în combaterea pandemiei, însă trei țări *ies părănd să fie* mai puțin transparente sau *negând* amploarea problemei, relatează CNN”; [in an internet article]: “În timp ce lilieci *se culcau deasupra capului*, iar șobolanii și șopârlele mișunau în jur, în excremente și în *moc*, bărbații săpau ore în șir în *spațiul puturos*, fără aer. După două săptămâni, toți trei *au dezvoltat o boală* severă, asemănătoare pneumoniei. (...) în curând și ei *aveau să sufere probleme* de respirație, tuse și febră peste 39° C (...) o infecție fungică cauzată de un agent patogen care se ascundea în *ciuperca care acoperea liliacul*. Nouă ani mai târziu, minerii din Mojiang *generează*

brusc titluri în *toată lume* după ce Wall Street Journal a raportat concluziile... nu a apărut pe piața fructelor de mare Huanan și a faunei sălbatice din Wuhan sau în oricare dintre celelalte “*zerouri la sol*” sugerate, ci prin o scurgere într-un laborator din Wuhan”. The author of the following translated text seems to be the twin brother or sister of the previous text: “El a recunoscut că era nesigură și mult mai naivă decât *selecția anterioară a blondelor* sofisticate ale fiului său. Regina a denumit-o pe Diana ca fiind ‘una dintre noi’, deoarece tatăl ei, Lord Spencer, *fusesse echivalent cu* regele George VI. (...) a încercat să o ajute să se *focuseze* mai mult pe căsătoria ei (...) a recunoscut că ar fi putut fi responsabilă pentru unele dintre *tiparele* sale comportamentale”.

In other cases, sheer comicality (deriving directly from superficiality and lack of overall culture as well as translatorial expertise) is generated by the false assumptions of those who made, or took over the result of, the faulty or false translation, e.g. “Curiozitatea a omorât pisica” spune o veche vorbă *românească*”.

Other instances of howlers contribute to the increasing number of exaggerated or unsuitable euphemisms that are currently pullulating in the Romanian language, making up the new *langue de bois*, e.g. “măsurile prudente (...), *neescalatorii*” (said by Mircea Geoană).

**5.1.** Last but not least, translating **literary texts** also generates quite a lot of howlers – which primarily illustrate the poor quality of the translators’ work, but also the quality of the publishers’, book editors and proofreaders’ activity. The examples below (culled from the Romanian translation of one of Agathe Christie’s most famous novels) speak for themselves: “cumpărase un serviciu modern, cu un model de culoare gri-deschis pe alb și fără nicio *aurire* care să se distrugă în chiuvetă” (“she had purchased a modern service with a pattern of pale grey on white and no *gilt* on it whatsoever to be washed away in the sink”); “Miss Marple pronunță cuvântul următor cu o ușoară *modestie* victoriană” [instead of *sfială, sficiune, reținere*] (“Miss Marple spoke the next word with a slight Victorian *modesty*”); “Care este numele *actual*, St Mary Mead?” (“what’s the *actual name*, St Mary Mead?”); “Ce vrei [sic!] să spunei, *cum s-a întâmplat*, nimeni n-a ucis-o pe Marina” (“What do you mean, *it happened*, nobody has killed Marina, have they?”); “*I-auzi, i-auzi!*” (“Hear, hear!” – used to express one’s wholehearted agreement with something said, especially in a speech) [instead of *Bravo! / Așa da! / Așa mai vii de-acasă!*]; “ești *fără speranță*” (“You’re *hopeless*, Dolly, quite *hopeless*”); “*Vezi bine, n-aș fi crezut niciodată*” (“‘Well, I never,’ said Cherry”); “*Asta-i ce vă pune ea în cap*” (“It’s *she puts it into your head*”) [instead of *Ea vă bagă asta în cap*]; “pisica (...) vine tot timpul în grădina noastră să *dezgroape răzoarele*” (“their cat – always coming over into our garden, *digging up* the beds”); “să vă *trimit o vorbă* ca să veniți să mă vedeți” (“I just felt furiously angry and *sent word* to you to come and see me”); “*O față de poker*, cred că așa arată, *deși n-am văzut vreodată una*” (“A *poker face* if I ever saw one”) [cf. Eng. *a poker face*]<sup>1</sup>; “aș putea să o duc pe *soția mea departe de aici? E cam scoasă din minți*” (“when can I *get my wife away from here?* She’s *half frantic*”); “*Dacă vreți, mă fac destul de clară*: nu am otrăvit-o pe doamna B.” (“If you’d like me *to make it quite clear*, I didn’t try to poison Marina”);

<sup>1</sup> The term *poker face* comes from the card game of poker, which often requires a player to bluff, or make the other players think he is holding different cards than the ones he is actually holding. The oldest known use of the expression *poker face* is in the 1870s, in a book explaining the game of poker. – [www.zupsee.com/blog](http://www.zupsee.com/blog)



“Există o nouă viață socială *îzbind pe aici*” (“There’s a new social life *springing up here*.”); “Și medici arătoși *provocând* atâta prăpăd” (“And good-looking doctors *causing* any amount of havoc”); “Pe urmă tânărul H. P. *agitându-se* pentru acea zi, *făcându-și* treaba. *Vorbind* mult, dar cu siguranță n-a auzit nimic” (“Then there was young Hailey Preston *dodging* about that day, *doing* his stuff. *Talks* a good deal but definitely heard nothing, saw nothing”).

## 6. Conclusion

True, positive seriousness in translating – and related cultural, as well as mediatic areas – would do a huge service not only to the quality of the texts translated (or retranslated), or to the press articles (mainly) generated by translation, but also to the (really generous) cause of linguistic standardization, which is, as a matter of principle, opposed to relativistic laxism. While *howlers* do not intrinsically belong to the area of (more or less recent) anglicisms, they are a constant presence in Romanian-to-English translations, and their typology is not only rich and miscellaneous, but also very interesting and thought-provoking.

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## **HUMOUR AND ITS TRANSLATION IN THE ROMANIAN VERSION OF AMOS OZ'S "A TALE OF LOVE AND DARKNESS"**

**Amalia MĂRĂȘESCU\***

**Abstract:** *The paper is an attempt at exploring humour in the English and the Romanian versions of Amos Oz's A Tale of Love and Darkness. It starts with theoretical aspects related to humour and its translation into another language. Then, it discusses Amos Oz's view on humour in general and humour in A Tale of Love and Darkness in particular. Finally, it presents the analysis of a passage from the novel, showing how Oz (and/or his English translator) achieves a humorous effect in the respective passage and how humour is conveyed in the translation of the passage from English into Romanian.*

**Keywords:** *incongruity, colloquialism, bathos*

### **1. Some Theoretical Remarks on Humour and Its Translation**

Humour studies and the translation of humour are relatively new as academic disciplines, having emerged with more force only beginning with the 1990's. Their relative neglect before that period can be explained by the vastness of these fields and by the difficulty to define and approach humour scholarly and to teach humour translation.

In time, two concepts have come to be attached to humour and to be used to characterize it: incongruity and superiority. Humour as perceived incongruity is "a (humorous) effect caused by a departure from normal cognitive schemes" (Vandaele, 2014: 156). Superiority relates to the effect of humour and is considered by Vandaele to include "any (anti)social effect, intention or cause that humour may have, either interpersonal and socially visible, or 'private' but with reference to the social world" (*ibidem*: 157, emphasis in the original). Whether we consider humour as always playful or always aggressive, what we cannot deny is that although incongruity can be seen as abnormality (inferiority), ironic incongruity is seen as a sign of superiority (the ironist commits incongruities as a sign of superiority) and incongruity that is resolved and overcome creates superiority (the ability to understand humour is a sign of intelligence). (*cf.* Vandaele *op.cit.*)

When we encounter humour, we deal with one of four possibilities: 1. a comic situation, which appears when there is no communicator and no humorous intention; 2. unintended humour, arising when there is a communicator, no humorous intention, but still a humorous effect; 3. intended humour, occurring when there is a communicator, a humorous intention, and a humorous effect; 4. unachieved humour, appearing when there is a communicator, a humorous intention, but no humorous effect. (*cf.* Vandaele *op.cit.*: 159-160)

Nigel Armstrong distinguishes between verbal and conceptual humour, admitting however that the two are not totally distinct categories. He contends that while conceptual humour can be translated if the concept is common to both cultures, verbal humour will disappear in translation if it depends on puns since they rely on polysemic relations that may not correspond across the two languages. Conceptual humour too may depend on language, hence defy translation, whereas linguistic humour, especially if cumulative in effect, may survive translation provided that the translator has "a high degree of craftsmanship" (2005: 185).

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The translation of verbal humour or, as Delia Chiaro calls it, “verbally expressed humour (VEH)” (2010) touches upon the issues of equivalence and translatability. The equivalence in this case is functional – the readers of translated humour will also expect to be amused by it – and dynamic – the same effect might be achieved through different means: some features of the source text might be lost, but something else will be gained in the target text. The translatability of VEH may be questionable and debatable, since “Humorous texts will exemplify extreme lingua-cultural specificity as they often entail recognition of cultural elements with which would be impossible to be familiar without having had direct exposure to them” (2010: 8). Consequently, humour is untranslatable because in its case it is difficult to achieve “an adequate degree of equivalence” (*ibidem*: 9). In addition to that, people, including translators may be sensitive to humour but unable to produce or reproduce it successfully; humour production and reproduction are talent-related, therefore rather difficult to learn and to teach; the appreciation of humour varies from one individual to another, which means that a translator may come across what the writer considered a comic instance, but the translator does not. (*cf.* Vandaele, *op.cit.*: 150)

Still, humorous discourse is important because it serves an important social function.

It can serve not only for the purpose of pure enjoyment, to make us feel good, (which should be reason enough to translate as much of it as possible) but humour also serves to condemn and to criticize, to pacify, to help us cope, to break the ice and according to some, even to heal. In conversations it is a crucial bonding agent which tells us that we are part of the group, that we belong. (Chiaro, *op.cit.*: 13)

## 2. Humour in Amos Oz’s View

These are some of the reasons why humour played such a special role in Amos Oz’s life and works. The sense of humour is a quality that he appreciated in people not just because it makes them lovable, but also because it prevents them from falling prey to fanaticism, one of the dangers besetting the life of people in the Middle East. “I have never seen a fanatic with a sense of humour, and I have never seen anyone with a sense of humour turn into a fanatic”, he declared in an interview published in 1993. It is an idea that he resumed on other occasions, for instance in a conference held in 2015, when he stated:

[...] curiosity, alongside humour, are two powerful antidotes to fanaticism. I have never seen a curious fanatic. I have never seen a fanatic with a sense of humour. Fanatics have no sense of humour and seldom are they curious. Because humour undermines fanaticism. (*Amos Oz on Fanaticism*)

As a consequence of these “discoveries”, he aspired to be awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine, which he was sure he would get “the day I manage to put a sense of humour into capsules and administer it to people all over the world so as to immunize them against fanaticism” (1993: 7). This is also a joke that he resumed on other occasions, definitely meant to help him cope with the fact that, though shortlisted several times for the Nobel Prize for literature, he failed to get it.

The same coping or healing role is played by humour in his novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. He claimed that he wanted to erase the line between comedy and tragedy in this novel.

I wanted to write this book in such a way there will be no distinction between the comic and the tragical. Not to write it in such a way that some pages will be funny and other pages heartbreaking, but I wanted the same episodes to be both. When I was younger, I used to think that comedy and tragedy are two planets. Now I know that comedy and tragedy are no more than two different windows through which we actually observe the same landscape, the same backyards of our own lives. (*The 2006-07 Jewish Community Endowment Fund Lecture with Amos Oz*)

The novel is meant to help him cope with or heal after his mother's suicide, which took place when he was 12 and that led to the dissolution of his family. "When you can't cry any more, then laugh," is a quotation from his grandmother that he also uses quite frequently, including in the novel (11). Humour therefore appears as an alternative to sadness, but also as a solution for getting out of it. It may also be considered to serve criticizing purposes, since some leading figures of Israeli life and politics are presented in humorous and not so flattering hypostases before being openly criticized, or bonding purposes because there are some episodes in the novel which present the Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem in a quite good light.

The book was published in Hebrew in 2002. Its Romanian version is an indirect translation, made not after the Hebrew original, but after its translation into English produced by Nicholas de Lange and published in 2004. The fact that the book was translated into Romanian from English is clearly indicated on its title page, in its copyright section and in the book itself. In the passage where the author remembers how he learnt to read by making connections between the form of the words and their meanings, the translator's notes specify that the respective words are English, not Hebrew. The Romanian translator is Dana-Ligia Ilin and the first edition of *Poveste despre dragoste și întineric* was published by Humanitas Fiction in 2008.

As far as the translators are concerned, Nicholas de Lange is not only Amos Oz's translator into English, but was also one of the author's friends, and stated that his school in translation was working with Oz (2007). De Lange translated seventeen books signed by the Israeli writer and spoke about the difficulty posed by Oz's allusions, and about the writer's preoccupation with maintaining himself up to date with the latest Hebrew slang. As for the experience of translating him, de Lange considered it "a marvellously fulfilling and enriching experience" (2019).

De Lange considers the translator both a reader and a writer, an author himself, who

has to make the reader laugh or cry, and feel a whole range of emotions. [...] The real objective at the back of our mind is, this isn't beautiful enough, or this is too romantic, and it ought to be a bit tougher, or it's too harsh and ought to be a little bit smoother. (2007: 10)

Accordingly, in his opinion, all translation is intervention.

This kind of intervention performed when the translator feels that the original text is somehow inappropriate to the target language readers can be seen in the Romanian version of *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Its author, Dana-Ligia Ilin, is one of Amos Oz's translators into Romanian, having also translated his *How to Cure a Fanatic* and *Suddenly in the Depth of the Forest*. She is a graduate in Chinese and French but has worked as a translator from French and English into Romanian and also authored a *Chinese-Romanian* and a *Romanian-Chinese Conversation Guide*. (cf. <https://www.cartepedia.ro/autor/dana-ligia-ilin-219>)

There is a lot of humour in *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, but it is the type of humour that makes you laugh with a tear at the corner of your eye. Quite often this is caused by bathos, i.e. “the descent from the sublime (or pretentious) to the ridiculous (or everyday)” (Armstrong, 2005: 183). The incongruity between the efforts made by the characters in order to achieve something and what they actually achieve (or rather do not) or between their anticipation of a certain event and of the role they think they will play in it and what actually happens accounts both for the humour and for the sadness one feels when reading the novel. The situations are funny or just presented in a funny manner, but besides laughing one cannot help feeling sorry for some of the characters involved. In addition to that, the writer himself sometimes ends the episode by commenting on it, not necessarily in a humorous way, from his point of view as a narrator and from the distance established in the meantime between him and the respective event.

I consider that one of the reasons why the novel has been so popular is that it reminds its readers of themselves. Oz considers that truly great literature is provincial and universal – provincial because it tells the story of a neighbourhood, a street, a flat and universal because it shows that all people have the same emotions, problems, ultimately secrets. (*cf. Where My Stories Come From*, 2017) Amos, the character that Oz builds in the novel starting from himself (because he also stated he wanted to erase the line between fact and fiction in *A Tale of Love and Darkness*), goes through experiences that remind us of our own, has relatives that remind us of our own, has feelings that we had or we would have in similar circumstances.

A second reason why I personally enjoyed the novel a lot has to do with its translation, which is more than just a rendering into Romanian of the English text.

### **3. Humour in the English and the Romanian Versions of Amos Oz’s *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Analysis of one fragment**

The way in which Oz builds humour (and sadness) in the novel and the way in which this is rendered into Romanian shall be exemplified with the help of one passage close to the beginning of the novel, presenting Amos’s perception of Tel Aviv and the relationship he had with the city when he was a child. I shall discuss the means by which humour is achieved in the source language text and then the way it is rendered or enhanced in the Romanian translation. As far as the target language text is concerned, I shall refer only to the words and phrases that were not translated literally. For ease of reference, the structures whose translation into Romanian will be discussed will be underlined in the quotations from the source text. As for the remaining part of it, I should point out that its translation follows it as closely as the norms of Romanian allow.

Amos’s image of Tel Aviv is opposed to the image he has of Jerusalem, his native city. For him, Jerusalem is a place where nothing happens and where nothing extraordinary can be seen. Of course, the “ordinariness” of the place is enhanced by the fact that it is too familiar to the child who has lived there all his life, but it is also due to the appearance of his flat – a small ground-floor apartment, dark and moist – and of his immediate surroundings – a little yard, dusty tin roofs, plots of land covered with scrap iron, thistles and grass dried from extreme heat and drought.

In opposition to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv is almost a fairytale city. It is situated “Over the hills and far away”<sup>1</sup> and it is an “exciting place”, where there are “great sportsmen”, but, more than anything else, for the child accustomed only to the aridity of Jerusalem, it is the place where one can find “the sea, full of bronzed Jews who could swim”. One can almost see the wide-eyed boy wondering at the marvels of the glamorous city. “Who in Jerusalem could swim? Who had ever heard of swimming Jews? These were different genes. A mutation. ‘Like the wondrous birth of a butterfly out of a worm.’”

It is an exaggerated perception that the translation into Romanian exaggerates even more. *Over the hills and far away* becomes *Peste dealuri, hăt-departē*<sup>2</sup>, instead of just *departe*, which would be less plastic and would reduce the distance at which the child, with his limited knowledge of things, places the city. *Exciting place* is rendered as *loc senzațional*, with the adjective stressing the extraordinariness of the place and the fascination exerted by it. The translation of *Who had ever heard of swimming Jews?* – *Cine a mai pomenit evrei care înoată?* makes use of *a pomeni*, instead of *a auzi*, since *a pomeni* is more colloquial and more in keeping with a child’s point of view.

The very name of the city had a magic of its own, making him imagine

a tough guy in a dark blue T-shirt, bronzed and broad-shouldered, a poet-worker-revolutionary, a man made without fear, the type they called a Hevremān, with a cap worn at a careless yet provocative angle on his curly hair, smoking Matusians, someone who was at home in the world: [...].

As a child, Amos does not realize that the name he hears, Tel Aviv, is made of two words, so it is transcribed as one, *Telaviv*, something that the Romanian translator preserves as well.

Something else that she preserves are the cultural references, rendered as such in the case of *the type they called a Hevremān* translated as *genul numit Hevremān* with no footnote, and *smoking Matusians* translated as *care fumează țigări Matusian*, with a transposition (*care fumează* for *smoking*) and an intratextual gloss, *țigări Matusian* for *Matusians*, which is preferable to a footnote in a literary text.

Not only that the people in Tel Aviv could swim, but they also walked in a different manner than the people in Jerusalem.

It’s not just that the light in Tel Aviv was different from the light in Jerusalem, more than it is today, even the laws of gravity were different. People didn’t walk in Tel Aviv: they leaped and floated, like Neil Armstrong on the moon.

In Jerusalem people always walked rather like mourners at a funeral, or latecomers at a concert. First they put down the tip of their shoe and tested the ground. Then, once they had lowered their foot, they were in no hurry to move it: we had waited two thousand years to gain a foothold in Jerusalem and were unwilling to give it up. If we picked up our foot, someone else might come along and snatch our little strip of land. On the other hand, once you have lifted your foot, do not be in a hurry to put it down again: who can tell what coil of vipers you might step on. For thousands of years we

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations in English, written in what follows between inverted comas or in italics, are taken from Oz, Amos, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, transl. by Nicholas de Lange, HarperCollins, 2005, ebook available at <https://www.overdrive.com/media/573059/a-tale-of-love-and-darkness>, 1.

<sup>2</sup> The quotations in Romanian, written in italics, are taken from Oz, Amos, *Poveste despre dragoste și întunerice*, transl. from English by Dana-Ligia Ilin, Ed. Humanitas Fiction, București, 2014, pp. 11-16.

have paid with our blood for our impetuosity, time and time again we have fallen into the hands of our enemies because we put our feet down without looking where we were putting them. That, more or less, was the way people walked in Jerusalem. But Tel Aviv! The whole city was one big grasshopper. The people leaped by, and so did the houses, the streets, the squares, the sea breeze, the sand, the avenues, and even the clouds in the sky.

The translation again makes use of emphatic words. *Even the laws of gravity were different* is rendered as *chiar și legile gravitației erau cu totul altele*, with the addition of *cu totul*, which emphasizes the difference. *People didn't walk in Tel Aviv* becomes *Oamenii mergeau altfel la Tel Aviv*, with a modulation, again stressing the difference more than the English version. *They were in no hurry to move it – nu se grăbeau deloc să-l miște* presents the addition of *deloc* for emphatic purposes. In the end of the paragraph the word *măiculiță* is added to enhance the child's amazement and *big* becomes *uriașă*, the hyperbole having the same emphasizing role: *Dar la Tel Aviv – măiculiță! Întreg orașul era o lăcustă uriașă* is more expressive than *But Tel Aviv! The whole city was one big grasshopper*.

*To gain a foothold in Jerusalem* has a double meaning, both literal and idiomatic, and so does the Romanian variant, *ca să putem pune piciorul în Ierusalim*, while *little strip of land* is translated with the diminutive, *fâșiuta de țară*, showing more affection. *Do not be in a hurry* is rendered with the plastic *nu te pripzi* (rather than with *nu te grăbi*) and *where we were putting them* (i.e., *our feet*) with *pe unde mergem*, more appropriate than the literal *pe unde le punem – pentru că am pus picioarele pe pământ fără să ne uităm pe unde le punem* would have been quite nonsensical.

The conclusion of the passage describing the Jerusalemites' manner of walking is expressed more briefly in Romanian than in English – *Cam așa pășeau oamenii în Ierusalim*, as compared with *That, more or less, was the way people walked in Jerusalem*.

While the paragraph is nevertheless funny due to the way in which Amos sees and describes the manner of walking of the inhabitants of Tel Aviv and of Jerusalem, it is also sad as the idea behind it is that of an undesirable situation: the Jews are not welcome in Jerusalem and have to be constantly on their guard to avoid something bad happening to them.

The people in Tel Aviv can not only swim, but are also capable of other great feats, like moving an entire square in several months.

Once we went to Tel Aviv for Passover, and the morning after we arrived I got up early, when everyone was still asleep, got dressed, went out, and played on my own in a little square with a bench or two, a swing, a sandpit, and three or four young trees where the birds were already singing. A few months later, at New Year, we went back to Tel Aviv, and the square wasn't there anymore. It had been moved, complete with its little trees, benches, sandpit, birds, and swing, to the other end of the road. I was astonished: I couldn't understand how Ben Gurion and the duly constituted authorities could allow such a thing. How could somebody suddenly pick up a square and move it? What next – would they move the Mount of Olives, or the Tower of David? Would they shift the Wailing Wall?

The incongruity between the child's age and his indignation at the indifference of Ben Gurion and of the authorities that allowed an entire square to be moved, followed by his exacerbated fear, totally motivated and entirely logical in his opinion, that they would proceed by moving the other sacred places in the city, accounts for the humour of the paragraph.

*Passover* is adapted into Romanian as *Paște*, as we do not have the holiday celebrating the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but we have the one commemorating Jesus's resurrection at a similar date in spring. *And the morning after we arrived, I got up early* becomes *și a doua zi m-am sculat dis-de-diminează*, with an implicitation and with *early* rendered as *dis-de-diminează* instead of the more habitual and less expressive *devreme*. Other words are translated with their more familiar variants: *I couldn't understand* – *nu pricepeam*, *could allow* – *puteau îngădui*, *would they move* – *o să mute*, *would they shift* – *o să schimbe*.

Amos has relatives in Tel Aviv, his mother's sisters, with their husbands and children. They do not visit one another very often, but they talk on the phone periodically, even though no family has a phone in the house. That is why these enterprises take the form of genuine rituals, for which the preparations start well in advance, being made with great care so as the call should not be missed.

For years we had a regular arrangement for a telephone link with the family in Tel Aviv. We used to phone them every three or four months, even though we didn't have a phone and neither did they. First, we would write to Auntie Hayya and Uncle Tsvi to let them know that on, say, the nineteenth of the month – which was a Wednesday, and on Wednesdays Tsvi left his work at the Health Clinic at three – we would phone from our pharmacy to their pharmacy at five. The letter was sent well in advance, and then we waited for a reply. In their letter, Auntie Hayya and Uncle Tsvi assured us that Wednesday the nineteenth suited them perfectly, and they would be waiting at the pharmacy a little before five, and not to worry if we didn't manage to phone at five on the dot, they wouldn't run away.

The whole passage that starts with this paragraph is like a story told to the readers orally. It contains colloquial syntax, which is preserved in Romanian, to which the translator also added a series of colloquial words. *The family* is rendered colloquially as *neamurile*. *Pharmacy* becomes *drogherie*. *Even though we didn't have a phone and neither did they* is translated *cu toate că nu aveam telefon nici noi, nici ei*, with an implicitation. *The Health Clinic* is simply *clinică*, and it is enough, in Romanian the word designating a medical institution in which people take care of their health. *We used to phone them* becomes *îi sunam noi*, with a difference in accentuation (the stress falls on *noi*, something which is absent in English). *And not to worry if we didn't manage to phone at five on the dot, they wouldn't run away*. – *și că să nu ne facem griji dacă nu reușim să telefonăm la cinci fix, că n-o să fugă nicăieri* is an example of colloquial syntax. The word *nicăieri* is a necessary addition in Romanian. Throughout the whole fragment, the structures of the type *would* + infinitive (*would write*) that express a repeated action in the past are translated with the Romanian *imperfect* (*scriam*).

Oz himself presents their trip to the pharmacy as an “expedition”, for which they might even have put on their best clothes. The preparation for it began the Sunday before the Wednesday of the call, when

my father would say to my mother, Fania, you haven't forgotten that this is the week that we're phoning Tel Aviv? On Monday my mother would say, Arieh, don't be late home the day after tomorrow, don't mess things up. And on Tuesday they would both say to me, Amos, just don't make any surprises for us, you hear, just don't be ill, you hear, don't catch cold or fall over until after tomorrow afternoon. And that evening they would say to me, Go to sleep early, so you'll be in good shape for the phone call, we don't want you to sound as though you haven't been eating properly.



The negative imperatives are rendered into Romanian by means of the conjunctive mood preceded by *nu* (*care*) *cumva*: *don't be late home – nu cumva să ajungi târziu acasă*, *just don't make any surprises for us – nu care cumva să ne faci vreo surpriză*. *Don't mess things up*, a warning clearly directed at Ariele, is rendered impersonally, as *să nu iasă vreo încurcătură*, while *as though you haven't been eating properly*, which may also imply that Amos is to blame for his own improper alimentation becomes *de parcă nu te-am hrăni cum trebuie*, which implies that his parents are to blame for it. The humour builds up not only through the addition of prompts that accumulate from Sunday till Tuesday, with the father reminding the mother of their impending call, then the mother reminding the father, then both parents reminding their child, but also through the warning given to Amos, who should not fall ill or fall over before the conversation, as if after that it will be all right to do so.

Obviously, on the day of the call they also start reminding one another about it early, two hours before it is supposed to take place, although the pharmacy is a five-minute walk away. The dialogue between the father and the mother goes like this:

'Don't start anything new now, so you won't be in a rush.'

'I'm perfectly OK, but what about you with your books, you might forget all about it.'

'Me? Forget? I'm looking at the clock every few minutes. And Amos will remind me.'

Familiar language is used again in the translation: *Don't start anything new* is rendered as *Să nu te apuci acum de nimic*, *you won't be in a rush* as *ca să nu trebuiască să te zorești* and *what about you with your books* becomes *dar cum rămâne cu tine, cu nasul în cărți*. Modulation is used in the translation of *I'm perfectly OK* as *Eu n-am probleme* and equivalence in *I'm looking at the clock every few minutes – Din cinci în cinci minute mă uit la ceas*, where we can also notice a change in emphasis (*Din cinci în cinci minute* is emphasized, unlike *every few minutes*, by being placed in initial position in the sentence).

Oz then comments on the special role that the child is given in this endeavour, pointing out the incongruity between his early age – he is just five or six years old – and the “historic responsibility” that he is assigned, as well as that between the fact that he does not have a watch but he is supposed to let his parents know how much time is left before their departure. He does that with much seriousness, by constantly running to the kitchen to look at the clock, and the contrast between the apparent insignificance of the phone call and the countdown that is usually associated with important events like a spaceship launch is another source of humour. Anyway, at ten minutes and a half to go precisely they leave their house and after turning left, then right, then again left and again right they go straight into the pharmacy where they properly greet Mr. Heinemann and bluntly announce the purpose of their visit. In the translation of the passage, we can notice again the use of a familiar word, *purcedem* for *set off*.

Mr. Heinemann knows why they came and knows a lot about their relatives in Tel Aviv, and he has something of his own to tell them, “his usual telephone joke”.

Once, at the Zionist Congress in Zurich, terrible roaring sounds were suddenly heard from a side room. Berl Locker asked Harzfeld what was going on, and Harzfeld explained that it was Comrade Rubashov speaking to Ben Gurion in Jerusalem. ‘Speaking to Jerusalem,’ exclaimed Berl Locker, ‘so why doesn't he use the telephone?’

It is the only joke proper in the passage, and it is translated literally without any footnotes or glosses accompanying the names that are unfamiliar to the Romanian reader, as they would make the reading more difficult. The joke does not pose any translatability problems because its idea is familiar to Romanian readers, though the names mentioned anchor it in the Hebrew culture.

It is not five yet, and the parents discuss whether they should wait the few minutes left or should dial right away, because there is no direct dialling and they may have to wait to be put through, which might delay the call. For the readers the delay seems minor, but the characters assign it much more importance: “Mother: ‘Yes, but what if for once we are put through right away, and they’re not there yet?’ Father replied: ‘In that case we shall simply try again later.’ Mother: ‘No, they’ll worry, they’ll think they’ve missed us.’ “What if for once we are put through right away is translated as *dacă se nimereste să ne dea imediat legătura* with the colloquial *se nimereste*, while *they’ll think they’ve missed us* is rendered as *o să creadă că au ratat convorbirea*, with the future form specific to oral language (*o să creadă*) and with a modulation in the end (*they’ve missed us – că au ratat convorbirea*).

While they are still arguing (translated into Romanian as *se ciorovăiau*, again colloquial), it is almost five and they have to call. The fact that this is considered a solemn occasion is again stressed, this time by the fact that the father stands up in order to do it and addresses the operator solemnly, in formal language: “Would you please give me Tel Aviv 648.” If the line happens to be busy, the family is again nervous, thinking that their relatives will think less of them for being late. Although, in the beginning, they were told “not to worry if” they “didn’t manage to phone at five on the dot”.

The child himself is very preoccupied with “this single line that connected Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and via Tel Aviv, the rest of the world”. It is a preoccupation quite unusual for a child, who should care more for games and school. But Amos is brought up by adults who are, in their turn, very preoccupied with his education, and is familiar with all problems that his family and his country go through, including those (or especially those) that are beyond his age. He is considered and considers himself the centre of the universe and compares the putting up of the telephone line between Jerusalem to Tel Aviv with his own running of a wire from his room to Eliyahu Friedmann’s room that was “only two houses and a garden away”. Because he and his friend faced terrible problems with the obstacles in their way, he is aware of the difficulties encountered by those who ran the phone line along so many kilometres, but also of the many dangers that the line is exposed to: animals, “wicked Arabs”, rain, fire. The way in which Oz presents the child judging things from his own point of view, with the limits imposed by his age but considering himself all-knowing and all-powerful, accounts for much of the charm of the book. In the translation of the paragraph, we find again a colloquial phrase, the more expressive and idiomatic *nu-i lucru de șagă* for *it’s not easy*.

The following paragraph presents again a situation that is both amusing and tragical. The family consider they are wronged and blame it on the fact that they are Jews and that is why they are mistreated.

After waiting a while, Father decided that the Postmaster or Mr. Nashashibi must have finished talking, and so he picked up the receiver again and said to the operator: ‘Excuse me, Madam, I believe I asked to be put through to Tel Aviv 648.’ She would say: ‘I’ve got it written down, Sir. Please wait’ (or ‘Please be patient’). Father would say: ‘I’m waiting, Madam, naturally I’m waiting, but there are people waiting at the

other end too.’ This was his way of hinting to her politely that although we were indeed cultured people, there was a limit to our endurance. We were well brought up, but we weren’t suckers. We were not to be led like sheep to the slaughter. That idea – that you could treat Jews any way you felt like – was over, once and for all.

The revolt accumulates as the passage builds up, though they do not have any reason for revolt as a matter of fact, the operator being polite. But their own impotence to solve the situation, to hurry things, leads probably to frustration and reminds them of other moments when they felt frustrated and of the reasons why. The polite hint that they are cultured people, but their endurance has limits is actually so polite that it might escape unnoticed (their impatience is noticeable only), while the feelings expressed in the rest of the paragraph and the words used to express them are too much if we think of the reply that caused them and of the fact that the operator might have been Jewish herself. On the other hand, however, if we consider the long list of sufferings the Jews have gone through throughout history, of which the Holocaust was quite recent at the moment when this happens, they may not be exaggerated at all. Besides, the fact that such an insignificant detail is enough to trigger so much frustration and anger is not amusing either.

But the phone finally rings, the conversation so much waited for and so much prepared finally takes place, and it goes like this:

‘Hallo, Tsvi?’

‘Speaking.’

‘It’s Arie’h here, in Jerusalem.’

‘Yes, Arie’h, hallo, it’s Tsvi here, how are you?’

‘Everything is fine here. We’re speaking from the pharmacy.’

‘So are we. What’s new?’

‘Nothing new here. How about at your end, Tsvi? Tell us how it’s going.’

‘Everything is OK. Nothing special to report. We’re all well.’

‘No news is good news. There’s no news here either. We’re all fine. How about you?’

‘We’re fine too.’

‘That’s good. Now Fania wants to speak to you.’

And then the same thing all over again. How are you? What’s new? And then:

‘Now Amos wants to say a few words.’

What should have been the climax of the episode is in fact anticlimactic. The lengthy and careful preparations for the conversation, the precautions taken against missing it, the anger at the potential delay had prepared the reader for an extraordinary event. To this there add the two epithets describing the sound of the phone when it finally rang, respectively the moment it did: *such an exciting sound, such a magical moment*. The suspense created so exquisitely leads to nothing, as the conversation itself is rather disappointing. They say nothing but that they are fine. What adds to the humour is that every member of the family has to take the phone and to say it, as well as to ask the others how they are. However, if we consider things more carefully, we realize that “Everything is OK” is actually all they need and want to hear. The fact that

everything is good and they have nothing to talk about is the best that can happen to them. The details that are left unsaid about what they actually do in the period between the conversations do not matter at all as long as at the moment of the discussion they are all present and each can say “I’m fine”.

As for the translation of the discussion into Romanian, we can note its colloquial character: *Everything is fine here* is rendered as *Toate bune pe aici*, *How about at your end, Tsvi?* as *Dar pe la voi, Tsvi?* and *Tell us how it’s going* becomes *Spune-mi cum o duceți*. *Now Fania wants to speak to you* is translated as *Vrea și Fania să vorbească*, with the omission of the object and *Now Amos wants to say a few words* is rendered as *Acum Amos vrea să zică și el ceva*, emphasizing that the child wants to talk too through the use of *și el*.

In a serious conclusion to the episode, Oz comments on the reasons why the conversation was so brief and apparently ineffective: on the fear his parents must have had that, for various reasons, that might be their last conversation with their relatives, on the difficulty everybody had at that time to express personal feelings and on their fear of being ridiculous when using Hebrew words inappropriately (because the language was new and because words had one meaning in standard language and another in slang).

#### 4. Conclusion

The passage contains a mixture of intended and unintended humour. In the first part, humour derives from the hyperbolization of the child’s perception of Tel Aviv. In the second part, from the incongruity between the anticipation of the conversation and its actual content. The unintended humour results from the child’s naïve view on things. The intended humour appears when the adult narrator comes to the fore, with superior knowledge. The translation of the text is mostly literal. However, we notice in it the use of more exaggerations, colloquialisms and familiar words and of more expressive words and phrases. All these bring the Romanian readers closer to the characters and to the text.

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## ANALYSING JOKES – A LINGUISTIC APPROACH

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**Abstract:** *The paper aims at analysing jokes in English by attempting a classification based on linguistic features of jokes which are characterised by ambiguity, but also by studying which mode of communication, oral or written, ensures a more successful realisation of the respective joke. We exemplify our theoretical explanations with various illustrations of jokes dealing with phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic ambiguities.*

**Keywords:** *joke, ambiguity, oral / written mode of communication*

### Humour and jokes – definitions and main concepts

Although having constituted the subject of study for various types of scholars, such as philosophers and literary critics, psychologists and sociologists, humour has never been offered a precise, detailed and rigorous theoretical background until recently, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is the accumulation of ideas, proposals and claims that accounts for this lack of theoretical delimitations regarding such a challenging field of study which covers a central aspect of human activity.

If, in 1978, Gruner presented and analysed various manifestations of humour, namely Exaggeration, Incongruity, Surprise, Slapstick, The Absurd, Human Predicaments, Ridicule, Defiance, Violence, and Verbal Humour, more detailed and subtle classifications were to be given later on. Thus, probably the most common classification for humour theories is threefold: relief or release theories, superiority or aggression theories, and incongruity theories (Morreall 1983, Raskin 1985), on the one hand, or, in another version, cognitive (Incongruity and Contrast), social (Hostility, Aggression, Superiority, Triumph, Derision, Disparagement) and psychoanalytical (Release, Sublimation, Liberation, Economy) (Attardo, 1994:47).

As far as definition is involved, humour refers, according to dictionaries (*Oxford Learners, Cambridge, Merriam Webster*) to (the ability to understand) the quality of being funny, or amusing, or laughed at, or ludicrous or incongruous. (see [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/humour\\_1?q=humour](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/humour_1?q=humour), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humour>, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor>). Humour can occur under various manifestations: in literary works, but also in spoken everyday language, in formal and informal speeches, in TV and radio programmes as well as in other arts (cinema, music, painting, music, theatre), but out of all these forms, we choose to analyse verbal humour. Our main interest for this paper will be a short linguistic manifestation of humour known as “joke”, defined by *Cambridge Dictionary* as “something, such as a funny story or trick, that is said or done in order to make people laugh”.

Despite its definition which involves oral production, joke has extended in a written form over the past century once with the increase of literacy, but has reached a climax of its written version once with the development of online social media in which the written message pervades, or at least used to. An extended comprehensive definition of joke is offered by Graeme Ritchie (2004:15):

By joke, we mean a relatively short text which, for a given cultural group, is recognizable as having, as its primary purpose, the

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production of an amused reaction in its reader/hearer, and which is typically repeatable in wide range of contexts. We take it as evidence that a text is a joke if it appears in a published form explicitly labelled as being a joke (e.g. a joke book, a web-site of jokes, examples in an academic paper on jokes), or if we have experienced it being delivered in circumstances which imply that others regard it as a joke.

Our own analysis of jokes will be based on ambiguity as the essential instrument for constructing a joke, according to Raskin “Deliberate ambiguity will be shown to underlie much, if not all, of verbal humor.” (Raskin 1985: xiii). Plus, we shall use two of Ritchie’s questions proposed in his methodology of analysis:

1. What type of linguistic knowledge does the joke rely upon?
2. Which production mode makes the joke work (more effectively)? (adapted from Ritchie, *op. cit.*: 29-30)

As regards the structure of a joke, there are two main parts of it, as there are two main segments in humour in general, according to Blake (2007:3): the set-up and the punch (or punchline). Sometimes the set-up is made up of two episodes, and a punch is presented as a third episode, as in

(a) “An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman all went to the pub together. The Englishman spent \$50.00, the Irishman spent \$100.00 and the Scotsman spent a very pleasant evening indeed.” ([https://theirishgifthouse.com/contents/en-us/d2329\\_Englishman-Scotsman-Irishman-Jokes.html](https://theirishgifthouse.com/contents/en-us/d2329_Englishman-Scotsman-Irishman-Jokes.html)).

In other cases, there is a feedline followed by the punchline, as in

(b) “My husband and I divorced because of religious differences.

He thought he was God and I didn’t.” (Blake, *op.cit.*: 4).

or, the set-up and the punchline are part of one single statement, as in

(c) “Monogamy leaves a lot to be desired.” (*ibidem.*)

### **Jokes based on phonetic ambiguity**

When dealing with phonetic-based jokes, one frequent case is represented by homophones. The phonetic ambiguity offered by homophones appears either in the set-up or in the punch and there are many cases in which oral production makes the joke work better than in writing. Let us analyse two illustrative cases:

(d) “What is black and white and /red/ all over?

A newspaper.” (*idem*, 30)

(e) “What did one sheep say to the other?

I love ewe.” (*idem*, 32)

In joke (d), the homophones under discussion are the adjective “red” and the verb “read” (past tense form.) The fact that it occurs in the set-up makes it difficult to be encoded in its written form, because you cannot suggest both words in written without losing its fun. We have chosen to give the phonetic transcription instead, but, in this case, it is obviously oral production that makes the joke successful.

Joke (e) relies on the homonymic pair noun “ewe” - pronoun “you” which is part of the punchline, therefore the ambiguity is spotted instantly and both oral and written modes of production can work (although for the oral form, the interlocutor needs to have advanced knowledge of English vocabulary in order to get the infrequently used noun “ewe”).

In certain situations, the homophone pair is achieved due to a mispronunciation (or incomplete pronunciation) of one of the two words – a means which is somewhat similar to cases of rhyme in poetry which require a modified pronunciation. The kids

joke (f) best illustrates this, and its written rendition (using the noun “ear” in both occurrences) clarifies the implication of the adverb “here” that should be pronounced without its initial consonant.

(f) “What did the earwig say as it fell down the stairs?

Ear we go!” ([http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Animal-Jokes-for-Kids/20150730182635\\_493.html](http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Animal-Jokes-for-Kids/20150730182635_493.html))

This joke functions perfectly well by oral production, but it also works in a written context.

Another type of jokes based on phonetics deals with intonation, and it is again ambiguity which is the source of laughter. The two readings of a sentence depend on different intonations, as in the joke

(g) “Why do birds fly south in winter?

It’s too far to walk.” (Ritchie, 2004: 82)

The two possible intonations are the normal one with the accent on the *wh*-word, and the one with an accent on “south” which accounts for the funny answer. As long as intonation is involved, it goes without saying that oral production offers full value to this joke. If written, the unusual intonation can be typographically marked by underlining or italicising the word “south”.

Onomatopoeia can also turn a set of sentences from a neutral into an amusing text, and for the jokes (h) and (i) to be fully understood, intonation is absolutely necessary in their oral rendition, whereas in the written form, the same sequences emphasised in intonation can be marked typographically by the repetition of a vowel.

(h) “Question: What is a cat’s favorite color?

Answer: PUUUUURple” ([http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Animal-Jokes-for-Kids/20130906010436\\_432.html](http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Animal-Jokes-for-Kids/20130906010436_432.html))

(i) “Airline passenger: Where does this door go to-o-o-o...” (Ritchie, *op. cit.*:

32)

### **Jokes based on morpho-syntactic ambiguity**

At a morphological level, homographs function very efficiently in jokes. The words with identical spelling but different morphological and semantic values can occur in the set-up or the punches on jokes. An example is the old joke based on the homography of “lead” (noun and verb, with different pronunciation)

(j) “You can lead a horse to water, but a pencil must be lead.” (Blake, 2007:71).

Obviously, being based on identical orthography, these jokes function more effectively when they are communicated to the interlocutor in their written forms.

Another category of morphological ambiguity is generated by referential issues. Thus, given their referential characteristic, pronouns can constitute a source of jokes as long as their reference leaves room to ambiguity in a given context. One of the most productive pronouns is the personal pronoun “it”, as in the example (k)

(k) “Mother, I’ve just found out that my fiancé has a wooden leg.

Do you think I should break it off?” (*idem*, 92)

with “it” referring to either “the leg” or “the relationship”.

Ambiguity is, by definition, an attribute of two types of pronouns that have identical form and whose role can be guessed through the context: reflexive and emphatic pronouns. That is why there have been created jokes that include them, such as

(l) “Postmaster: Here’s your five-cent stamp.



Shopper (with arms full of bundles): Do I have to stick it on myself?

Postmaster: Nope. On the envelope.” (Ritchie, 2004: 43)

In (l), the shopper meant “myself” as an emphatic pronoun, but the postman decoded it as a reflexive pronoun and answered accordingly. Moreover, it is also the preposition “on” here that makes the pun on a syntactic level – as associated to the phrasal verb “stick on” or as part of the noun phrase “on myself”.

Another case of ambiguity at a morphological level involves a confusion between two different values of a word. For example, the indefinite article “a” can be used in jokes with its numeral value of “one” referring to a particular individual, or with reference to the whole category of individuals. In (m), (n) “a man” and “a wife” are used initially in their reference to the whole category of people, whilst the punchline changes the meaning to their ‘particular person’ version.

(m) “A: There’s a report in the paper here that in New York a man is mugged every three hours.

B: But after the first mugging he would have nothing left.” (Blake, 2007: 93).

(n) “Father: I think it is time you took a wife.

Son: Whose wife should I take?” (*ibidem*)

All these ambiguities based on referential issues can be successfully transmitted in both modes of communication, since both oral and written forms convey the intended double meaning. Yet, the oral form can be doubled by a helpful intonation, but, in written, italics or underlining of a helpful word can also assist in the de-coding process.

A syntax-based joke may refer to a syntactic means of avoiding repetition of a clause within a sentence and of simplifying it by using only the adverb “so” followed by the appropriate auxiliary and the subject, as in the neutral, non-joke example “I went to school by bus and so did you.” This means can represent a source of jokes as long as its interpretation may involve a little change from the original clause or no change at all. If we analyse the example (o)

(o) “Bill sleeps with his wife seven nights a week. Nothing remarkable about that, so do half the men in this country.” (*idem*, 94)

The first non-humorous reading of “so do half the men in this country” involves a small change from the original, namely “they sleep with *their* wives”, whereas the second interpretation, which triggers the punch of the joke, involves no change from the original, “they sleep with *his* wife”. Since the joke develops on a syntactic level, both modes of communication can render it successfully. Yet, if the interlocutor fails to understand it when one renders it orally, he can add a supplementary question to suggest where the ambiguity lies: “So what do half the men in this country do seven nights a week?”

Ambiguity at the syntactic level in jokes can also be suggested by a seemingly ungrammatical sentence or sequence of clauses given by the lack of some syntactical parts of speeches. A perfect example in point is (p) in which both the question and the answer seem to lack the main verb. Yet, the ambiguity given by homophones and homographs will solve the syntactic problems.

(p) Why did the antelope? Nobody gnu. (*idem*: 37)

The noun “antelope” is pronounced the same as the two words, noun+verb “ant” and “elope”, thus solving the lack of the main verb in the set-up question. Then, in the answer, the other animal noun, “gnu”, has an identical pronunciation as the verb “knew”, and that is how the other lack of verb is solved. Yet, with this new interpretation, the semantics of the question and answer has no logical or real reference,

and here is how humour is triggered. As far as the mode of communication is concerned, it is probably better for a pre-intermediate or intermediate learner of English to read the sentence and see the noun “gnu” in order to understand the whole sequence, because it involves knowledge of the words “elope” and “gnu” for a full oral understanding.

### **Jokes based on semantic ambiguity**

As far as semantic ambiguity is concerned, we have already referred to some jokes that deal with it, because in quite numerous cases, jokes are constructed on two or more levels, thus combining phonetic, orthographic, morphological, syntactic levels with the semantic one. Now we will take a closer look at the respective jokes as well as to other jokes emphasising the semantic aspect.

Semantic ambiguity or ambivalence of a word or phrase is often doubled by incongruity, that is by the unexpected meaning that is revealed by the punchline. If we take the joke (b), the initial phrase “religious differences” can first be decoded as “different religions”, yet its punchline reveals its ironical interpretation with regard to relationships.

(b) “My husband and I divorced because of religious differences.

He thought he was God and I didn’t.” (Blake, 2007: 4).

The semantic ambiguity of the word “lead” represents the basis for joke (j) and it is this semantic awareness that helps one understand the joke and taste it. Here semantics is doubled by a possible homophony between the noun “lead” and past participle verb “led” as well as by the syntactic ambiguity between the two uses of the verb “to be” as an auxiliary for passive voice or as a linking verb.

(j) “You can lead a horse to water, but a pencil must be lead.” (Blake, *op.cit.*:71).

In jokes (m) and (n), the two references of the noun preceded by the indefinite article, generic or individual, pertain to semantics, whereas in (p), we have seen how a syntactic disambiguation gives way to semantic non-referentiality.

There are numerous jokes that speculate on double-meaning words, such as the noun “stripe” in joke (q) = 1. “a strip on the surface of something that is a different colour from the surrounding surface” and “2. a strip of material that is sewn onto the arm or shoulder of a military uniform to show the rank of the person wearing it” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stripe>) or the word “sue” in joke (r) = 1. Verb. “to take legal action against a person or organization, especially by making a legal claim for money because of some harm that they have caused you” 2. proper noun, a girl’s name. These jokes function well orally and in written.

(q) “Q: Why did the soldier salute the tiger?

A: Because the tiger had more stripes.”

([http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Military-Jokes-for-Kids/20141229173401\\_845.html](http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Military-Jokes-for-Kids/20141229173401_845.html))

(r) “What did the lawyer name his daughter?

Sue.” ([http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Lawyer-Jokes-for-Kids/20141130174932\\_638.html](http://www.kidsjokesoftheday.com/htmls/kids-jokes/Lawyer-Jokes-for-Kids/20141130174932_638.html))

Sometimes, the semantics of a word or phrase in a joke involves is a larger previous background knowledge for a full understanding. Thus, in joke (a), the knowledge of national stereotypes is a prerequisite for the joke to work: the Scots are said to be miserly and cheap. Another example in point is Cold War jokes such as Radio Yerevan or Radio Armenia jokes, whose political background information involves

historical awareness regarding what life in USSR was like during the communist era, problems with shortages, austerity, and censorship. Here are two examples, which work well both orally and in written form:

(s) “Question: What is the most permanent feature of our socialist economy?  
Radio Armenia: Temporary shortages.” (Blake, 2007: 35)

(t) “A man goes into a Russian butcher’s shop. He asks for two lamb chops. No lamb. He asks for a beefsteak. No beef. He asks for a pork tenderloin. No pork. When he leaves, the butcher turns to his assistant and says, ‘What a memory!’”  
(*ibidem*)

As far as the semantic fields of jokes are concerned, we present a list of most frequent jokes topics: animals, blondes, business, cannibals, computer, crazy people, dumbs, food, golf, graffiti, heaven, holiday, lawyer, light bulb, medical, military, music, nations, office, old age, parenting, police, racial, religion, scary, school, science, sexual, shopping, silly, taboos, violence.

### **Conclusion**

We have identified in our paper jokes based on phonetic ambiguities which are triggered by homophones, intonation and onomatopoeia, jokes that rely on morphological or/and syntactic ambiguities with homographs, ambiguous referentiality of certain morphemes, syntactic means of avoiding repetition and syntactic ungrammaticality and, last but not least, jokes triggered by semantic ambiguity and ambivalence given by double-meaning words and larger background knowledge. As far as the mode of communication is concerned, the jokes with phonetic ambiguities seem to work better when rendered orally, whereas for the other two types, there is not much difference in point of their production.

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## **“THE MILLER’S TALE” – A LAUGHTER-PROVOKING FICTION IN GEOFFREY CHAUCER’S “THE CANTERBURY TALES”: AN INSIGHT INTO WHAT PROVIDES COMIC RELIEF**

**Cristina Denisa ARSENE-ONU\***

**Abstract:** *A controversial work back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, due to its fragmentation, but still reaching harmony in form and purpose, **The Canterbury Tales** is approached in the present article as the epitome of comic writing for its time. Apparently, there were/are various strands of the comic tradition available in Chaucer’s time. Therefore, how the author put them to good use is note-worthy for several reasons. While, nowadays we consider a comedy as a dramatic genre and the comic as something that can trigger laughter, medieval definitions feature neither drama nor laughter. The present comparative approach deals with identifying the potential triggers of laughter during 14<sup>th</sup> century England as compared to the perspective taken by 21<sup>st</sup> century English language students from the University of Pitesti who took part in a survey on the above-mentioned topic.*

**Keywords:** *humour, comic relief, laughter, Geoffrey Chaucer, The Miller’s Tale*

### **Geoffrey Chaucer’s Comic/Humour – General Frame**

Even though Chaucer has been widely known for being the “father of English poetry/language” my contention is that this title could be reconsidered and changed to “the father of English comedy,” according to the feedback I have been receiving for the past years, from my 1<sup>st</sup> year students, from the University of Pitesti, Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Arts, Romania, English Language and Literature Department. Whenever they made acquaintance with the laughter-provoking fictions of the fabliaux from *The Canterbury Tales*, mainly the “Miller’s Tale”, their reaction was in most of the cases described as “hysterical laughter”. I do not intend to claim that Chaucer was the inventor of comic writing as such; however, the writer seems to have been a key inventor of comic writing in the 14<sup>th</sup> century English language.

The present article (in the same comparative vein) begs the question: *How did/do people have fun? What triggered/s laughter and merry-making in the 14<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century?* Apparently, there were/are various strands of the comic tradition available in Chaucer’s time/our times. Therefore, how the author put them to good use is note-worthy for several reasons. For instance, the learned medieval notions of comedy and the comic, were different in some respects from our own. While, nowadays we consider that a comedy as a dramatic genre and the comic as something that can trigger laughter, medieval definitions feature neither drama nor laughter.

Although in the eighteenth century the title of comic poet was a stigma implying lack of dignity, a few critics still found Chaucer’s work worthy of praise. Thomas Warton for instance went so far as to say that Chaucer was the “first who gave the English nation an idea of humour” (Grohman Reiner, 1960: 1). George Meredith, in his “Essay on Comedy”, mostly examines the comic writing of Moliere; still, when it comes to Chaucer he merely states that the poet “bubbles” with the “Comic spirit.” In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one finds that there is ample appreciation of Chaucer as a comic poet. For example, A.W. Ward, speaks of Chaucer’s “exuberant love of fun and light-hearted

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gaiety,” G.L. Kittredge sees *The Canterbury Tales* as a “human comedy,” while G.K. Chesterton calls them “broad comedy or farce.” (*Ibidem*: 2)

The focus of the present work is the comedy of the “Miller’s Tale”, whose comic elements are discussed in relation to George Meredith’s theory of comedy as presented in his *Essay on Comedy*. The reason why I have chosen the “Miller’s Tale” to be under scrutiny lies in its being a fabliau, a type of story that is usually comic, and because this particular tale is generally believed to represent the best of Chaucer’s artistry (Grohman Reiner, *op.cit.*: 7) and ranks the highest is my students’ choice of comic writings.

The Meredithian theory of comedy is especially explicit concerning the social conditions under which good comedy is produced and thrives; that is, a society which is intellectually alert, accepting of social equality between the sexes, and willing to approach life critically. The comic character must be depicted as a general type rather than a highly individualized personage, so that he/she may appeal to society as a whole. The comic heroine should be a worldly woman, capable of following both her wits and her heart, as she engages in the eternal battle of the sexes which is basic to comedy. The society in which this conflict of the sexes takes place is usually that of the middle class, which becomes comic as it imitates and aspires toward its betters.

The society Chaucer addressed was full of wit and bright; they also enjoyed the equality of the sexes which allows men and women to view life similarly. Additionally, they admit coarse behaviour and cuckoldry as comic elements. But as it ridicules the folly and consequences of illicit love, the “Miller’s Tale” may be said to accord with Meredith’s idealistic basis. The above-mentioned tale, however, is intended to produce laughter, not to illustrate a moral.

### **Insights into the Concept of Comedy**

Laura Kendrick provides an insight into the conventional medieval etymological definition of the Latin word *comedia*, which is explained as ‘rustic song’; *comedia* was supposed to be a compound formed from *oda* (‘song’) and *comos* (‘peasant’ or ‘rustic’). Therefore, **comedy** was rustic poetry which made use of appropriately low vocabulary and style with peasant life. ‘Low’ means cultivating the land, tending animals, and rural sexual activity. What is more, in some cases, to write in the vernacular, the ‘vulgar’ tongue, was enough to make a work into a comedy (Kendrick, 2002: 91). Alternatively, another etymological definition emphasized a connection between *comedy* and *festive banqueting* (Kelly, 1989: 6). This latter type of medieval comic texts features biblical characters behaving ludicrously at a fictive banquet. They would be read aloud and possibly mimed.

Basically, the derivation of the word ‘comedy’ from the word ‘banquet’ might stem from the more general observation that medieval festive occasions were the traditional contexts for comedy. Annual seasonal festivities celebrated by both clergy and laity – such as the long holidays of New Year and wedding feasts – were especially auspicious for comedy. By definition, these moments of expanded community were periods of transition and attempts to integrate novelty or to bridge difference. The temporary relaxation of the rules was most probably encouraged by copious ingestion of alcohol and food upon festive occasions. During the play time of the feast, materialism, physical pleasure and vulgarity in every sense of the term might take ‘centre stage’ in the performance of comic texts of a parodic nature by professional entertainers or amateur ones (*Ibidem*: 91).

Both etymological definitions of comedy mentioned above – from ‘rustic song’ and from ‘banquet’ – fail to mention laughter, but they may assume it. A banqueting context would promote high spirits, and medieval clerical and aristocratic elites typically confirmed their own superiority by laughing at vulgarity – that is, rustic life and language.

The comedy could be any versified narrative that treats the lives of common people and ends on a merrier note than that on which is began (Kelly, *op.cit.*: 47). *The Canterbury Tales* as such is a work designed as a storytelling contest among a thirty-something group of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, a contest that is supposed to end happily with a banquet on behalf of the winner. Nonetheless, its projected sheer bliss ending is by no means the only feature of the *Canterbury Tales* that has encouraged modern scholars to define its genre as comedy (Kendrick, *op.cit.*: 93).

Chaucerian comedy differs markedly from comedy as classically defined, that is, as a socially normative literary form, working to correct our behaviour through making us laugh at the ridiculousness of vice and folly, as is the case with Ben Jonson’s comedies. In Chaucer, though, the social norms are not clearly displayed and moral norms are often openly subverted as when the narrator of the “Miller’s Tale” makes comments over the description of Alison and her lasciviousness which was a trigger both for lords and yeomen (Pearsall, 2004: 161-162).

#### **Conventions of Medieval Comic Texts – The “Miller’s Tale”**

Comedy of one kind or another is present in a large number of the *Canterbury Tales*, but we are concerned here with one of the tales where the narrative structure and expectations are those of comedy as a specific genre. One of such tales, that of the Miller certainly belongs to the genre (*Ibidem*: 160).

John of Garland’s definition of comedy focuses on the cast of the five main characters, namely ‘a husband and wife, an adulterer and the adulterer’s accomplice – or his critic – and the adulteress’s nurse, or the husband’s servant’ along with their plots which are revolving around adultery and the outwitting of a jealous husband by his wife and a younger man. Hence, it arises that comedy deals with low and humorous matter, and more specifically, that this matter involves adultery, yet ends joyfully (Kendrick, *op.cit.*: 93). Undoubtedly, in Chaucer’s case, his practice of comedy in English depended on his familiarity with comic biblical parodies, tales of seduction, adultery and trickery which featured vulgar speech and subject matter, especially adultery which end up in ‘happy’ outcomes (*Ibidem*: 94).

Chaucer in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* called the Miller both a secular jongleur and a clerical goliard – traditions of comic entertainment, the subjects of which were mainly sins of flesh, such as adultery. He is both a figure for sin and devil, as well as the incarnation of crudity and ugliness (with his warty, hair-tufted nose, huge black nostrils and furnace-sized mouth). The comic persona of rusticity, foolishness or drunken gluttony, masterfully rendered by the Miller, is a *licence* to take various sorts of liberties with authoritative texts, courteous discourse, and other social conventions and rules of conduct (*Ibidem*: 109).

In praising the “Miller’s Tale”, Eugene H. Long states that “this story, ‘vulgar’ or ‘bawdy’ as it may be, sheds light on the comedy of life” (Grohman Reiner, *op.cit.*: 3). Some of the most richly comic poetry of Chaucer has the taint of bawdry and ribaldry, which has undoubtedly made generations more conservative than the present one to hesitate to comment on it.

In the “Miller’s Tale”, the time is the present, and the story is introduced as an up-to-date report on a contemporary ‘slice-of-life’. The place is the homely known world of town or village, usually in England. The “Miller’s tale” is slyly set in or near the university town of Oxford, as if to give a broad and impartial view of the principal preoccupations and activities of university students (Pearsall, *op.cit.*: 160).

Chaucer scholars have noticed that the “Miller’s Tale” features much clever parody of biblical texts. We will focus on the passage from the end of the tale, which exemplifies Chaucer’s comic techniques. Our laughter arises when recognising well-known biblical language when Absolon, the parish clerk, goes out into the night to woo Alisoun, the old carpenter’s seductive young wife. The young man resorts to well-known biblical figures from the biblical Song of Songs – *honeycomb, cinnamon, turtle-dove* – which was understood allegorically in the Middle Ages as an expression of the love between Christ and Church. The speech is not only ineffective but also inappropriate, especially because it is rendered by the big-mouthed, warty-nosed Miller. Alisoun’s crude response involves another comic misuse of biblical citation: “go away or I will cast a stone”, making reference to Christ’s defence of the woman who had been accused of adultery and hence meant to be conventionally punished. On top of that, Alisoun, would be “casting” this answer while she was in bed with her lover Nicholas, which is a ludicrous parody of Christ’s message. It goes without saying that stones in her vicinity were out of the questions, so the threat is ridiculous. The climactic comic action has to do with Alisoun’s tricky substitution of her bottom for her face as an object for Absolon to kiss (the mis-directed kiss). The humour of the lines in which Absolon, in a frenzy of wiping, applies a whole series of available materials to his lips (dust, straw, cloth) is downright scatological, for these would seem to be the sorts of materials used for wiping excrement off bottoms in the Middle Ages. By kissing Alisoun’s bottom, Absolon is forced to treat his face as a dirty bottom (Kendrick, *op.cit.*: 109).

In the series of comic physical inversion of this fabliau, bottoms replace faces again when Nicholas replays Alisoun’s trick in order to get his own bottom kissed. From here on the action accelerates, each gesture inevitably provoking the next in a casual chain leading up to the tale’s riotous conclusion: when Nicholas farts in Absolon’s face, the latter takes aim with a hot iron, which brands Nicholas’s bottom and makes him cry out for water, which awakens and prompts the Carpenter (awaiting the second Deluge in his wooden tub) to cut the rope and come crashing down; hence Nicholas and Alisoun cried out for help from the neighbours, who come running to the scene to take part in and laugh at the dispute over what really happened – on one side, the husband, on the other, the wife and her lover – and ultimately to join in the general mockery of the cuckolded husband’s folly.

Although Alisoun’s husband had taken a fall that broke his arm, endured his own cuckolding and the mockery of the whole neighbourhood, although Nicholas had a badly burnt bottom, although Absolon has “flawed” lips, deflated pride and destroyed illusions, the “Miller’s Tale” ends exuberantly in laughter, which gives it the sort of ‘happy’ ending that medieval comedy required (*Ibidem*: 110-111). The satire is done from well-established normative positions in these comic tales: the complacency and gullibility of John the carpenter, the ludicrous philandering of Absolon, are classics of satirical comedy (Pearsall, *op.cit.*: 162).

Chaucer sprinkles the “characterizations and conversations with clichés borrowed from vernacular versions of the code of courtly love – phrases of the sort we are accustomed to meet in Middle English minstrel romances” (Grohman Reiner,

*op.cit.*: 26-27). The description of Alisoun is an example of the poet's borrowing of clichés from the courtly code. When applied to Alisoun, these clichés seem to hit the mark and bounce away; for the down-to-earth carpenter's wife is not and will not be a noble lady. She has the conventional and fashionable beauty of a white forehead, but this is how Chaucer praises it:

*Her forheed shoon as bright as any day,  
So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk...  
She was a prymerole, a piggessnye  
For any lord to leggen in his bedde,  
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde* (Chaucer, 2000: 120).

The mixture of courtliness and vulgarity makes Alisoun's portrait comic, especially to a courtly audience. Although Alisoun's actions are of the country rather than of the court, the love encounters are described with conventional phrases, or with a burlesque of these phrases. Nicholas woos her roughly and directly. His supplication to the object of his love is quick and direct: love me secretly or I will die, he says. Alisoun, unlike a high-born lady of romance, quickly capitulates.

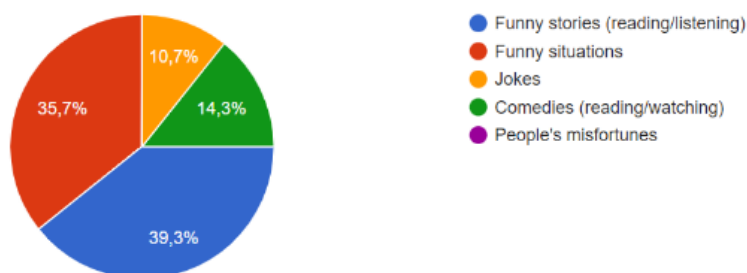
#### A Student-Oriented Survey

Laughter stems mainly from the content which includes such elements as bringing together both the positive and the negative sides of a story, the use of *deception*, the *impossible*, or the *unexpected*. Deception, the second cause of comedy, motivates much of the "Miller's Tale" action as the clerk plots to deceive the carpenter. The clerk's plan for the deception, based on a fantastic vision of the second great flood, contains the third cause of comedy, the impossible. The second part, the impossible cannot be found in the "Miller's Tale" closely woven structure. But the third element, the unexpected, is used for an anti-climactic effect in Alisoun's portrait and in the denouement.

The love-triangle of a young wife, old husband, and amorous clerk always implies deception and cuckoldry. The whole of Nicholas' elaborate plot is designed to deceive the carpenter; and John easily obliges and even unknowingly assists in the deception. Nicholas deceives John at every turn, including the accidental and disastrous deception, brought about by the clerk's cry for water, that the flood is upon them. When Nicholas comes to the window, trying to fool Absolon, a beautiful double deception is at work. Absolon in turn deceives Nicholas by greeting him, not with a kiss, but with a red-hot brand. Therefore, deception in the "Tale" is an essential comic element; for Nicholas, Absolon, and John, to a greater or lesser degree, all deceive and are deceived.

#### What makes you laugh?

28 de răspunsuri



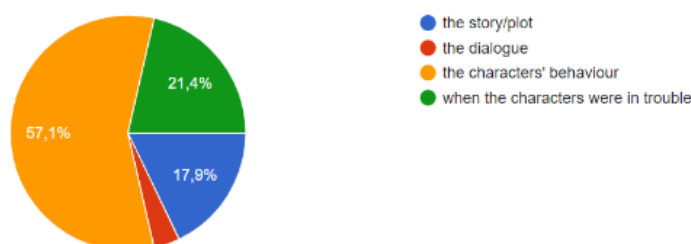


Based on the previous laughter provoking strategies, I have conducted a survey to identify what prompted my undergraduate students to perceive the “Miller’s Tale” as a laughter-provoking fiction. The 28 respondents are students from the University of Pitesti, Romania, Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Arts, English Language and Literature Department, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year, during the academic year 2022-2023, from the Language and Literature undergraduate programmes. Gender-wise, out of the 28 students, 78,6% are female and 21,4% are male and their ages range from 18 to 40 years old.

The questions the respondents were supposed to answer focus both on facts as well as opinions, so as to give the survey validity but also to enable them to use their creativity and critical thinking skills. When it comes to what triggers the students’ laughter, 40% of them were inclined to opt for funny stories, closely followed by 35% choosing funny situations, 14% comedies, and a mere 10% jokes. With a sigh of relief, I have to admit that people’s misfortunes variant was not one of the choices our students went for, even though, as cruel as it might sound nowadays world tends to be cruel and turning misfortunes into jokes or stand-up comedy/roasts is quite the norm in social media.

What triggered your laughter when reading The Miller's Tale?

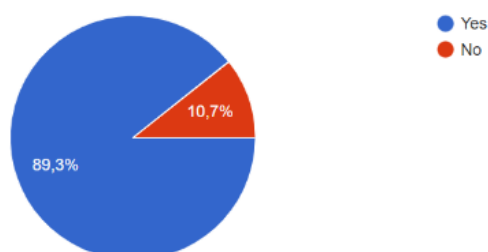
28 de răspunsuri



The statement *Humour is a universal human trait* was overwhelmingly agreed upon by almost 80% of the respondents, while 15% disagreed and 7% preferred not to express their view on the matter. *English writers have a great sense of humour* was primarily labelled as an opinion by 60% of the students, while 40% deem it to be a fact. The take-away of these answers could be that the well-renowned “British black humour” is under underrated/overrated or completely misunderstood. Regardless, the “Miller’s Tale” has indeed peeled laughter from our students, who overwhelmingly admitted (90% of them) after reading the story. This has always been the case with 1<sup>st</sup> year students when studying Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*.

Did The Miller's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer make you laugh?

28 de răspunsuri



In light of the above, the story was granted mostly, 3, 4 and 5 on the scale from 1-5 in terms of humour. Moving on to the details that triggered the fits of laughter with our students 60 % of the respondents chose the characters' behaviour, 20% the characters' being in trouble, and 20% the story/plot.

Due to the fact that the majority of the respondents are Gen Z representatives, who are characterized by being digitally natives, fidgety and impatient, instant reward system-oriented, they need to be challenged with visual prompts too, in case we need to have them on board for a longer period of time, to involve them and have them express their point of view and use their critical thinking skills. As a consequence, they were asked to watch a 10-minute animated video featuring the main ideas from the above-mentioned story. Surprisingly or not, they found the video funnier than the written story (65% - 35% found the written story more hilarious).

### **Conclusions**

Geoffrey Chaucer apologizes in advance, in the *General Prologue*, for telling such coarse tales as the "Miller's Tale." It is hard to believe that Chaucer was genuinely embarrassed by what he was doing (Pearsall *op.cit.*: 163): it is all part of the fun, and all part of the system of dramatic subterfuges that Chaucer has worked out in the *Canterbury Tales* to give himself the freedom he needs to do what he wants to do as a writer. The freedom, however won, was worth winning, for the fabliau, is, without exception, amongst the supreme achievements of his artistry.

The present comparative approach has dealt with identifying the potential triggers of laughter during 14<sup>th</sup> century England in the "Miller's" as compared to the perspective taken by 21<sup>st</sup> century English language students from the University of Pitesti who took part in a survey on the above-mentioned topic.

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## ***DARK HUMOUR, COMIC ELEMENTS AND THE HORRORS OF WAR IN “CATCH 22”***

**Georgiana-Elena DILĂ\***

**Abstract:** *Joseph Heller’s Catch 22 makes use of humour and satire in order to portray a world where the war and its effects are unbelievably overwhelming. Many of the moments of the novel that are best remembered are undoubtedly hilarious, managing to create a bond between comedy and tragedy, thus, linking humour to traumatizing events. Dark humour is certainly the way Heller chooses to deal with the atrocities of war and its importance in the novel should not be overlooked when commenting on its impact and popularity.*

**Keywords:** *war, dark humour, satire, absurd*

Joseph Heller’s first published novel, *Catch-22*, is often voted as one of the best American novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even though it deals with the way war fundamentally changes and influences people it also provides incredible insights in the human psyche (Carpenter 2012: foreword) as it has been researched and proven that indeed Heller based his characters on his real companions offering opportunity for further investigation and revelation of the men behind his world-famous work. Heller never fully stated that his own experiences had shaped the novel, but as Kurt Vonnegut mentioned in an interview some of the writers who had been fighting in the war had the most appealing and believable stories to share and that is why they are so popular nowadays as well. The real voices of the people that are presented in the novel are sometimes “shouted” as it has been mentioned about Heller, in the idea that the chronological order is ignored just to create a greater impact on the readers and subsequently on the film-goers.

Heller’s intentions were to offer an account of the events taking place in the war while making people somehow use their imagination, his main point being that of sharing the experience with as many readers as possible embracing also a more humorous approach – that of the widely known dark humour. He was greatly influenced by Nabokov, Waugh and Céline and the manner in which they mixed the comic and the tragic together attracting readers into the stories that they weaved.

There has always been a curiosity regarding the way that *Catch-22* became one of the best stories about the war presented by an American author, even though there was a certain need for pushing the manuscript to the publishers in the beginning of the journey, but there was definitely something in the bent-headed humour of the book that would convince Candida Donadio that there was more behind the foolishness that others saw in the writing and so she made the right decision in supporting Heller and his novel’s being published. And she was proven to be right as in two years both the author and the work became part of literary history event though it first became a bestseller in the UK and not in the US as he might have expected. However, the sales of the novel increased steadily on the American territory as critics were expressing their opinions on Heller’s novel.

Whenever Heller had to comment on how everything started, he presented mostly what he had mention and had been published in 1974 in *The Paris Review*:

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I was lying in bed in my four-room apartment on the West Side when suddenly this line came to me: 'It was love at first sight. The first time he saw the chaplain, Someone fell madly in love with him.' I didn't have the name Yossarian. The chaplain wasn't necessarily an army chaplain – he could have been a *prison* chaplain. But as soon as the opening sentence was available, the book began to evolve clearly in my mind – even most of the particulars ... the tone, the form, many of the characters, including some I eventually couldn't use. All of this took place within an hour and a half. It got me so excited that I did what the cliché says you're supposed to do: I jumped out of bed and paced the floor. (Sorkin, 1993: 116)

As people have commented on Heller's presentation of the war events and the way he deals with missions and dangerous situations there has always been a common ground of the dark humour that he uses as a tool to make people laugh, but still reach a greater understanding of the serious issues put forward.

Joseph Heller was able to identify the immense ironies in his situation, and *Catch-22* captured the absurdities from the start. As I read *Catch-22*, I respected the humor. I also respected the difficulty of the training for such dangerous situations that was required for the accomplishment of the mission. The humor was based largely on the desire to step away from the complexity and stress of those missions and mitigate the feelings that each mission might be one's last. (Carpenter 2012: foreword)

The dark humour used by the author to convey his message is one of the main reasons for the novel's popularity as readers could observe certain instances with a less bleak view of the world at that time. James Nagel mentions "Heller's attack on the basic principles and fundamental order of society" as he was the one who enlisted in the US Army Corps in 1942 flying over sixty combat missions as a B-25 bombardier, having personal experiences from the war as a believable voice that readers trusted and wanted to hear, the novel being popular from the very beginning.

Heller tumbles one joke after another as the story descends downwards through betrayals, unnecessary deaths and a Rome that is not unlike Dante's *Inferno*. The comedy, if not quite as dark as this summary makes it sound, is sharp enough to be searing, and it is searing because it is based on his first-hand experience. (Coker 2014: 214)

Being published at the beginning of the 1960s helped *Catch-22* become a cult book for the younger generations protesting against the Vietnam War and the absurdity of war in general. Nowadays it is still related to the war on terror reminding us that World War II happened and people understood nothing from the disaster of the first one. Many critics and readers started their journey with the novel viewing it a farcical satire on the American Air Force and then changing their mind that the author actually had fury and even felt disgust against humanity in general with tones against anything that could harm the balance society desperately needs.

In *Catch-22* Heller offers us a wealth of characters who are compliant with bureaucracy taken to its logical extremes. As a positive contrast to the acquiescence of these more corrupt characters, he presents us with Yossarian. Yossarian refuses to let the system dehumanize him, and asserts his and other's humanity throughout the novel. (Simmons, 2008: 49)

The 1960s were represented by the dark humour that was encountered not only in books, but also in television and radio as individuals needed to express all the frustrations, anxieties and fears in a way that would entertain people, but at the same time would send out a message making readers revisit certain events and situations. This might be one of the main reasons that Heller had stories explored by different voices showing again and again the absurdity of the war and the parody about the military life and the way coward people in key positions ordered innocent men around in order to show how heroic they were while doing absolutely nothing or just flying in one short mission and then just enjoying their power over men who could not actually fight back. As Leon F. Seltzer stated “the novel’s absurdities – comic and otherwise – operate almost always to expose the alarming inhumanities which pollute our political, social, and economic systems” (Setzer, 1984: 74).

What has appeared to be an excessively fragmented narrative (or at least a too randomly fragmented one) can be read as a mammoth orchestration of individual comic bits and routines into a kaleidoscopic comedy revue, the cumulative effect of which is to situate Yossarian ever more irretrievably in the world defined by *Catch-22*. The chronological fluidity of the story is partly induced by the logic of an absurdity as overwhelming as this, and is partly an opportunity for the reader to reflect on the logic of the absurd itself as played out under this text’s conditions: that a world so irrational, where distinctions between past, present, and future collapse, could actually exist seems implausible in the extreme, yet when judged by the terms of its governing framework, the confusions of such a world seem plausible indeed. (Green, 2008: 188)

The novel presents forty-two chapters spreading over almost five hundred pages dealing with the bombardier, Yossarian, who “struggles against a hostile establishment and the code it maintains for controlling the society it rules, that is, *Catch-22*, the principle of power which states ‘they have a right to do anything we can’t stop them from doing’” (Heller, 1961: 19). Yossarian is regarded as someone who wants to save himself and not the others in particular and that is why he is actually considered an anti-hero. However, one might not forget that there is always a need for context and when we are presented the whole picture, we see that when offered the possibility of being relieved of his duties, he refuses saying he was not going to do it. As Heller himself pointed out:

I wanted somebody who would seem to be outside the culture in every way - ethnically as well as others ... I wanted to get an extinct culture, somebody who could not be identified either geographically, or culturally, or sociologically – somebody who has a capability of ultimately divorcing himself completely from all emotional and psychological ties. (Krassner, 1984: 78)

Yossarian is seen as a conspirator and he sees the administration doing the work against him, so there is no trust between the two. The novel itself starts with him being treated for liver condition as he was trying to avoid flying any more missions. He has started fearing the commanding officers more than the Germans as Colonel Cathcart enjoys increasing the number of missions that should be flown by a soldier before going home and Yossarian misses this opportunity twice fearing he might never get to actually leave the war as he was at the whims of a man who cared very little about others.

It is one of the joys of the book that Heller spins the illogical absurdity of war which logic itself is unable to resolve. Yossarian is a child in an adult world, and like a child

can see the Emperor's nakedness all too clearly. The passages in which he questions the madness around him are crucial to the novel. After all, he reasons, why does he have to die? History does not demand his premature demise; the justice of the cause will be satisfied without it. Men will die, of course, as a matter of necessity; *which* men will die is a matter of circumstance, and Yossarian is willing to be the victim of everything but circumstance. (Coker 2014: 215)

Even though there are times when the dialogue reveals the fact that unless one has a comic take on things there is no possibility of getting out sane enough to continue being part of the war, or, for the lucky ones, to go home eventually and attempt living a life that is not overwhelmed by the horrors of what they had seen and experienced, suffering not only at the hand of the enemy, but at that of their own commanding officers. So, although the novel is set in Corsica and Italy (the same places where Heller himself had been during the war) the author is mostly directing his criticism against the American mentality focusing on the reactions of his compatriots.

By burlesquing the key trials of the postwar period Heller uses absurdist techniques to bring to the surface the hidden ideological assumptions of the McCarthy era: its paranoia, xenophobia, racism and general preoccupation with secrecy. The novel repeatedly converts conspiracy into comic theatre as if Heller's characters were performing in an endless farce, where the momentum of their own activities acts as the justification of those activities and obscures the most obvious realities of their situation. (Seed, 1989: 69)

Continuing on the same note of humour and absurd situations one of the best-known quotes from the novel is the one in chapter two when Clevinger and Yossarian talk about the way in which the latter is preoccupied with the way in which the enemy is treating him personally, while the former is mentioning a general situation revealing that the main focus is not how each and every one deals with danger. Thus, "the tone of this interchange is suggestive of nothing so much as the patter of a vaudeville team, and the humor evoked by such a passage clearly relies on the basic strategies of comedy, surprise and incongruity." (Green, 2008:187)

Clevinger had stared at him with apoplectic rage and indignation and, clawing the table with both hands, had shouted, "You're crazy!"

"Clevinger, what do you want from people?" Dunbar had replied wearily above the noises of the officers' club.

"I'm not joking," Clevinger persisted.

"They're trying to kill me," Yossarian told him calmly.

"No one's trying to kill you," Clevinger cried.

"Then why are they shooting at me?" Yossarian asked.

"They're shooting at *everyone*," Clevinger answered. "They're trying to kill everyone."

"And what difference does that make?" (Heller, 1961: 10)

The novel explores the loss of autonomy in a system that is imposed on the entire society and the absurd rules and instances that make people laugh and still wonder how things have deteriorated in such a troubling way. One very relevant example is that of Doc Daneeka and his existence being erased and the refusal to acknowledge that he was still alive if the bureaucratic documents mentioned him as dead. This "death" of the individual in face of the capitalist system shows that there was

nothing that could be done in face of bureaucracy. And to further push the limits of the absurdity of the situation not even Mrs. Daneeka trusts the letters sent by her husband announcing that he was not actually dead and that he was indeed fine and everything was just a misunderstanding. She is more preoccupied with the ten thousand dollars insurance policy she was about to receive than the real situation her husband found himself in at the time.

“You’re dead, sir,” one of his two enlisted men explained.

Doc Daneeka jerked his head up quickly with resentful distrust.

“What’s that?”

“You’re dead sir,” repeated the other. “That’s probably the reason you always feel so cold.”

“That’s right, sir. You’ve probably been dead all this time and we just didn’t detect it.”

“What the hell are you both talking about?” Doc Daneeka cried shrilly with a surging, petrifying sensation of some onrushing unavoidable disaster.

“It’s true, sir,” said one of the enlisted men. “The records show that you went up in McWatt’s plane to collect some flight time. You didn’t come down in a parachute, so you must have been killed in the crash.”

“That’s right, sir,” said the other. “You ought to be glad you’ve got any temperature at all.” (Heller, 1961: 392)

Heller wanted to push limits even further so he portrayed different types of characters that would perfectly embody the types of individuals specific to the time period as we have seen the ones mentioned above. There is also Milo Minderbinder, an entrepreneur who starts dealing on a black market and becomes rich by dehumanizing others while taking advantage of all the money he could get from the Germans. Milo was the face of war profiteers who can make profit and alliances with anyone as long as they have a common enemy or competition they intend on crushing. He feels no remorse and sees nothing wrong with the way he behaves. There is a lack of patriotic behaviour that is emphasised in several of Heller’s works revealing that there was no appreciation for the rule followers and the ones that dedicated their lives to getting success for the American nation.

Few novels in fact offer comedy as pure as that in *Catch-22*. No situation, not even the bloodiest or most fearful, is insulated from the further indignity of the joke, or exempt from the comedic *reductio ad absurdum*; no character, not even the apparent protagonist, escapes the ravages of mockery and ridicule. While such thoroughgoing comedy is familiar to us in film – particularly the American comic film descended from Mack Sennett – it is undoubtedly disconcerting to find it in a purportedly “serious” work of literature depicting a subject as forbidding as war and its consequences. (Green, 2008:185)

The novel is impressive in the sense that many serious and troubling elements that might seem taboo when it comes to laughing about them are treated with a humour which makes everything more bearable in the sense that there is the absurd in the real world that gets us every time, the same absurd and exaggerated situations that we notice being pointed at by Heller who, as a masterful writer, engages in the mission of showing his readers what should be laughed at and, in this case, even the most cruel events in history and their consequences. The ridiculous and absurd situations that are present in the novel, even the names chosen by Heller and the variety of characters that are introduced to the public are all meant to show how a world can be irredeemable and

talented authors still find a way to get people to laugh and appreciate the comic effects and humour of their work:

“[*Catch-22*] still blows me away,” says Carl Hiassen. “[It] is one of the most phenomenal novels in the English language because of Heller’s ability to make you laugh literally on every page while writing about the darkest of all human conditions, wartime.” (qtd. in Daughtery, 2011:482)

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## ***HUMOUR AND EXUBERANCE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S "ORLANDO"***

**Mihaela GAVRILĂ\***

**Abstract:** *Virginia Woolf's most prominent novel with respect to experimentation, innovation and theme, Orlando is at the same time a time-travelling fantastical biography, a feminist statement and a hybrid cheerful comic work that presents with a critical eye the theories expressed by the patriarchal literary stage. The exuberant and humorous rendering of an unusual journey through history examines the true nature of sexuality, a taboo subject at that time, and gives shape to a literary character like no other.*

**Keywords:** *experimentation, innovation, exuberance, humour*

Probably Virginia Woolf's most autobiographical novel, *Orlando*, is both a study of free speech in which the fantastic mingles with the real and an excellent illustration of the author's mastery of literary techniques. Under the obvious surface of a text written in a relaxed manner and the difficulty of pertaining to an exact category, the novel possesses a thick and intricate pattern that enables Woolf to paint the mysterious character of Orlando with an exuberant and humorous rendering, following the protagonist's path through sexuality, time and space.

Published in 1928, *Orlando* was seen as a break from Woolf's more serious writing as she herself admitted that she had "written this book quicker than any: & it is all a joke" (Woolf, *Diary 3*: 164) and the short period of its creation, of about six months, made her state that it was "half laughing, half serious: with great splashes of exaggeration" (Woolf, *Diary 3*: 168). The innovative feature of this piece of writing stands in the fact that even the author might have discovered new things when rereading it: "I wrote it in such a tearing hurry that anything, horror or sublimity, may be there for all I know" (*Letters 4*: 32). And the debate about the novel's full meaning could be also explained by its multiple aims, that of a diluted biography of Vita Sackville-West (who even read and approved of the book before publication), of a critique on the limitations of various types of biography and as an extensive investigation on how personal experiences might imprint the development of individual identity.

An interesting technique is the introduction of self-conscious narrator, who acts as Orlando's biographer, and is permanently allowed to insert issues of form into the narrative but who alludes to the rules of biography, but in doing so he is more often than not breaking those exact practices. The readers are constantly made aware that Woolf is not Orlando's biographer but a character himself: "this dual construction of character, one which includes both biographer and subject, allows Woolf not only to explore thematic elements, such as Orlando's negotiation of gender roles, but also to examine the ways in which various ages of life writers depict such themes" (Woolf, 1958: 213). The concentration on the construction of the text is what it gives its play frame that sets into motion all the paradox of the joke structure and gives the book its complexity:

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Orlando's laugh resounds throughout centuries. He laughs with Princess Sasha (Orlando 20). She laughs at the Archduchess Harriet (118). She also laughs at herself and at the vanity of (his/her) life (203). Entwined with flirt and banter, the delightful pleasures of desire and mischievous teasing, laughter is furthermore connected to the serious wildness of love as Orlando meets her soul mate Marmaduke in a whirlwind of hoarsely laughing looks<sup>1</sup> (161-2). Laughter gives its flighty tempo to Orlando's waltz of lovers, underlining its unbearable lightness of being and the intricate connexions between questions of identity, gender and alterity. Orlando's elating laughter echoes his/her gender metamorphoses (sex change and cross-dressing) as well as the existential quandaries linked to his/her various amorous relationships. (Cassigneul, 2019)

Moreover, Woolf uses humour to mock the conventional form of the genre of biography and reshapes it into an appropriate shape to render the experiences of her former lover. What could have been written as a biography of either a man or a woman and develop over a lifespan is transformed into a journey of a man/woman that travels through four centuries of gender changes, spread with tragic-comic truths about Sackville-West's life.

A representative scene is the fragment in which Orlando, after having lived a few hundred years, and having changed gender, is being angered by a suitor that she insults and pranks in order to be freed of any kind of constraints without having to use any other weapon except laughter:

To love a woman who cheated at play was, he said, impossible. Here he broke down completely. Happily, he said, recovering slightly, there were no witnesses. She was, after all, only a woman, he said. In short, he was preparing in the chivalry of his heart to forgive her and had bent to ask her pardon for the violence of his language, when she cut the matter short, as he stooped his proud head, by dropping a small toad between his skin and his shirt.

In justice to her, it must be said that she would infinitely have preferred a rapier. Toads are clammy things to conceal about one's person a whole morning. But if rapiers are forbidden; one must have recourse to toads. Moreover, toads and laughter between them sometimes do what cold steel cannot. She laughed. The Archduke blushed. She laughed. The Archduke cursed. She laughed. The Archduke slammed the door.

'Heaven be praised!' cried Orlando still laughing. She heard the sound of chariot wheels driven at a furious pace down the courtyard. She heard them rattle along the road. Fainter and fainter the sound became. Now it faded away altogether. (Woolf, 2021: 120)

Another example of Woolf's sense of humour is the comic construction of the shifting biographer that theatrically complains about the lack of records on which to base the narrative and who even admits that she/he uses imagination and speculation to fill in the twelve pages that detail Orlando's stay in Constantinople:

It is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career, when he played a most important part in the public life of his

country, we have least information to go upon. [...] But the revolution which broke out during his period of office, and the fire which followed, have so damaged or destroyed all those papers from which any trustworthy record could be drawn, that what we can give is lamentably incomplete. [...] We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination. (Woolf, 2021: 78)

Orlando's lively laughter echoes not only through centuries but accompanies him/her through gender metamorphoses, love affairs and basically through his/her eventful life, acting as the binding force of identity, gender and alterity. In an effort to give an "exact and particular account of Orlando's life" (Woolf, 2021: 141), the narrator admits that the situation is aggravated by Orlando's willingness to change from one set of clothes to another:

And mincing out the words, she was horrified to perceive how low an opinion she was forming of the other sex, the manly, to which it had once been her pride to belong – 'To fall from a mast-head', she thought, 'because you see a woman's ankles; to dress up like a Guy Fawkes and parade the streets, so that women may praise you; to deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you; to be the slave of the frailest chit in petticoats. and yet to go about as if you were the Lords of creation. – Heavens!' she thought, 'what fools they make of us – what fools we are!' And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in. The comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her. She was a feather blown on the gale. Thus, it is no great wonder, as she pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged. (Woolf, 2021: 141-2)

Even if Virginia Woolf considered the novel to "be a most amusing book" (Woolf Diary 3: 157) her husband took the book "more seriously than I had expected. Thinks it in some ways better than *The Lighthouse*" (Woolf, Diary 3: 185) and modern critics seem to agree with Leonard Woolf when stating that "in Orlando she succeeded by dressing her biographical portrait in the vestiges of fiction. She employed humor, satire, and invention and defied temporal and biological truths in order to express the 'reality' of Vita Sackville-West" (Cooley, 1990: 72). With a rhetorical strategy that matched the views of the genre of biography that she found challenging Woolf achieved her mission:

'The aim of biography', said Sir Sydney Lee, . . . is the truthful transmission of personality', and no single sentence could more neatly split up into two parts the whole problem of biography as it presents itself to us today. On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality. And if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two as

one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one. (Woolf, 1927: 473)

Using the novelistic integrity that she talked about in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf gave literature a fantastic and unpredictable novel with a biography's weight of authority and an innovative structure that was meant to encourage women to find their own narrative voice. The rhetorical structure of a joke enabled her to write lives and about lives while connecting the historical/biographical facts with exaggeratedly fictional personalities. She also manages to parody the realism of the conventional biographical form through the intentional warp of time, space and gender.

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## ***THE ART OF HUMOUR IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE: EXPLORING CHARLES DICKENS AND WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY***

**Valentina GEORGESCU STÎNGĂ\***

**Abstract:** *Victorian literature is renowned for its rich and diverse themes, encompassing everything from social issues to romance and mystery. However, one often overlooked aspect of this literary era is the clever and intricate use of humour as a means of commenting on the realities of the time. Among the many Victorian authors, two giants stand out when it comes to incorporating humour into their works: Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. In this article, we will delve into the delightful world of Victorian humour as portrayed by these literary masters.*

**Keywords:** *laughter, humour, social, satire, wit*

### **On laughter**

Laughter, as a universal human response, played a significant role in Victorian society, and various scholars have examined its manifestations and meanings within the social and cultural context of the time period under focus. In analysing the way in which laughter should be understood, we draw upon the work of the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, whose 1900 *Le Rire (Laughter)* describes it in the following terms: “Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned” (Bergson, 2005:25). According to Bergson’s theory, laughter functions as a means of social correction: “To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. Such, let us say at once, will be the leading idea of all our investigations. Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a *social* signification” (Bergson 4). Henri Bergson claimed that laughing is a social process that has specific functions in real-world human contact and is not just a reaction to humour. According to him, laughing results from the perception of something mechanical or inflexible in human behaviour, which departs from the flexibility and spontaneity that are inherent to life. According to Bergson, laughter occurs when we notice a contrast between our strict expectations and the unexpected or ludicrous behaviour of others.

Bergson’s theory of comedy revolves around the concept of “mechanical inelasticity” (Bergson, 2005:10). He argued that laughter arises when we observe individuals who become encapsulated in their habits, routines, and fixed ways of thinking. In these instances, the comic emerges as a powerful force that disrupts the rigidity of the mechanical, prompting us to recognize the need for adaptability and open-mindedness.

According to Bergson’s idea, laughter serves as a social correction. It acts as a tool for drawing attention to society norms, customs, and dogmas that obstruct the dynamic progress of people. Laughter challenges us to reevaluate our viewpoints, adjust to novel circumstances, and ultimately create growth and progress by highlighting the limitations of our rigidity. Following this line of thought, comedy can be a solid tool for carrying out social criticism. By laughing, we can challenge oppressive systems,

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oppressive ideologies, and social inequalities. By exposing the absurdities and inconsistencies of the order of things, humour becomes a means of questioning and subverting established norms, leading to transformative social changes.

Bergson's careful theorisation of laughter touches on the metaphysical side of life in addition to its social and psychological aspects. He argued that laughter facilitates a deeper comprehension of the human situation by enabling us to dissociate from the gravity of daily issues. In this sense, laughing serves the function of a pathway to a richer perception and understanding of the human condition. It enables us to take a step back, gain a fresh perspective, and recognize the fundamental paradoxes and absurdities that underlie our existence – it basically helps us remember how crucial it is to embrace the spontaneity and creative potential of life.

### **Victorian Society and Laughter**

The aim of the present paper is to understand the social signification of laughter, as conceptualised by Henri Bergson in his above-mentioned work, when projected against the background of Victorian society, in an attempt to answer the crucial critical question of how laughter and humour shaped Victorian subjectivity and literary response.

Victorian society was characterized by strict social codes and conventions, and laughter was subject to certain norms and expectations as there was a certain “reserve about giving way to hearty laughter” (Andrews, 2013:129). Laughter could be thought of as a disruptive force that challenged the rigid social hierarchy and decorum of the era, which led to “the puritanical and class-conscious revulsion from laughter in the Victorian Era” (Andrews, 2013:130). The rapidly-paced industrialization, urbanization, and the pronounced social class divisions were only a few of the difficulties and social upheavals that the Victorians had to cope with. The anxiety and tensions of daily life were temporarily eased by laughter as a strategy of coping with reality. In this context, the amusing and light-hearted passages in literary works provide escape and a sense of delight, offering a haven from the gravity of social situations.

The nature and manifestation of laughter throughout the Victorian Age were influenced by gender dynamics. Women in particular were expected to follow stricter social norms and were frequently shown as the target of humour rather than taking part in it. Women's laughing was depicted as pleasant and endearing when controlled, reflecting social norms of femininity. A poem from the age renders the following gender implications of laughter: “The laughter of boyhood's a joy and a pleasure, / The laugh of an innocent girl is a treasure; / But the laugh of a man doesn't give much delight, / And the laugh of a woman shows folly or spite” (Wyatville, 1897:93). This clearly shows the gender repartition that existed in the case of Victorian laughter.

In his 1900 essay that we have previously invoked, Bergson stated that “the deepest intention of laughter is social” (Lightman, 1869:170). In this light, we can safely state that humour and laughter in Victorian literature often served as a vehicle for social critique. Authors like Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray used it as an instrument to expose the follies, vices, and injustices of their times. By infusing their works with humour, they engaged readers emotionally and intellectually, provoking them to reflect on societal ills and the need for change.

### **Victorian Literature and Laughter**

Victorian fiction is praised throughout literary history for its rich and varied topics, which range from social unease to romance and mystery stories. The intended

and sophisticated use of laughter and humour during this literary era is, however, a feature that is sometimes disregarded. When it comes to using humor in their writing, two preeminent figures of Victorian literature - Charles Dickens (1812–1870) and William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) stand out. In this section, we will plunge into the delightful world of Victorian humour as portrayed by these two literary masters.

### **Charles Dickens' Inimitable Laughter: Unveiling the Comic Genius**

Charles John Huffam Dickens, one of the greatest English novelists to this day, is renowned for his richly detailed characters, convincing narratives, and social commentary. Dickens infused his works with a distinct and catchy sense of humour, making laughter an integral part of his storytelling art. In this section, we will focus on the laughter that permeates Dickens' writings, exploring the various forms of humour employed, their significance, and the enduring legacy of Dickens' comedic genius. Dickens had a wonderful talent for incorporating a wide variety of humor into his stories to appeal to a wide range of tastes and sensibilities. Dickens used a variety of comic techniques, from subtle wit to broad slapstick comedy, to make his readers laugh. His humour ranged from wordplay and puns to comical situations, grotesque caricatures, and satirical commentary on society. In what follows, we shall make a few comments on the most revealing aspects of his writing that are relevant to the laughter topic undertaken in this study.

**Character Comedy and Eccentricity:** One of Dickens' greatest comedic strengths lies in his creation of memorable characters whose eccentricities and idiosyncrasies provoke the reader's laughter. His ability to use eccentric behaviour, speech patterns, and quirks to create humorous moments are quite obvious when it comes to such characters as Mr. Micawber in "David Copperfield" (1850) or Mr. Pickwick in "The Pickwick Papers" (1836). "*A thoroughly good-natured man, and as active a creature about everything but his own affairs as ever existed*" (*David Copperfield*, 43), Mr. Micawber is perhaps an "unlikely hero – he is clearly written more in the vein of the ne'er-do-wells" (Quabeck, 2021: 211). He is described as a "melodramatic man who serves a great amount of the novel's comedy through his 'manic plunges from elation to despair and back again'" (Quabeck, 2021:211). His entries throughout the novel are meant to bring (comic) relief, just as it happens when he saves David from the cross-examination of the Heeps: "I had begun to be a little uncomfortable, and to wish myself well out of the visit, when a figure coming down the street passed the door - it stood open to air the room, which was warm, the weather being close for the time of year - came back again, looked in, and walked in, exclaiming loudly, 'Copperfield! Is it possible?' It was Mr. Micawber! It was Mr. Micawber, with his eye-glass, and his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the condescending roll in his voice, all complete!" (*David Copperfield*, 221).

During the conversation, Mr. Micawber quite humorously introduces the interlocutions to his financial difficulties: "I have no scruple in saying, in the presence of our friends here, that I am a man who has, for some years, contended against the pressure of pecuniary difficulties.' (...) 'Sometimes I have risen superior to my difficulties. Sometimes my difficulties have - in short, have floored me. There have been times when I have administered a succession of facers to them; there have been times when they have been too many for me, and I have given in, and said to Mrs. Micawber, in the words of Cato, "Plato, thou reasonest well. It's all up now. I can show fight no more." But at no time of my life,' said Mr. Micawber, 'have I enjoyed a higher degree of satisfaction than in pouring my griefs (if I may describe difficulties, chiefly arising out of warrants of attorney and promissory

notes at two and four months, by that word) into the bosom of my friend Copperfield.”  
(*David Copperfield*, 222)

It is to be noted that Dickensian comic characters often embodied exaggerated traits and eccentricities, allowing Dickens to poke fun at the idiosyncrasies of Victorian society.

**Social Commentary:** Dickens’ humour cannot be perceived solely a means of entertainment; it also embarked on the function of instrumentalising social criticism. Through irony and satire, the novelist exposed the shortcomings of Victorian society, highlighting the stark contrasts between the rich and the poor. In novels like “*Oliver Twist*” and “*Bleak House*,” Dickens juxtaposed the absurdity of certain social norms and institutions against the harsh realities faced by the less privileged members of Victorian society. By adopting this satirical approach the novelist intended not only to elicit laughter, but also to lay the basis of a call for social reform. The satirical depiction of the Victorian climate that Dickens writes in *Oliver Twist* is quite explicit in this sense: “So they established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they) of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the waterworks to lay on an unlimited supply of water, and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal, and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations . . . kindly undertook to divorce poor married people . . . instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse (...)” (*Oliver Twist*, 9)

The fragment above produces a bitter laughter as its purpose is rather to provoke our sympathies for young Oliver and his fellow unfortunates, and second, to register Dickens’s protest against the authorities’ policy on and practice of charity in the society of his time.

**Comic Dialogue and Wordplay:** Dickens’s undeniable mastery of language and dialogue allowed him to create humorous exchanges between his characters. His novels are filled with witty banter, puns, and clever wordplay, which add depth and levity to his narratives. The sharp exchange of lines between characters, such as Pip and Herbert Pocket in “*Great Expectations*,” showcases Dickens’ skill in crafting comedic dialogues that entertain and amuse readers. A quite humorous example is the scene in which Herbert explains a few social norms to Pip: “Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth - for fear of accidents - and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it’s as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under. This has two advantages. You get at your mouth better (which after all is the object), and you save a good deal of the attitude of opening oysters, on the part of the right elbow.” (*Great Expectations*, 183)

**Comedy in Tragedy:** In Dickens’ works, laughter often emerges from the darkest corners of human existence. He skilfully interweaves comedy and tragedy, using humour to alleviate the sombre tones of his narratives. This juxtaposition allows readers to find moments of respite amidst the hardships faced by his characters. By infusing comedy into tragic circumstances, Dickens captures the complexities of life and the resilience of the human spirit.

In light of all these considerations above, it is safe to state that Dickens’ ability to blend laughter with social commentary contributed to the enduring appeal of his



literary works. His characters and their humorous escapades continue to resonate with readers across generations. Dickens' humour transcends time, bridging the gap between the Victorian era and the modern world, demonstrating the timeless nature of laughter and its ability to connect people across ages. Moreover, Dickens' comedic portrayals of human flaws and societal absurdities remain relevant even today.

### **William Makepeace Thackeray: A Subtle Blend of Wit and Irony**

William Makepeace Thackeray, another preeminent Victorian novelist, is highly celebrated for his incisive social commentary and intricate character portrayals. Within his vast literary repertoire, Thackeray skilfully employed laughter as a powerful tool to examine the follies, hypocrisies, and absurdities of his contemporary society, as he believed that "Good humour may be said to be one of the very best articles of dress one can wear in society" (Thackeray, *Sketches and Travels*). This section examines Thackeray's command of humour, analysing his distinct style of comedy, the underlying themes in his works, and the long-lasting effects of his comedic genius. Dickens' humour was frequently loud and exaggerated, but Thackeray's humour was more subdued and incisive. Instead of relying on slapstick or exaggerated scenarios, Thackeray's comedy frequently operates on a subtler and more refined level. He incorporates humour into his stories through astute observations, deft wordplay, and subtly satirical commentary. In what follows, we will dwell on some of the most important aspects of Thackerian humour

**Irony and social commentary:** Irony constitutes a regular component of Thackeray's humour, making it a potent instrument for social satire. The novelist skilfully highlights the gap between appearance and truth while exposing social inconsistencies and double standards. Through irony, Thackeray challenges readers to reconsider the moral principles and values of Victorian society, promoting reflection and critical analysis. Society is the product of the individuals who form it: "The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face. Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly kind companion; and so let all young persons take their choice." (Thackeray, 1962:21)

**Character satire, a window into Victorian society:** Thackeray's skilled construction of satirical characters demonstrates his acute eye for human flaws and vanities. He exposes the social vices that were pervasive in Victorian society by exaggerating their characteristics and defects. In novels like "Vanity Fair" and "The Newcomes," Thackeray deftly mocks the superficiality of upper-class life and the chase of money. His characters, including Becky Sharp and Jos Sedley, act as humorous mirrors that depict the moral difficulties and ethical compromises of their day. In fact, Thackeray's masterpiece, "Vanity Fair", "constitutes the last instance and highest accomplishment of narrative satire in Victorian Britain" (Quintero, 2008: 367). The novel explores the theme of social climbing and the pursuit of wealth and status; through the character of Becky Sharp, a cunning and ambitious young woman, Thackeray satirizes the vanity and greed prevalent in Victorian society. His sly wit and clever wordplay make the novel a delightful and thought-provoking read. It is important to note that "Thackeray's satire is neither the satire of class nor of party. It is the impartial satire of a philosophic humourist. He was a middle-class man himself (...), but no man ever gave the middle classes harder hits than he" (Hannay, 1869: 53).

**Humour as a Mask for Deeper Themes:** Beneath Thackeray's comedic veneer lie profound themes that transcend mere laughter. His humour serves as a vehicle for exploring complex human emotions, such as insecurity, ambition, and the yearning

for social acceptance. Thackeray skilfully blends comedy with pathos, juxtaposing light-hearted moments with poignant insights into the human condition. In doing so, he offers a multifaceted portrayal of society that resonates with readers on a deeper emotional level. But it should be stated that the object of Thackeray's humour was "not destruction, but correction; he (...) only desired that our whole society, such as history has made it, should be more simple, generous, natural, equal – not that it should be swept away" (Hannay, 1869:53-54). Thus, Thackeray's use of humour is not directed at merely ridiculing his characters or society as a whole. He possesses a keen sense of empathy, allowing readers to empathize with even the most flawed and morally ambiguous individuals. Thackeray's humour is often rooted in a deep understanding of human nature, shedding light on the vulnerabilities and complexities that make us all inherently flawed. By eliciting both laughter and empathy, he fosters a connection between readers and his characters, creating a more profound and lasting impact.

**Playful narration:** Thackeray often engages in playful and self-aware narration, breaking the fourth wall and addressing readers directly. This technique allows him to offer insightful commentary on the events and characters, creating a sense of intimacy with the reader. Thackeray's wit and occasional sarcasm add an additional layer of humour to his storytelling and is evident from the Preface to *Vanity Fair*: "Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?-Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out." (Thackeray, 1962:822).

### Conclusion

While both Dickens and Thackeray employ humour, there are notable differences in their styles and themes. Thematically speaking, both writers share a common goal of social critique, but their emphasis differs. Dickens' humour tends to be more exaggerated and theatrical, whereas Thackeray's humour, on the other hand, is subtler, utilizing wit, irony, and astute observations of human behaviour. Dickens' humour highlights the disparity between social classes and the flaws of the Victorian system. Thackeray's humour plunges into the human condition, exposing the follies, vanities, and moral ambiguities of individuals. The legacy of their humour lives on, reminding us of the enduring power of laughter as a means of social critique and reflection.

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## **THE ROLE OF HUMOUR IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

**Raluca GHENȚULESCU\***

***Abstract:** Laughter is a universal response to various situations and takes many different forms, from bitter sarcasm to harmless self-irony and from silly jokes to witty remarks or meaningful anecdotes. Despite the universality of humour itself, the mechanisms that trigger it vary from culture to culture. Therefore, when dealing with people from different countries, in a professional environment, it is essential to know the cultural peculiarities of each type of humour they respond to, in order to avoid blunders or misunderstandings. The main purposes of this article are to present the theories on humour, to raise awareness on the types of comic effects pertaining to different nations and to give examples of how humour can be used in intercultural contexts as an icebreaker, a successful way to keep a conversation going, a tension reliever in business or political talks or, simply, a team binder in a multicultural company.*

***Keywords:** humour, Intercultural Communication, theories*

### **Introduction**

Humour is an important form of communication, which can facilitate the understanding of other cultures, so it should be analysed from the viewpoint of its potential to enable intercultural interaction.

Some forms of communication are universal, whereas others are culture-specific. Laughter is seen as a universal mechanism of expressing emotions, but what triggers it depends on the specificities of each culture. The British humour, for example, is considered very funny in the Anglo-Saxon space, but is regarded as slightly boring, sarcastic or even pessimistic in other spaces. Therefore, if one cracks a British joke in front of an international audience, the chances to obtain mixed reactions are high, risking to be misunderstood or to sound impolite. This happens because most forms of humour are based on knowledge shared by the representatives of the same culture and may or may not function in intercultural communication.

To make humour function in communicative situations in a multicultural environment, we need some new principles that “involve explicitly discussing the cultural knowledge that we take for granted in the humorous message” (Lee in Reimann, 2010:25). It all depends on the type of humour, since slapsticks or sight gags are almost universal and can trigger the comic effect irrespective of culture or language, whereas more refined forms of humour, such as wordplays or sarcasm, are more culture-bound and language-specific.

In intercultural communication in the workplace, humour can be used to test co-workers’ shared views and interests, to provide less pleasant information in a seemingly relaxed manner and, generally, to diffuse inherent tensions. The better you choose the type of humour and the more neutral (i.e. without any kind of political, religious or sexual connotations) the jokes that you are telling are, the higher the chances to obtain the desired effect. On the contrary, the less appropriate the joke, the higher the risks of threatening the face of the interlocutors. In Eva Hoffman’s words:

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Telling a joke is like doing a linguistic pirouette. If you fall flat, it means not only that you don't have the wherewithal to do it well but also that you have misjudged your own skill" (Hoffman, 1989:118).

The sub-sections below analyse the appropriateness of using humour in intercultural communication and the theories pertaining to humour, illustrated with examples of jokes that can – or cannot – be used in multicultural environments.

### **To use or not to use humour in intercultural communication?**

Whoever wants to be a competent intercultural communicator should take into consideration contextual factors such as the interlocutor's cultural background, beliefs, norms, habits – briefly, their potentially complex cultural identities (Chen and Starosta, 2000). If one knows how to capitalize on all these, one's chances to succeed in communication are high. Otherwise, the risk to offend the interlocutors is greater than the chance to amuse them.

Among the advantages of using humour in the workplace, the American magazine *Forbes* lists the following: "Humour is a potent stress buster", "It puts others at ease" and "It builds trust" (Smith, 2013). Strongly believing in these three main benefits of laughter in intercultural communication, the multi-national company *PricewaterhouseCoopers* provides special areas on its premises where employees are invited to laugh and have fun, in order not only to relax, but also to enhance their creativity and improve their professional performance (Morreall, 2008).

Despite its proven advantages, humour should be treated with care, since humorous speech acts are usually culturally embedded and strongly dependent on shared knowledge and background, language differences and taboo topics. Consequently, they may either miss their intended comic effect, because people in the audience may not understand the joke (for example, the jokes about the communist regime and the censorship it imposed may not be properly understood by someone from a capitalist country), or may cause misinterpretations, which, in their turn, may lead to people feeling offended (Reimann, 2010).

According to Romero and Cruthirds' classification, there are four distinct functions of humour in the workplace (Romero, Cruthirds, 2006):

1. affiliative, whose purpose is to bring people together by using shared knowledge or, in other words, by laughing at the same realities of the company they work for, such as the character of the boss, the daily schedule, the new employees, the co-workers' habits etc., as proven by the jokes provided as examples below:
  - a. Nothing ruins a Friday more than an understanding that today is Tuesday.
  - b. There is a new trend in our office; everyone is putting names on their food. I saw it today, while I was eating a sandwich named Kevin.  
(<https://www.humorthatworks.com/database/funny-work-jokes-to-get-you-through-the-day/>)
2. self-enhancing, meant to promote communication among the group of co-workers and capitalize both on the group's dynamics and on each individual's professional performance, for example by giving them motivational advice in a funny, indirect or even sarcastic way:
  - a. A clean desk is a sign of a cluttered desk drawer.
  - b. The only thing worse than seeing something done wrong is seeing it done slowly.

- c. If at first you don't succeed, redefine success. (<https://www.humorthatworks.com/database/funny-work-jokes-to-get-you-through-the-day/>)
- 3. aggressive, which rather segregates the group rather than consolidating it, because it points to the differences between the members, not on their shared knowledge, beliefs and realities. As the jokes below show, taking a position of power towards a co-worker or reminding your colleagues that the management of the company is faulty will create animosities:
  - a. I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.
  - b. An executive committee means twelve men doing the work of one.
  - c. For me, teamwork is very important; it helps me put the blame on you. (<https://www.humorthatworks.com/database/funny-work-jokes-to-get-you-through-the-day/> - adapted)
  - 4. self-defeating humour, used by people to make fun of themselves to amuse the others, in order to obtain their respect and acceptance or to make themselves look more approachable:
    - a. I always tell the new employees: "Don't think of me as your boss, think of me as a friend who can fire you".
    - b. I get plenty of exercise – jumping to conclusions, pushing my luck, and dodging deadlines.
    - c. My annual performance review says I lack "passion and intensity." I guess management hasn't seen me alone with a Big Mac.
    - d. I like work. It fascinates me. I sit and look at it for hours. (<https://www.humorthatworks.com/database/funny-work-jokes-to-get-you-through-the-day/> - adapted)

In the first two cases, humour is used to create bridges between people, to help them cope with stressful situations and problems and to keep a positive attitude towards work. On the contrary, in the last two cases humour creates a gap between the speaker and their co-workers, as it places the one who tells the joke either in a position of superiority or in one of inferiority towards the others, thus intensifying power relationships in the workplace and segregating the group.

Humour in professional communication can also be regarded as appropriate or inappropriate based on the culture itself, not only on the individuals who use it. There are cultures that accept or even encourage a relaxed atmosphere in the workplace and, therefore, allow jokes and gags, but there are cultures that strictly forbid such behaviours. For example, in Great Britain humour is highly valued and encouraged in all sorts of environments, irrespective of the power relationships between people, whereas in Japan, where the hierarchical structure is very important, laughing at your superiors is frowned upon, so joking about one's boss is not accepted.

In conclusion, if we face the dilemma of using or not using humour in intercultural communication, we should consider a few aspects. First of all, we should know that all the jokes that have a negative connotation and contain stereotypes should be avoided. Secondly, we should listen to our interlocutors and try to understand their way of thinking and communicating before using humour in front of them. It is vital for intercultural communicators to see what kind of things people resonate with, what seems funny to them or, on the contrary, what topics they consider inappropriate or even offensive. We should always keep in mind that different cultures perceive humour in different ways, that laughter, though a universal coping mechanism, is not equally appreciated all over the world, that self-irony is regarded either as a sign of humbleness

or as a proof of arrogance, depending on the culture, and that there are cultures in which humour is not synonymous with amusement, but with lack of respect or aggressiveness.

### **Humour in theory and practice**

Although, according to E.B. White, “humour can be dissected as a frog, but [...] the thing dies in the process” (White, 1941: Preface), meaning that you either understand humour and enjoy it or you do not, and no theory or explanation can make it more meaningful, there are some theories on humour, based on the philosophical or psychological principles of great personalities, from Aristotle to Bergson, which should be taken into consideration when analysing the mechanisms of humour in intercultural communication.

In the book entitled *Inside Jokes: Using Humour to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*, Matthew Hurley et al. make a daring attempt to unite all the different theories on humour into an all-encompassing concept. Their challenge is to provide a single answer to questions like: “Why do people use laughter to communicate various emotions?”, “Why are humans the only beings endowed with a sense of humour?” or “What conditions should communication meet in order to be considered amusing?” What seems to be the general answer to these questions is that humour has an evolutionary purpose, directly connected to the development of the human brain, in certain environmental and social conditions, which enable people to communicate various emotions, from the positive ones, such as happiness, delight or amusement, to the negative ones, such as contempt, hatred or fear.

Despite the authors’ arguments for this unifying theory on humour, I think the phenomenon is too complex to be explained by a single concept – evolution – and it is worth taking into consideration other perspectives, such as the five theories on humour that other authors have dwelt upon throughout time.

The first of these theories, known as the Incongruity Theory, has its roots in Kant’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy insofar as the joke starts from a premise, brings arguments in favour of that hypothesis and, in the end, contradicts it. In an intercultural environment, one could tell such jokes, with or without including the ethnic element, in order to point to the human faults in general or to that of a particular nation. The “neutral” ones, without a derogatory connotation about a certain ethnic group, could be based on puns that can be understood irrespective of the listeners’ native language or that are specific for a certain language and lose their funny connotation in other languages or are even untranslatable:

- 1) I bought a new couch and I was told that it could accommodate 3 people without any problem. How can I find 3 people without any problem?
- 2) “Doctor, I keep seeing pink zebras.”  
“Have you seen a psychologist?”  
“No, just pink zebras”.
- 3) A young husband with an inferiority complex insisted that he felt like a little pebble on a vast beach. The marriage counsellor, trying to be creative, told him, “If you wish to save your marriage, you’d better be a little bo(u)lder”. (<https://www.rd.com/jokes/> - adapted)

The jokes with a hint towards various ethnic stereotypes (e.g. the American dream, the Sicilian propensity for crime, etc.) could rely on the same pattern of incongruous thinking, but add a note of malice, which can qualify them for the second theory on humour, the Superiority one, as the people telling them tend to feel superior in front of their listeners or to sound patronizing. In many cases, such

jokes may be misinterpreted in a multicultural context or even lead to conflicts, as the members of that ethnic group could feel offended instead of amused:

- 1) “How did you get rich in America?”  
“I had two cents in my pocket and I bought two dirty apples. I wiped them clean and I sold them with four cents either.”  
“What a brilliant idea! And how long did it get you to get rich?”  
“One year. Until my aunt died and left me a fortune of one million dollars.”
- 2) The customs officer finds a gun in a Sicilian’s luggage:  
“What is this?” he asks.  
“A calculator”.  
“It looks like a gun.”
- 4) “It is a calculator, because we use it to settle our accounts.”  
(<https://www.rd.com/jokes/> - adapted)

The second theory, called the Superiority Theory, is based on principles as old as Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy, leading to a cathartic feeling when discharging inner thoughts and emotions in the form of a joke. Nevertheless, this kind of humour, which is usually perceived as sarcasm rather than an innocent joke, could release anger, hatred, despise or other negative feelings towards people, often based on their nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or health condition. Therefore, they are hardly told in intercultural communication, but, depending on the audience’s sense of humour and self-irony, they can be perceived as very amusing.

- 1) 50% of Romanians have extramarital affairs. This means that, if you don’t have one, your wife certainly does.
- 2) “Doctor, are the blood test results ready? I’m dying of curiosity.”  
“Not only of curiosity”. (<https://www.rd.com/jokes/> - adapted)

The third theory, the Relief Theory, also known as the Release Theory, is related to Freud’s psychoanalysis and considers laughter a good way to release sexual tension (Eros) or fear of death (Thanatos). In jokes, repressed impulses are relieved in a disguised form, just like in dreams. (Freud 1905). Although it is usually seen as the realm of frivolity, with silly jokes and gags meant to defuse a tense situation implying the two primordial drives, sex and death, I think there is more to this kind of humour than a simple outlet for impulses. In my opinion, it is a parallel reality in which people can assume a more aggressive persona that helps them get rid of socially unaccepted types of behaviour. In this respect, this theory is very similar to the previous one, having a cathartic and therapeutic role, but directed towards a lower level rather than to a superior one. Though equally malignant, sarcasm requires a certain finesse of spirit, whilst this aggressive humour addresses the deepest, most instinctual and most condemnable areas of our primordial mind. Here we can include jokes containing offensive or aggressive language, with sexual connotations or swear words, which anybody can understand, but few people like. In intercultural communication, these jokes should be avoided for obvious reasons, but there are cases when they are accepted, if those telling and listening to them know each other very well and do not get easily offended. For example, the two jokes below are based on the two sexually connoted ethnic stereotypes: Greek men are more prone to homosexuality – a favourite theme in the Italian jokes – and Scandinavian men are not good at sex:

- 1) A Greek and an Italian were debating who has the superior culture.  
The Greek says, “We have the Parthenon.”  
The Italian says, “But we have the Coliseum.”

The Greek says, “We had great philosophers.”  
The Italian says, “But we created a world empire.”

And so on and so forth for hours, until finally the Greek lights up and says, “We invented sex!”

The Italian nods slowly, thinks, and replies, “That is true - but it was Italians who introduced it to women!”

- 2) Ole and Lena were celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. After the guests left, Lena looked at Ole and punched him real hard in the shoulder. “That’s for 25 years of bad sex.” Ole thinks about it, then reaches over and punches Lena hard in her shoulder, “That’s for knowing the difference!” (Ole and Lena are the main characters in Scandinavian jokes).

To these three general theories on humour, two more were added in the 1990s, in an attempt to bring more clarity to the topic. Thus, Caleb Warren and Peter McGraw have introduced and tested the Benign Violation Theory, which starts from the work of the linguist Thomas Veatch. In these authors’ opinion, three conditions should be met for a benign comic effect:

1. a situation is a violation of a social, linguistic or religious code;
2. the situation is harmless or benign, so we do not include in this category the car accidents with casualties, no matter how hilarious the situation in which they were produced was;
3. the violation of the code in question is instantly perceived as harmless, without any further threats or consequences (driving under the influence of alcohol cannot be included here, though it may seem funny up to a point).

In intercultural communication, this type of humour should be used wisely, as the violation of some codes may be considered amusing in one culture and offensive in another one. A sad example here is the attack on the journalists from *Charlie Hebdo*, in January 2015, when two French Muslim terrorists killed twelve people and injured eleven others, enraged by the cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad in what they considered to be blasphemous hypostases. In this tragic case, the third rule mentioned above was not complied with, as the French journalists could have anticipated that the cartoons would not be perceived as harmless by some Muslim fanatics and they would stir a violent reaction. They related only to the principles of secular France, whose democracy allows any form of expression, not to the strict rules of the Islamism.

Nevertheless, there are jokes based on the benign violation principle that can be told to almost any audience, irrespective of their culture, and the comic effect would be the same, as the example below, adapted from Jerry Seinfeld’s show, proves:

- 1) Now they show you how detergents take out bloodstains [...]. I think if you’ve got a T-shirt with a bloodstain all over it, maybe laundry isn’t your biggest problem. Maybe you should get rid of the body before you do the wash.  
(<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/>)

Another adjacent theory is the Mechanical Theory, which relies on Henri Bergson’s belief that inadaptability or inflexibility in someone’s personality is the true essence of humour. Routines and idiosyncrasies are usually funny, due to their repetitive character, as Al Bundy’s daily habit of collapsing in front of TV with one hand in his pants and the other one on a beer shows. No matter if the viewers are American or not, this scene – mechanically repeated – raises a laugh.



These theories show that, if cleverly used, humour is an effective means of social influence, social cohesion and social status. It is one of the best ways to express “emotions, moods, attitudes and opinions on a particular social issue, with the aim of developing in-group relationships” (Gogova, 2016:22). On the contrary, if used inappropriately, in aggressive or offensive jokes, in bitter irony or sarcasm against various individuals or categories of people, considered socially inferior or maladjusted, it is a dangerous weapon, which can inflict permanent wounds on the addressees and destroy communication bridges.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the very definition of the word “humour” – the ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny – we can conclude that humour does not necessarily refer to something intrinsically funny, but to something that people perceive as being funny, depending on the context of communication, or, rather, to their innate sense of humour. Therefore, jokes that some people consider harmless and amusing may be regarded as bland or even offensive by others. Thus, the talent of great communicators resides in their ability to tell the right joke at the right time in front of the right audience (especially a multicultural audience).

This article has provided some theories on humour, has classified the main types of humour and has provided a lot of examples for each of these categories, in order to highlight the advantages and the disadvantages of humour in intercultural communication or, in other words, to show the main facets of laughter: tension diffuser, coping mechanism, conversation icebreaker or team-building facilitator.

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## **FORMS OF HUMOUR IN LIZ TUCCILLO'S "HOW TO BE SINGLE"**

**Alexandra Roxana MĂRGINEAN\***

***Abstract:** This study focuses on the manner in which humour is achieved in Liz Tuccillo's novel *How to Be Single*. We start from introducing the background of the story, then, in the most complex section of the paper, we proceed to look at the means through which contextual humour is created at the level of the text. Here, we analyse some methods such as the juxtaposition of incongruent or contrasting meanings, the neglect of Grice's Cooperative Principle, the baffling of the reader's expectations, polysemy, stereotyping, feminist outlooks, plays-upon-words, witticism and even intertextuality or repetition as sources of humour. Then, we look at the particular category of humorous effect being drawn from analogies, metaphors and comparisons. Last but not least, we mention and explain a few examples of situational humor in the fourth section of the body of the research. The perspective on the material combines elements from cultural studies, linguistics, pragmatics, imagology and feminism.*

***Keywords:** cultural studies, pragmatics, humor, identity, feminism*

### **1. Introduction**

Julie, the narrator, who is an editor approaching her forties and lives in Manhattan, witnesses the way in which her female friends fall apart as a result of being single. Alice is a successful attorney willing to dump her career in order to have more time to date, after having spent five years in a relationship, thinking that it would end up in marriage. Georgia throws a fit of hysterics because she wants to go out and find a date, since her husband, Dale, left her. After a series of failed relationships, Ruby comes to mourn the death of her tomcat so deeply that she becomes depressive. Serena gets into spiritual practices and becomes reclusive and driven by self-restraint and what Julie considers to be denial of life itself and of living. Julie is single as well, but ends up having an affair with a Frenchman, Thomas, who is in an open marriage. All these women have in common being educated and physically attractive, which determines Julie to want to understand why they are single. In order to find an explanation, she sets out on a world tour with the intention of investigating this issue in various cultures, theoretically with the aim of writing a book to reveal her findings. She wants to assess whether Americans are having trouble with relationships because of their "indulgences" and their "myopia", which she declares herself "tired of" or if something else may be the cause (Tuccillo, 2008: 40).

The paper sets out, firstly, to look at ways in which contextual humor is achieved, and by context we understand the phrase, the complex sentence or a few sentences, only sometimes with implications drawn from the wider area of the text of Tuccillo's novel. The next section looks at the cases of humor created through analogies, metaphors and comparisons, which we have singled out in a separate chapter due to their significant presence, and to their relatively greater independence from the immediate context. The third part of the body of the analysis dwells on situational humor, which is not created through linguistic artifices in a close context, but derives from the widest frameworks and is understandable by implications. Of course, context is difficult to pinpoint, separate or classify, but we have done so, in broad lines, for the sake of the organization of the paper.

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## 2. Means of achieving contextual humor

Contextual humor – in its first instance provided by the context of the narrative through a *juxtaposition of opposite or contrasting meanings* – is visible from the very first page in the way in which the story-teller, Julie, characterizes her friend Georgia's state of advanced anguish as a result of having been left by her husband, Dale. Georgia is screaming at Julie on the phone, in the middle of a long diatribe that seems unstoppable, that she wants to kill herself so as not to live in pain, emphasizing the idea by reiterating it in another, synonymous, form two sentences further, saying that she wants to die. The impact of her words and her hysteria are augmented and made visible at the level of the text with the use of capital letters, i.e. the so-called shouty capitals, after which Julie describes her friend's marked distress as being "a tad upset", using here a technique of counterpoint combined with a blatant understatement in order to obtain the humorous effect (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 3). "Tad" as a term designates something in small quantity and inconsequential, so its use in conjunction with the adjective "upset" – which describes too light of an emotion with respect to the feeling in our context, which appears to be a very strong one – to refer to a death wish becomes humorous because it is a deliberate underestimation. Julie tends to use the same word as modifier when describing Serena as obsessive-compulsive, and she does it in the same way, for the same effect.

The case introduced above and the concept of juxtaposition that we are resorting to, as well as the reason why we have begun the investigation with it reside in this method of creating humor in the novel illustrating the most well-known definition of humor analyzed semantically: "an antonymic opposition between two scripts/frames that are compatible entirely or in part with the text" (Attardo, 2001: 168). This definition is part of "incongruity theories" and "Semantic-Script Theory of Humor" and tries to look at humor from preponderantly a semantic point of view (*ibidem*). Let us see some other examples.

As years have gone by and Julie has built a career as an editor, she means to describe the dullness of her life and the way the simple fact of earning a good living is no longer satisfactory enough: "the novelty of being able to afford groceries had definitely lost its initial thrill" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 14). Here, the juxtaposition is made between the prosaic reality of buying groceries (which are not among the expensive goods, but quite the contrary) and the connotations of the noun "thrill" – something that is exciting, out of the ordinary, unique. The outcome of the proximity of the two terms suggesting opposite expectations is humor. In the wider context, the noun "novelty" referring to shopping for the above-mentioned items is comic in itself, since a few sentences before the narrator mentioned her age, which is thirty-eight, which means that she has been doing this type of regular shopping presumably for at least fourteen years, which hardly qualifies it as novelty anymore.

While visiting Beijing, Julie has to use the toilet in the squatter ones in hutongs, which are separated by extremely low panels which make visible the head of the person in the next compartment while squatting. As Julie enters one such so-called perimeter and, while in squatting position, makes eye contact with a woman in the neighboring one, the thought crosses her mind that they could even engage in a brief conversation, but is discouraged by a very different noise pertaining to the sphere of bowel movement: "If we spoke the same language, we could have had a nice little chat. Instead, she farted" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 293). There is opposition created in both expectations and linguistically, between the noun phrase "a nice little chat", which

inspires something very civil, and the grossness connoted by the verb “farted”, the two suggesting, despite the [+sound] common characteristic, very different spheres of action that are reasonably far apart, which creates, in this way, a juxtaposition of contrasts. The Rabelaisian, scatological element that gets added to the picture enhances humor in this particular case.

As she gets invited, in India, to interview a blissfully married couple who has resulted from an arranged marriage and discuss their auspicious pairing, Julie uses a comical image to describe how she feels about the idea: “I’d rather gnaw off my arm and beat myself over the head with it until I passed out than go talk to a happily married couple about how in love they are. So instead, I said, ‘I’d love to.’” The violence in the image as well as it being a gross exaggeration makes it funny as well as express the amount of unpleasantness that Julie would experience during the encounter. We would logically expect, in context, the “So instead” part to be followed by a refusal to take the interview, but Julie actually accepts, and, moreover, in a readily, apparently enthusiastic manner, as she does not merely say “yes” or “sure” followed by a thank you, but expresses her eagerness using the verb “love” (be it part of an idiomatic expression). The baffling of our expectations is accompanied by a juxtaposition of diametrically contradictory attitudes, except that in this context the narrator is overtly leading us on, through the use of the connector “So”, indicating us to expect from her to give an answer reflecting more of the same displeasure, i.e., a refusal – while performing the opposite, a keen acceptance of the invitation. This is an example in which the “anticipatory hypotheses” of the readers about the “syntactic and logical structure” of the utterance, which receivers of messages build, in order to “resolve potential ambiguities and eliminate vagueness”, are contradicted, which triggers humor (Curc6, 1995: 31).

In depicting Ruby’s depression, Julie is trying to assign a particular profile to her friend, one that is supposedly more optimistic, as it displays a positive sign that may indicate higher chances at being cured: “She was a very tidy depressive. It gave me hope.” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 16) Of course, depression is not better if the person is orderly (instead of leaving objects just lying around in disarray), especially since this orderliness may point, for instance, to obsessive-compulsive tendencies, which only adds one more issue to address to the list. Tidiness is irrelevant to the person’s chances of getting better from depression, which Julie obviously knows. Which means that her line is merely an instance of humor through irony, as well as a way of saying that there is still some positivity even in the darkest of realities. We may interpret, in this context, that irony targets her own person as well, since she has presented herself as a “voice of reason” (*ibidem*: 14), so the person who likes reasonableness, rationality, logic and balance in everything and who perhaps clings to these herself as a defense mechanism against her own lurking depression or at least disappointment.

Sometimes humor is obtained at the text level *in the immediate context of the phrase or sentence, in the closest proximity*, such as through the use of witty compound adjectives. Julie refers to a time when Serena’s female friends wanted to make her break up with a man she was dating knowing that she was leading him on, but then, in the light of the proven fact that Serena would not have any other relationship for a very long period afterwards, they regretted doing that, as it was “the last real relationship for the rest of her wheat-free life” (*ibidem*: 12). The role of the adjective “wheat-free” is to highlight the notion of deprivation (which is the creed that mystical, vegetarian Serena has chosen to live by, making it a virtue), reminding it to the reader and highlighting how she suffers more types of it – some self-imposed, and some others accidental. The

function of the adjective as a reminder assigns to it a concluding, summing-up quality as well, helping the narrator's power to synthesize. It also labels the character Serena with what is a defining feature (self-restraint), but it expresses this idea indirectly, and this achievement is humorous.

As Julie arrives at Ruby's home at noon and sees the latter has just climbed out of bed, she voices her worries: "'Did you get out of bed today?' I asked, worried. 'Yes. Of course. Right now,' she said, offended." (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 15) In this case, humor is achieved in the immediate context of a sentence and can be explained by resorting to pragmatics – namely, Ruby refuses to pick up Julie's implicature, which is a reproach that she has not gotten out of her bed that day, which means that she has not changed, started her day, set about to initiate an activity etc., and is not to be read in the literal basic first sense of just getting up momentarily from the respective piece of furniture. Julie's sentence is a conventional implicature, one that does not depend on context (Grice, 1975: 43-4). However, in order to show that she refuses to accept the implied criticism, as well as that she is unwilling to debate the situation, Ruby pretends that she does not understand what her friend means, intentionally taking into account and responding to the primary, literal sense of the phrase. Ruby *neglects the Cooperative Principle in conversation*, and flouts (i.e. deliberately refuses cooperation, implying at the same time something else) the quantity and manner maxims, i.e. giving enough information and in the way in which it is required, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity (*ibidem*: 43-7). There are a few other instances in the novel when humor is achieved through flouting of maxims. While sunbathing on a beach in Bali, Julie is approached by vendors of fake Rolex watches, about which she says: "I'm going to go out on a limb and say I don't think it was real" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 247). Here, she flouts the manner maxim (Grice, *op. cit.*: 46), telling, in uncertain terms, as if she were unsure or as if it were a wild guess or a mere possibility, a truth which, given the context, is bound to be so, i.e. that the watch is not original.

Realizing that Ruby takes too long to recover after failed relationships, usually three times longer than the actual duration of the relationship, and that her attempts to stay with someone seem to be bound to take a bad turn every time, Julie starts calculating the amount of time that Ruby still has at her disposal to find that one relationship that works, and concludes that "the math is simply not promising" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 19) Also, Julie notices that when Ruby manages to be with someone longer, it only means that her suffering when she breaks up (which appears to be unavoidable), will take up more time, which draws Julie to a gloomy conclusion: "I don't think at this point there are enough years left in her life to get over him" (*ibidem*). This mathematic approach *combines the claim to an innocent, well-meant, practical approach with irony* which is how humor emerges in this case.

The choice of the venue for the women's night out is made in such a way as to ensure the presence of a considerable amount of men, and thus a steakhouse makes sense, in Julie's opinion: "you are guaranteed to find heaps of straight men there (or women beefing up for their next weight-lifting competition)", hanging out in groups, "devouring their meat like cavemen" (*ibidem*: 24). This instance of humor combines the linguistic one, introduced especially through the use of the noun "heaps" and of the verb "devour" and the imagery that these create, with the situational one, i.e. the fact that women have decided to go to a restaurant that stars meat dishes for the increased likelihood that they will find male clients there preponderantly, with that idea deriving from a special additional feature that is *stereotyping*. The narrator's words contain more stereotypes: that of men being more carnivorous than women, relying perhaps on the

further stereotypical feature that men are more instinctual and savage (even unchiseled?) than women (hence, the analogy with cavemen); of women minding their diet more than men, either because they want to lose weight, be fit / (slim?) and thus avoid heavy, consistent meals; of women being more delicate than men, and eating big quantities of meat only in special circumstances, such as if they are weightlifters. One more comment worth making would be that the term “cavemen” does not refer to its literal meaning, of a cave dweller, but evokes a stereotype itself, having acquired metaphorical overtones and used in the figurative sense, meaning a rough, primeval, potentially aggressive, uncivilized individual, who is – of course? – male. We may add the idea that this manner of putting things introduces, for the first time in a clear style in the story, a *feminist stance*, which will reappear upon occasion.

We shall have a look at other instances of humor achieved through a *combination of stereotyping and feminism*. The episode mentioned above with calling men in a steak bar (or men in general?) cavemen is toned down in comparison with other occurrences, which are much more biting. As Alice explains that, in order to encourage men to date her, she lies about her career as a successful lawyer, telling them that she gives facials for a living instead, the irony becomes obvious: “I’m just getting them interested by appealing to their basest level. Once I have their interest, I slowly sneak the smart in, but by then they’re hooked.” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 31) The stereotypes implied by her line are countless and derogatory for men: men are threatened by intelligent women, thus men are insecure with respect to women and weak and aggressive, since they need to dominate; they are unintelligent, as they can be manipulated like this; they are backward, as they prefer the company of less smart persons, and base and basic, as instinct is more important than a high-level interaction, not to mention superficial. The picture painted implicitly by Alice is a dim one. However, she tries to avoid being the wrong stereotype herself, in inverted commas, i.e. wants to elude being the threatening “Vamp” and slip into the alluring “Bimbo”, as “Unlike the scheming Vamp [...], a Bimbo is easily dominated” (Guerilla Girls, 2003: 19)

The locale Hogs and Heifers is populated by a lot of men, described by Julie as follows: “some bikers, a couple of cowboys (don’t ask me), all sharing the common trait of having a deep respect for women and their struggles on this planet” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 33). The stereotypes of the biker and the cowboy have in common the notion of being rough and simple. Here, the suggestion is that they are also disrespectful towards women especially as an outcome of their essentially less sensitive, profound or insightful nature that itself is the likely result of their basic preoccupations: riding bikes (that comes along with being rowdy and, potentially, heavy drinking and partying) and, respectively, tending to animals.

Humor arises from *plays-upon-words* as well. When Julie struggles to think of a way to make the girls’ outing a success for Serena too, given her friend being very particular about her tastes, the narrator expresses the belief that alcohol may help, through its quality of inducing relaxation and thus making everything appear as more pleasant even to an exigent person such as Serena: “I had an epiphany as to how this entire night might actually turn out okay. I realized there is a divine spirit looking out for us in this world. Because there’s this thing called alcohol” (*ibidem*: 26). Linguistically, the term “epiphany” and the phrase “divine spirit” used next to one another in a short context of the text, together with the personality of Serena, who we know is spiritual, being Julie’s concern and in her thoughts, we are created the expectation of reading the concept of “spirit” with its meaning from the sphere of

spirituality, i.e. ghost, entity, energy etc. However, humor is released here by playing upon the *polysemy* of the term and by baffling our expectations as far as the sense with which it will be used in context, as Julie ends up referring to it with its other interpretation, of alcoholic drink.

Merely the potentiality of polysemy can become a source of humor. An example is when, in the context of the ceremony that makes Serena a swami, and, literally, of the burning of incense, of fires lit in the room for spiritual cleansing purposes and of a pyre ablaze as well, Georgia calls the initiate “hot” – meaning, of course, the figurative sense of good-looking instead of the literal sense: “This fire represents the funeral pyre ... ‘He is really hot,’ Georgia whispered.” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 64). What is further comical in this context is that the two different meanings of the word point to the radically contrasting and even contradictory realities of the pleasures of the senses as opposed to their sacrificing to attain illumination, i.e. the physical versus the spiritual. Also, it contrasts in a nutshell the way a person attending the ritual should be feeling and the way Georgia is feeling at that very moment – exactly the way she is not supposed to right then and there, somewhat defeating the purpose of the event and proving its ineffectiveness at the very heart of it. With this one word, she abruptly spoils the serious atmosphere, disrupting it, this discontinuity becoming humorous.

Julie tries to describe the way in which Serena’s prolonged sexual abstinence is getting the best of her (her instincts becoming unleashed immediately after taking her vows as a swami as if on cue), by resorting to the polysemy of the term “drive” as a noun meaning propensity, and as a verb: “her sex drive, due to lack of attention, had driven far, far away” (*ibidem*: 142). The accompanying underlying metaphor is that her sexual drive has become much more powerful, so it is quantitative, as well as acquired the potential to run wild or amok, i.e. be uncontained and prompt her to recklessness (which it does, as she gets involved with another swami), meaning that it is also qualitative.

When Alice agrees to give Ruby hormone shots, a play upon the polysemy of the noun “shot” initially referring to “injection” is achieved, as Alice recontextualizes it in the idiomatic expression of giving something a shot, i.e., “a try”: “[...] You asked, and I thought, Why not give it a shot?’ Alice said, laughing” (*ibidem*: 287).

In the quote above related to Serena’s sexual drive, we notice that the adverb “far” gets repeated for extra humoristic effect. *Repetitions* to stress a term, sometimes slightly modifying its meaning in a different context, are another device that creates humor. In the same context of describing Serena’s trouble to keep her chastity vows, Julie comments: “The thought of adding sex to this intense emotion had almost become too much for her to fathom. *Almost* too much for her to fathom.” (*ibidem*: 146) Repetition and stress are visually marked as well by putting the adverb in italics, to further draw the reader’s attention to it, the suggestion being that Serena does not put the possibility of giving in to her sexual drive past her. The highlight on the adverb “almost” in a shorter context is a connotation changer, reversing the initial meaning borne in the long sentence, of barely considering giving in, to actually considering it, tipping the scales of it happening from remote possibility to an actual probability. On page 27, the phrase “giggling like a schoolgirl” gets repeated five times – one for every one of the female characters – to emphasize the silliness of their behavior during their night out (*ibidem*: 27). Julie expresses the awkwardness of her relationship with Thomas, how it has made her be part of a love triangle and how this situation is untenable, as well as the oddity of an open marriage, by repeating the endearment term

“darling” in the following context: “he called me ‘my darling’. Until his other darling came halfway across the world to take *her* darling back” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 351).

*Intertextuality* as a source of humor proves the way in which Tuccillo addresses educated readers, especially since she does not use overt reference or inverted commas to at least warn her readers that she is hinting at another work. When she describes Serena’s resignedly accepting her fate of not finding the energy to date any longer, Julie actually indirectly cites Dylan Thomas: “Unlike Alice, at least in terms of dating, Serena decided to go quietly into that good night.” (*ibidem*: 13) The reference is mid-twentieth-century romantic poet Dylan Thomas and his poem *Do not go gentle into that good night*. The title reiterates a verse that gets repeated obsessively throughout the masterpiece, together with another one – “Rage, rage against the dying of the light.” – the night and the light representing death and, respectively, life, and the main idea being that one should face death fighting, rather than passively, even though it cannot be escaped (Robinson, 2019). The use of the reference is humorous especially because it connects with Serena’s belief into people possessing and representing light, which is associated, in her view, with not only life itself and life energy, but also spiritual awakening. This notion of light, what it stands for in spirituality and the fact that it is introduced by Serena’s universe and preoccupations in the story are the starting point for the intertextual reference, motivating and substantiating it. What Julie means to say is, of course, that Serena has in fact lost her light and stopped living in the very process which she probably thought would make her more alive than ever. Julie builds upon the metaphor of Thomas’ poem further, drawing a parallel between her friend’s behavior and a walk towards a dark place and thus a metaphorical death in life.

At the level of the *narrative structure*, humor derives from the *division of the novel into chapters whose titles are rules to follow by single women*, making up a compendium of tenets, as well as from the messages themselves. Just to provide one example, chapter two, which corresponds, of course, to “RULE 2”, recommends: “*Don’t Be Crazy. No Matter How You Feel, Because It Just Makes Us All Look Bad*” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 23). A lot of these rules rely on or connote stereotypes. The advice in Rule 2 is built on the ancient underlying assumption that women without men tend to become hysterical – a very popular idea associated, for instance, with Charcot’s Salpêtrière, which has been exploited in noir feminist and anti-feminist movies.

### 3. Analogies, metaphors and comparisons

Humor is often achieved through analogies, metaphors and comparisons that Liz Tuccillo is proficient at creating through the intermediary of her protagonist-narrator’s witticism. They offer a very comprehensive picture of a reality in a condensed and unexpected manner. Besides having the ability to elucidate the meaning instantaneously and richly, the vivid images that she generates in this way serve the function of creating humor. Before looking at some representative cases of such tropes, we need to say that in the section above we have also had some examples of humor where there was a blend between the one derived in the context of the text and the one obtained through these turns of speech, which means that sometimes it is difficult to separate the types of humor.

As she tries to explain the reason why Georgia and her husband’s relationship deteriorated, Julie refers to the woman’s tone as “*that tone*” being the main problem, a patronizing and disrespectful manner of address that is a mixture of “contempt”, “disgust” and “impatience”, showing disgruntlement; to make herself understood better, she resorts to a description of this tone’s disastrous effects through an analogy with a



nuclear, radioactive bomb: if one could “cart it back to some desert in Nevada, and release it – the earth would literally sink into itself, imploding in sheer global irritation” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 5) The above-mentioned desert and places of the like are used for experiments involving dangerous substances and for the deployment of hazardous ones – a general-knowledge concept – and she uses this knowledge to create the image without naming the objects of the respective processes, i.e. nuclear bombs, radioactive materials etc., so without resorting to the actual terminology, but being clear enough to evoke the reality in the readers’ minds and allowing them to fill in the dots. Once the receiver performs the decoding by herself/himself, the satisfaction of having understood the reference and having performed the association without it being revealed directly is more gratifying and thus creates more empathy with the story and the story-teller. It is like a secret understanding and bond are enforced, which increase likability and make us pay attention more.

As Julie tries to explain the hysterics and hysteria that manage to seize a grown, responsible woman like Georgia once she sees herself abandoned and single again, which are duly identified as a “self-preservation instinct” that kicks in, the narrator compares it with a “complete lobotomy” (*ibidem*: 6). The main feature upon which the comparison relies is that the situation tends to make a person become less intelligent and more reckless in their actions, which may, potentially, become ridiculous. The perfect example for this, besides Georgia’s urgency in her compulsion to date, is Alice, a successful attorney, who quits her job so as to have time to date every day.

In order to describe Serena’s obsessive-compulsiveness, and the way in which her spiritual preoccupations and working on herself have made her more complicated, self-absorbed, pretentious and isolated, Julie uses the spatial metaphor of the maze: “She has worked on herself to such an extent that she has actually become a human maze. I pity the man who ever attempts to enter the winding corridors and dead-end tunnels that are her dietary restrictions, meditation schedule, new age workshops, yoga classes, vitamin regimes, and distilled water needs. If she works on herself anymore, she will become a shut-in.” (*ibidem*: 12) This image combines two metaphors related to space: a dynamic one, the action of building, in this case character, figuratively, and the static one of the construction, i.e. becoming the metaphorical resulting edifice that is potentially a work of art, something achieved with effort and that is supposed to hence be superior to what exists in the initial phase. The reason why this choice of a spatial metaphor for what Serena does to herself is a suitable, clever and subtle choice is twofold. On the one hand, the imagery successfully parallels and renders the concept of (self-)improvement, and, on the other, it suggests the idea of unapproachability, of the way in which a woman becomes a fortress, raising symbolical walls that make her impenetrable – also in a very concrete, sexual way. However, this sexual connotation is not the only one that Julie adds to the picture in her selection of the spatial metaphors that become an allegory. The key word that completes the implications that the narrator wants to point to is “shut-in”, which Serena is bound to transform into. The element of novelty introduced by this term as a noun is that it refers to somebody who is “confined indoors”, but “by illness”, sending us to the idea that Serena may in fact not be well; what is more, her unwellness may be of the particular type that affects the mind, pertaining to the field of psychiatry – “a condition in which the person is highly withdrawn and unable to express his or her own feelings” (Shut-in, n.d., in *Collins English Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/shut-in>).

Hence, Julie's insinuation is that Serena's behavior may constitute and/or lead to a mental issue.

Spatial metaphors return when Julie describes Ruby's reaction to unhappiness as a fall into a dark space called the "Crazy Pit", which comes after the "Moment of Disappointment" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 18). As once fallen into the pit Ruby has trouble getting out, which takes much longer than expected, Julie continues the metaphor by stating that she makes a point out of being around her friend at the time of the unpleasant occurrence, attempting to "stop her at the top of the stairs down to Crazy" (*ibidem*). The likening of the disappointment to a fall on the stairs adds the features of an exceedingly violent and abrupt event. Julie points out how Ruby uses her friends to unburden herself by describing her feelings in a plethora of details: "And she doesn't like to sit there alone. Ruby likes to call up her friends and describe in vivid detail, for hours, what it's like in the basement of broken dreams. The wallpaper, the upholstery, the floor tiles." (*ibidem*: 18-9) In this spatial analogy, Julie equates minute information with the decoration of a room, i.e. with a mention of the items adorning it; in other words, conversation is like a space which can be inhabited that gets filled with words, which are the objects making up the arrangement. In this case, besides being humorous, Julie's metaphor suggests that Ruby's habit is annoying.

In her dismal at the statistics, which show that the number of women surpasses that of men, and that some women are consequently bound to remain without a pair, Julie bitterly remembers the metaphor of every pot having its lid only to point out how it is a lie. Moreover, in the light of noticing the way men are looking for younger women, leaving the ones that they are with or cheating on them, she further describes this move or exodus by building on the same metaphor: "It sounds like a lot of the lids have left the kitchen to go find better pots elsewhere, or maybe to meet younger, prettier pots." (*ibidem*: 169) It becomes obvious which entity every kitchen object is distributed: men are lids, women are pots. Even though the objects in the initial saying are not necessarily gendered, they become so in Julie's interpretation, which can interestingly assign more features to the genders, or allows further speculation as to the possibility of this enrichment of connotations. Thus, women may be seen as pots as they are emptier inside or more exposed and vulnerable when they do not have a match; also, given the spatial positioning of the lid over the pot, we could infer a powerplay meant to suggest that men have the upper hand.

The night the women end up visiting three restaurants, Julie expresses her disappointment for this situation, feeling that they have decreased the quality of the places progressively: "Our evening had degraded from Steaks and Vodka to Beer and Wings to Hogs & Heifers." (*ibidem*: 31). Taken separately, the names of the places are merely indicative of the type of menu that one can find there. However, Julie uses them to represent much more than that. She performs, besides an analogy, a *synecdoche*, in which a part signifies a whole based on a relationship that is more symbolical than in the case of the metonymy, where the connection is closer, more obvious or direct ("Synecdoche", On *Literary Devices. Definition and examples of literary terms*, <https://literarydevices.net/synecdoche/>). Julie is resorting to the type of food as representative not only for the menu, the category, tastes or social status of the people frequenting the respective restaurants, but also for a kind of value-assigning classification of human beings and their type in terms of subtler features such as profundity or spirituality of the clients, as well as to illustrate how low can single women sink according to how desperate they are to find a date. The enumeration of the proper names of the restaurants, and hence of the progressively simpler, less

sophisticated kinds of food, is meant to show an involution, a giving-up of standards, and ultimately symbolically send to the compromise that people could make to adjust their expectations and adapt to living with others. To be exact in describing the synecdoche, the steak and vodka stands for good tastes, a higher-status society and financial superior standing because they are more costly than the other dishes; the beer and wings stand for the regular, common individual, who is unpretentious not only in relation with his/her food, but just about everything else in life, i.e. for the self-indulgent, ordinary people; the last name stands for animals, which in their turn stand for the people that can be found in it, for their instinctual nature. This last stop has the role of showing that the spree for coupling may potentially reduce a woman to a brainless creature, blind to her own debasement as soon as she yields to looking for a match just for the sake of matching above anything else. Humor arises from the very hint that the restaurants are meant to actually point to the people in them and their behavior.

Since we are discussing parallels with the animal world, sometimes the comparisons are very simple, providing a humorous association that creates a type of sweet, innocent comic as if meant for children. When she thinks about describing the effect of extracting a wisdom tooth on one's face, Julie resorts to a cute rodent: thus, the person is "swollen like a chipmunk" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 84). Being disappointed with the swami she fell in love with, Serena cries a river and then, with her head bald and her puffy eyes, she looks "an awful lot like a baby ostrich" (*ibidem*: 237).

In the context of the Indian custom of arranged marriages, in which a young woman's family actively searches for a husband while the bride-to-be plays a passive role, Julie compares this search with putting "an APB out on him": "Maybe it was time to notify the authorities, set up roadblocks, and send out a search party." (*ibidem*: 341) The metaphor relies on the idea of the great number of people that are getting involved in a personal matter, the making of a private matter public, as well as the purposeful, practical-minded manner in which something that is supposedly the result of serendipity or destiny is approached.

#### **4. Situational humor**

A clear instance in which situational humor emerges is the initial presentation of Ruby as a depressive individual, unwilling to leave her bed, constantly crying over her loss. From the seriousness of the description and the emphasis on how Ruby cannot escape her dark thoughts and suffering, we assume that someone very close to her has either died or left, an interpretation supported by the character's own words – "Because Ralph can't stay in my memory so strongly, he just can't." (*ibidem*: 16) – at which point we presume that he may be her boyfriend. A paragraph lower, though, Julie explains: "Ralph was Ruby's cat. He died of kidney failure three months ago." (*ibidem*) The breaching of readers' expectations regarding the situation, as well as the creation of a disproportionate reaction in Ruby in comparison with the stimulus gives rise to humor. The additional, this time openly ironical layer of humor is that Ruby's decision to get a cat was fueled by her repeated disappointment in and subsequent distrust of humans, in an attempt to avoid being hurt by being left alone again, but was, as she did not know about "feline chronic renal failure" (*ibidem*: 19). After Serena's investment ceremony, during which an image of her holding a baby came to her, Ruby wanders the streets, going to a children's playground and seriously considering becoming a single mother, but after talking to a couple of mothers there and realizing the difficulty of raising a child on her own, she changes her mind back equally fast, deciding upon adopting

another cat. The swiftness of the process in weighing so determinedly the pros and cons of both having and not having a child, as well as the passage from a child to a cat in a matter of dozens of seconds turns out to be comical, especially given how apparently convinced, firm and unwavering Ruby seems to be, how strongly she feels about opposite but very serious realities in such a short span of time. A baffling of our expectations occurs at the level of the immediate context, which enhances the humorous effect: “She needed to get back on the horse, to love again. She needed to not be afraid to get emotionally involved again. She had to dive back in. It was time to get another cat.” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 69) Coming back again, after much hesitation, Ruby does in fact finally decide later on to have a child, and, what is more, to be artificially inseminated by one of her gay friends, but, to her shock, both the couple she first considers for the task and her single gay friend with AIDS refuse her, because, to her utter surprise, other women have beaten her to the idea, which she thought daring, revolutionary and original. Previous to this resolution, she had gone through another phase, in which she indeed worked at a shelter, making it her mission to provide one last loving hug for the dogs that were about to be put down. This is why her argument before the couple Gary-Dennis is: “I went and helped kill dogs at the shelter uptown to toughen up and now I’m ready to have a child.” (*ibidem*: 242) Because she is in a hurry, she skips explaining the relevance of one fact for the other properly, i.e. the way in which her emotional trials of witnessing dogs being sacrificed have made her more able to deal with hardships and sorrow, and what results is a comic juxtaposition between the ideas of killing animals and becoming fit for a mother. Also, the ambiguity of the expression “[I] helped kill dogs” – which does not mean that she killed them, but that she helped the animals feel more loved before their death – an ambiguity that can be fully clarified only in the wider context of the facts that her interlocutors are not privy to, adds to the humorous effect. Not giving up on the idea of being artificially inseminated, Ruby wants to enhance her odds by getting hormone shots, but is unable to do them herself, and asks her roommate, Serena, to help her, and the latter agrees; however, as Ruby stands leaning on the bathroom sink with her butt out of her underwear, Serena has trouble actually making the shot, and they call on Alice to lend a hand, which she does, the trouble being, nevertheless, that for the next days on end Ruby has to suffer her friend Alice going on and on about her upcoming wedding while she is getting injected, which turns out to be a drag. This is why, the situational humor is accompanied by an instance of linguistic humor deriving from the ambiguity of the phrases involved due to their potential sexual innuendo: Ruby “had to bend over and take it” (*ibidem*: 284).

Everything that happens the night the female friends go out in the city can be deemed situational humor. Vegetarian Serena allows herself to be convinced by men to drink heavily and eat chicken wings, followed by ribs, only to become seriously sick, ending up in hospital. Georgia gets into a fight with another woman because she refuses to cede her dancing spot on the bar in the Hogs & Heifers. As soon as Ruby gets the attention of a man who seems interested in her, she talks about the loss of Ralph, but does it casually, saying he was, after all, just a cat, hiding her true feelings so as not to come across as crazy and lose the chance to draw the man’s attention and interest towards her. On this, Ruby is acting to counter the gender stereotype according to which women deal with grief showing their emotions, while men are supposed to be self-restrained, so as to “emulate” male behavior in order to get close to him, at the same time acting out other stereotypical feminine features such as being accommodating towards male needs and behaviors (Martin, Doka, 2000: 99-112).

Motivated by the snide comment made by some French ladies the night of the outing, that American women lacked *orgueil*, Julie arrives in France to investigate how the French women behave, their secret in staying dignified, by going to a local ladies' night out. This is the place where she starts her international research. Initially impressed that French women would take time away from their men, seeing it as a form of independence and self-respect (especially that men are not allowed on the premises from eight to eleven o'clock), much to her surprise, she witnesses strippers coming on stage, which is the point where the French ladies' haughty discourse loses its shine, determining her to conclude that American and French single women were not that different after all. However, on a more serious note, another explanation is provided for the ease of French women in taking rejection as opposed to the Americans, which relies on cultural differences: the French are more accustomed to accept failure and hardships, and no shame is attached to that, in comparison with the pampered Americans who are "coddled" by teachers and parents since cradle and are consequently less equipped to withstand unpleasant experiences as natural outcomes (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 78).

The visit to Paris and then the rest of the international stops occasion the mention of a set of behaviors that are stereotypically associated with the respective places, but, because they are so well-known, they become commonplace and comical in themselves due to overuse. In France, what is noticeable is: the kissing of both cheeks by men and women alike, the elegance of women, the politeness of people, men's courtesy towards women, being accepting and open towards romantic encounters (Thomas, whom Julie ultimately falls in love with, has an open marriage and a locale where the first floor is dedicated to illicit romantic encounters, but he is very gentlemanly nevertheless); the opera house is a distinctive locale, with red upholstery, gold leaves and rococo atmosphere; other specific cultural objects that get mentioned are: expensive lingerie, coffee shops, tasty bread and cheese, and perfumes. The French drink champagne at any hour of the day – and the speed and naturalness with which Julie adapts to the habit and embraces it is humorous.

In Italy, some cultural objects that draw Julie's attention are the pasta and the motorcycles. But much more relevant traits, revealing hidden assumptions in the culture rather than artefacts, are the way in which the long-haired, smitten Lorenzo cries his eyes out as he gets left, and even wants to commit suicide by jumping off the balcony, and how Italian women do a lot of slapping on their partners when these make them angry, "losing" themselves and ready "to risk everything", which makes American Julie feel "dry inside" and "emotionally limited" (*ibidem*: 111). Besides being comical, this contrast reflects the one existing between a culture that is affective, i.e. in which it is acceptable and reasonable to show one's emotions, as opposed to one that is neutrally affective (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997: 69); North Americans see Italians as "'excitable' Italians" (*ibidem*: 71), because even when Americans express emotion, they will "separate it from 'objective' and 'rational' decisions", whereas Italians "tend to exhibit and not separate" (*ibidem*: 73). This is why, when she reacts on impulse and kisses Thomas (after he rescues Lorenzo, wrestling with him to prevent him from committing suicide, so spontaneously, in a very emotionally invested moment), Julie feels humiliated and ashamed that she has gotten carried away like that.

The exotic atmosphere of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the importance of displaying a perfect body on the fashionable beach of Ipanema function as pressure factors, in the atmosphere of an indulgent culture that values the satisfaction of basic needs and enjoying oneself (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010: 280-1), to buy very expensive swimming suits and to trigger, for Julie, insecurities related to her

appearance. When Julie looks for reassurance from the shop-assistant (who is also the manager of the business), and the latter, being part of a culture in which women are used to having perfect bodies, admits to her client's imperfections, Georgia becomes enraged, deciding to punish the store owner by walking out without buying anything. The way she then changes her mind, and returns to buy the suits, under the pretext that it is a more effective lesson in this way (if Julie purchases and wears the suit despite the woman's opinion), while in fact she simply does not want to give up the products, is humorous: "Four hundred and eighty-five dollars later – two hundred and forty-two dollars and fifty cents of which will never see the light of day, nor sand nor water – we walked out of the store. Yep, we really showed her." (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 124) The situational humor is combined with linguistic contextual humor, as the idiomatic expression of something not seeing the light of day is recontextualized with its more literal meaning in the continuation that Julie gives it – "nor sand, nor water", referring to the fact that she will not wear it to the beach – and with humor deriving from a flouting of the quality maxim (Grice, 1975: 47), saying something that is obviously untrue in order to be ironic towards their weakness and inability to stand up for themselves until the end. Julie resorts to another humorous characterization of the store experience – "this morning's shooting, I mean *shopping* spree" – which combines an analogy with a play-upon-words, namely an apparent slip of the tongue based on the similarity of the two words involved (*ibidem*).

Brazilian culture includes, being a leisure-oriented one, partying hard in the Lapa district, neighborhood samba schools that organize dancing competitions, *ficas* or one-night stands, prostitution (male as well), and cheating on one's partner. A custom that becomes a source of situational humor in the story is the kissing of complete strangers spontaneously by locals, just on account of being found attractive. The night Georgia accompanies Julie to the party in Lapa, she walks around the crowd with the intention of exposing herself to a spontaneous kiss, but Julie is the one who ends up receiving it from a local bodyguard at the end of the evening.

Before she goes to Australia, Julie reads about the "man drought" and is dismayed by the gloomy statistics saying that "there are five women to every man in Sydney" (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 168). She feels the downside of this fact at a party, where she gets to taste the renowned Sammy or Semillon white wine that is like a national emblem, but where men lose interest in dancing or keeping company with both she and her friend Alice the minute they find out that they are middle-aged.

In Bali, besides the beautiful accommodations that merge luxuriant vegetation, water and extremely modern, exquisite architecture, the way in which there is no word for artist as everyone possesses artistic features in some way, so there is no need to particularize them as a separate category, the family compounds, i.e. individual houses for members of the extended family having in the middle a common courtyard, and reincarnation, Julie finds out about Bali being a tourist destination for romantic encounters. For instance, in the town of Kutu, a woman is sure to come across much younger gigolos, and the place is frequented by ladies coming from other parts of the world (such as Australia) for the experience. Julie herself, who is here with Thomas, having ultimately agreed to an affair with him, as if mirroring the place, meets one such couple in which the woman is twice the age of the young man, and who admits helping his poor family financially. The boy's name, Made, which we are indicated to pronounce Mah-day, gives way to a contextual linguistic comic based on a play upon this proper name's pronunciation, its meaning in English as an individual term and common noun, as well as the potential connotations that it triggers in its figurative use:

older women lie on the beach “waiting for their day to me Made” (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 247), meaning that the respective day could be the day when they meet their own version of Made, as well as that they put themselves on display hoping to be “made out”.

While Thomas and Julie are in Beijing together, visiting the Forbidden city (the halls and temples in the imperial city from the Ming dynasty onwards), Thomas’ wife makes an appearance, having come to claim him back, and causing a scene. The parallel that Julie draws between the location, its name and the significance of what is going on, her being the adulteress scolded by the enraged wife, is comical: “She had entered the gates of the Forbidden City and was about to confront us both in the Imperial Garden. What better place for a wife to confront her husband and his concubine?” (*ibidem*: 300) This drawing of symbolism from the place where the action occurs is meant to empower the wife, suggesting the righteousness of her claim, making it justified; it points to how low Julie feels in relation with her situation.

The Chinese women that Julie meets during her visit to Beijing confess to being interested in European and western men, as well as readier in complying even with potential arrogance from their part, while men like relationships with Chinese women precisely because they feel like they can act out more while these women remain subdued. Initially, Julie cannot understand why the women feel so free in this context, but she soon does, as Chinese Mei confesses to the existence of very rigid social norms back in her country. If a woman wants to have a child in China, she needs to be married, as children born out of wedlock have no identity and are not registered. Having acquired this new information, Julie no longer finds the practice of parents going to Zhongshan park to try to match up their mature children absurd. The elderly are wearing signs with a description of their adult children’s traits in the hope that they would manage to match them in marriage, given the fact that they worry about their only child’s future wellbeing (an only child being the result of country politics). What initially seemed comical to Julie is revealed as sad from a different perspective. The reality of the *hutong* cottages with their precarious food (dumplings and noodles) and hygiene (flies) and squatter toilets – where Julie is forced to push her conception of intimacy over a limit in order to be able to answer the call of nature – has a tinge of both humor and sadness in it. As narrator Julie also educates her readers regarding what learning Mandarin entails, i.e., determination and discipline in order to remember and use the forty thousand characters and the four different meanings of every word depending on the pronunciation, she does it to suggest that the people capable of that could develop a work ethic that may help them rule the world, as they build a psychological profile that turns the odds in their favor. She decreases the impact of her outlook through a denial of accountability for any potential desire or support for the Chinese to actually do so: “*I’m just saying.*”, her final sentence being also written in italics to give the meaning more weight, and thus becoming humorous. The character Mei is laughing a lot and loudly, matching the national stereotype, which is yet another source of the comical.

By the time Julie gets to Mumbai, India, she is tired and depressed herself because of the situation with Thomas, and the impact of the crowded streets, the persistent unpleasant odor, the hailing of the taxi drivers, the mopeds carrying whole families, the loud noise and the children and extremely poor people begging in the streets by putting their fingers to their mouths to show that they are hungry is a desolate landscape that gets her spirits even lower. However, the cultural reality that she finds relevant for her research is that of matrimonial sites, on which parents post for their

adult offspring, and then organize interviews for arranged marriages, taking into account the horoscopes and the caste system – formed by the Brahmins, who are the rich and educated (sometimes priests), followed by the farmers, the laborers and the untouchable (the ones living on the streets). After having had a separate talk with the potential candidates and having assessed these themselves, the parents allow their daughters to talk to the suitors, the young women sometimes ending up having two such chats a day, and often agreeing to marry after only one such encounter. Julie no longer has the incredulousness with which she would have once met this type of arrangement, especially that both women she meets in the context of her visit (acquaintances of Serena's friends) arrange to get married in the interval of the couple of days that she spends in India, which creates a comical effect given the amount of stress and strain American Julie & friends put into the matter.

The last stop in Julie's itinerary is Iceland, where she gathers all her friends. A visit to the Blue Lagoon enables interaction with local women, who appear, during the dinner they take at a restaurant the respective evening, detached from and relaxed about the idea of dating and marriage, as well as independent, level-headed, regarding the concept of single motherhood as normal and in a matter-of-fact way. The situational comic arises when it becomes apparent that the two Icelandic women who seem not to believe in either God or marriage are convinced of the existence of elves. They speak about it in relation to strange incidents occurring at a construction site nearby, which they say were caused by the builders having trespassed into elfian land, which of course meant that they had to move the construction site a little farther. The deadpan serious tone in which the Icelanders describe the situation, considering the existence of the creatures as definite fact, becomes humorous, more so through its unexpectedness, coming from someone who is so rational about other things overall.

## 5. Conclusions

There is a higher density of humorous references in the first part of the novel, which may mirror an attempt to get the attention of the reader in a lighthearted way – given that the novel is advertised through the title as a humorous, light reading – and only then introduce the more serious tone or aspects.

Marked preference for spatial metaphors may reflect the unconscious conceptualization of being single as a metaphorical void in one's life. It is seen as both inner emptiness and unfilled space on the outside.

Under the pretext of showing us the differences in approach of relationships cross culturally, we are also fed lessons in cultural specificity and stereotyping as well. These differences either become sources of humor themselves or provide opportunities for the creation of various types of humor subsequently.

In terms of gender concerns, the novel's stance baffles our expectations. The title, *How to Be Single*, implies a feminist attitude, but, if we look beyond the cover – so to speak – this might not actually be the case, as otherwise why would one think of drawing up an instruction manual if it were a natural status to have or if it came easy? Nevertheless, the deeply unflattering stereotyping of men (one of the sources of raw humor), as well as the point of all five protagonists being attractive and intelligent women are there, indicating self-assertiveness, despite the presentation of their misery in the absence of a partner. The ending justifies the novel as bearing feminist overtones as the conclusion to all the experiences depicted in it is the necessity of self-love and the optimistic perspective that "Miracles happen every day." (Tuccillo, *op. cit.*: 404)



As far as this paper is concerned, I could say that the cultural differences have not been explored in detail, mainly because the focus of this study has been humor. However, most aspects depicted around cultural specificity trigger situational humor, which has given me enough motivation to nevertheless look into them, and has made them relevant for this study to be approached and described. One more detail that needs to be mentioned is that I sometimes chose to explain some instances of contextual linguistic humor as accompanying one particular instance of situational humor if they were connected, for the sake of avoiding too much fragmentariness of the information and to smoothen perception of that particular event.

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## **ELEMENTS OF JAMES JOYCE'S COMIC GENIUS IN "ULYSSES"**

**Flavian PALADE\***

**Abstract:** *The current paper is intended to analyse the multifaceted comic universe imagined by James Joyce for his characters in his masterpiece called Ulysses. Although the novel is famous for posing considerable difficulties in terms of deciphering its messages, the comic is regarded as an excellent guide to Ulysses because it reminds the readers, by its presence, that one of the most significant reasons for being a work of art is to give them pleasure. The present paper is also aimed to reveal the methods by which Joyce's novel offers not only great entertainment, but a deeper sense of joy. It is worth mentioning that throughout the novel there are to be noticed a large number of similarities in terms of theme, structure and technique between Joyce's work and Homer's epic poem, the Odyssey. This paper will deal with examining the mythical background of the novel and establish the manner in which comic realism and comic irony combine in the use of myth. The world of Ulysses is under the major influence of the topic of morality. Joyce employs the structure of the Odyssey as a framework for Ulysses. Moreover, a special attention will be granted to the ways in which the traditional patterns of comedy are used by Joyce to shape and control the evolution of his main characters. The analysis of verbal comedy also plays an important role in the current paper.*

**Keywords:** *comedy, complexity, universe, controversy, myth*

### **The comic nature of Ulysses seen from various perspectives**

Although the comic nature of *Ulysses* has been widely acknowledged, there are still numerous aspects related to this topic that are worth to be brought to light. In order to have a better understanding of the use of comic elements in *Ulysses*, it is of high importance to review some of the most significant critical opinions regarding this issue. The first point of view that deserves to be mentioned pertains to Oliver St. John Gogarty who claims that Joyce's novel is a big joke "a joke that had gone too far and been taken too seriously". He also states that we are "the victims of a gigantic hoax, of one of the most enormous legpulls in history". Gogarty's opinion is relevant because it reflects the attitude of Irish critics towards Joyce, namely that he is refining the Irish art of telling a joke and that one has to be a Dubliner to appreciate the comic aspects of *Ulysses*. (Saturday Review of Literature, 1950:8) In his article called "Joyeux Quicum Ulysse", Niall Montgomery claims that "only one closely acquainted with Dublin can appreciate Joyce's comedy, particularly his verbal humour". Another Irish critic, Brian Nolan, considers that Joyce's humour contains an underlying fear and sense of doom. He attributes this to Joyce's Irish heritage as an Irish Catholic. (Envoy, 1951)

Undoubtedly, it is much easier for a Dubliner to detect the nuances of Joyce's humour, but this is not a mandatory condition in order to be able to understand the message of his writing. Thanks to his innate intelligence and wit, Joyce's mastery of language is so great that his work can be labelled as universally accessible regardless of the origins of his readers.

In *The Novel and the Modern World*, David Daiches considers *Ulysses* to be a comedy of attitude rather than of action by displaying an attitude of indifference to values, placing them on the same plane. According to Daiches, the comedy consists in "our recognizing as ordinary, as neutral, what we have hitherto regarded as special or

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*different*". He sees *Ulysses* as a large mass of neutrality, but admits that the novel's central character, Leopold Bloom, is a fully human individual. The figure of Bloom is of utmost importance to the view of the comedy in *Ulysses* due to the fact that large part of the comedy involves him and the conception of his character, both as Leopold Bloom and as *Ulysses*. (Daiches, 1965:113)

Many critics regard the comic in *Ulysses* as satire. In this respect, it is worth to be mentioned Edwin Muir who is the author of one of the earliest studies of Joyce's novel as satire published in his collection of critical essays called *Transition*. Muir draws the attention to the abundant humour in *Ulysses* and attributes it to Joyce's recognition of "*the dual values...of life and art, of reality and imagination*". In spite of perceiving it primarily as satire, Muir admits the complexity of Joyce's comedy acknowledging that it is comprised of many and diverse elements fused together. Muir brings into the spotlight the concept of "*humour of the processes of life*". This type of humour which results from the use of instinct and other biological concerns as a basis for comedy can be noticed in Molly's soliloquy and in the coarser forms of wit that Buck Mulligan exercises. (Muir, 1926:21)

In his work called *Dublin's Joyce*, Hugh Kenner exhibits a one-sided attitude towards *Ulysses* by presenting the novel as a dull and mechanical compilation of insignificant details. In addition to this, he states that its characters are walking clichés and its psychology is superficial. All these features do not demonstrate that Joyce is a limited artist, on the contrary they portray him as a skilled craftsman taking into consideration that the author of *Ulysses* is not the Irish writer, but a persona created by Joyce. Kenner depicts *Ulysses* as a parody of mechanism on a gigantic scale, a monstrous symbol of the mechanized modern world that it criticizes. According to Kenner, "*that, at one level, is Ulysses. It is essential, first of all to see it like that, and not as a solemn mystery, that is the way to see, ultimately, its laughter*". Kenner's interpretation of *Ulysses* is ironical by stating that Joyce's intention was to freeze the language of Dublin into a book and to show us the demise not only of that language, but of the life to which it gives voice. Dublin actually illustrates the entire modern world, a place that has been mechanized and where life has been reduced to "*the animal level at which this comic inferno is conceived*". (Kenner, 1956:166)

### **The influence of the Odyssey on Ulysses**

In *Ulysses*, the comical elements cannot be separated from the use of Homeric myth which has both structural and symbolic purposes in the novel. The use of myth itself leads to a comic reading of the work. In David Daiches' opinion, myth is equated to reality in order to level all values and ultimately deny that they exist. Other critics consider *Ulysses* as a mock-heroic *Odyssey* in which the Homeric parallel is used for ironic contrast. On the other hand, Walter Litz presents a more balanced point of view by arguing that the Homeric parallel may be considered from two perspectives: the mock-heroic and the symbolic in which the external correspondences function ironically while internal correspondences function symbolically. In this way, the specific aspects of life in Dublin correspond ironically to the particular circumstances of life in the Heroic Age. The single aspect that remains unaltered is the human condition. In this case, the Homeric parallel is symbolically used.

We must take the external and internal correspondences together, tempering the irony which results from the former with the sincere emotions evoked by the latter. Joyce's *Ulysses* must be seen in a total perspective which includes both of the Homeric perspectives I have been describing. It was part of Joyce's purpose to

present Bloom as simultaneously ridiculous and magnificent, comic and heroic. Bloom is comic in that his actions are often cramped and mean when compared with the wide-ranging experience of Ulysses. But Bloom is also magnificent; his inner fortitude and equanimity of mind reveal a kinship with the Classical hero that can never be completely obscured. (Joyce, 1966:95)

Rudolph von Abele states in his short article *Ulysses: The Myth of Myth* that it is not only the present which is being criticized but the heroic past as well: “*the world of myth is put under comic criticism by a world of anti-myth and what results is neither the apotheosis of myth nor the denigration of modern culture, but the presentation of a fictive universe whose most amusing paradox is that, though saturated with death and kitsch, it yet gives off an authentic and inexhaustible aura of life*”. (Abele, 1954: 358)

Throughout the novel, Joyce operates consistently on two levels, the realistic and the mythic. The former deals with immediate truths which are inevitably accompanied by various setbacks and grief, while the mythic background has to do with eternal truths in all their comic intensity. When both planes match, as it happens in moments of crisis, Joyce produces comic moments of great power. The interference of reality and myth is made possible by means of the stream-of-consciousness technique. This becomes obvious in the Circe episode, the comic crisis of *Ulysses*, where Bloom and Stephen find themselves in a world of fantasy which is the result of the wild turmoil of their imaginations. In this case, reality, myth and dream-image merge in a fantastic comic drama which enables the central characters to reach a comic release at the close of the episode.

The central comic character of *Ulysses* is undoubtedly Leopold Bloom. The shape of *Ulysses* was heavily influenced by Joyce's decision to use Homer's *Odyssey* as the epic counterpart to Bloom's modern Dublin voyage. The Irish author's system of Homeric correspondence ensured coherence to the text of *Ulysses*. Homer's masterpiece offered the shadow characters of Bloom, Stephen and Molly. Joyce drew inspiration for several minor characters from the *Odyssey*. Each of the eighteen episodes in *Ulysses* corresponded with a comparable adventure in the *Odyssey*. The amazing complexity and creativity of the Homeric correspondences obscured the simplicity of the initial conception. Joyce chose a fundamentally comic mythic background for *Ulysses*. The voyage of Odysseus is towards home and he aims to establish again the family ties, domestic love and societal stability. His quest ends in success and harmony. In the *Odyssey*, Joyce discovered a true comic hero and also a “*myth which embodied eternal laws*”, a genuine comic myth. W.B. Stanford highlights the fundamentally comic structure of the *Odyssey* in the *Ulysses Theme*, and also underlines the unheroic or comic elements of its central character. To sum up, there is no real conflict between Joyce's comic *Ulysses* and his Homeric prototype.

The patterned movement of the *Odyssey* adheres in outline to the traditional flow of comedy. Bloom's pattern follows that of the *Odyssey*. He is at first presented in an aura of brightness and fertility, full of the spells and smells of intimate family life. Then, he goes into the streets of Dublin, the comic other world, there to settle his destiny for a day. During that day, the contrast between his imagined potential and his actual achievement, displayed more acute in the light of the crisis of Molly's infidelity, generates a state of tension which gathers impetus as the day folds in about him, to reach a climax in the night town episode. Bloom passes through an emotional catharsis and eventually gets home at the end of the day where he reaches a state of perfect, although hardly won, balance.

### **Traditional comic values in Ulysses**

In the following lines, the present paper will focus on analyzing Joyce's use of the regenerative patterns of comedy in his depiction of Bloom and Stephen. First of all, it is necessary to mention Joyce's opinion regarding comedy. For him, comedy was "*the perfect manner in art*" and the feeling which it aroused was that of joy. Joyce's view on the subject of comic form resembles to a great extent the idea of Susanne Langer who considers that the corresponding feeling of comedy is "*the pure sense of life*" or "*sheer vital exuberance*". (Langer, 1953:326)

Susanne Langer argues that it is the function of comedy to abstract from reality and present in symbolic garb one of the fundamental forms of consciousness; comedy, she writes, "*abstracts, and reincarnates for our perception the motion and rhythm of living*". She bases her theory of comedy on her perception of the behavioural patterns of all organic lifeforms. All living creatures, she reminds us, are imbued with a life-instinct which urges them to avoid every threat to their existence. "*The impulse to survive, to maintain a pattern of vitality in a non-living universe*", she writes, "*is the most elementary instinctual purpose.*" (Langer, 1953:327-28)

Langer claims that any organism has two basic functions: accommodation and growth. In human terms, these two goals take the form of an endeavour to achieve ideal selfhood. This struggle is called by Carl Gustav Jung the process of individuation and according to him, it is the supreme objective of human life. Implicit in comedy is the metaphysics of resurrection, a transcendence of death. It is now generally accepted that comedy developed from a seasonal ritual celebration of the regenerative energies of man and nature. The most significant aspect about these rituals is that they were fertility rituals and the god they celebrated was a fertility god "*a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life*". (Jung, 1967)

There are two types of death, comedy is concerned with: on the one hand, comedy strives to defeat actual physical death and, on the other hand, there is the battle against the forces which prevent an individual from becoming fully alive. The characters of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus are going to be scrutinized in terms of their compromises with the death forces that they confront with or carry with them during their Odyssey through the streets of Joyce's Dublin. Both Bloom and Stephen experience a crisis in *Ulysses*. Stephen desperately attempts to escape from the unwanted authority of his father, Simon Dedalus, while Bloom, seriously affected by his wife's infidelity, tries to come to terms with the departure of his youth and the inevitable approach of death. In other words, Stephen goes through a classic crisis of youth and Bloom through a crisis of maturity, each of them being resolved in comic terms.

The force of the comic in *Ulysses* consists in its capacity of transforming itself in the dominant spirit of the novel which is able to exude a sense of balance among the readers and at the same time expresses itself in laughter. The laughter of *Ulysses* has many forms of manifestation, according to Frank Budgen:

There are moods of pity and grief in Ulysses but the prevailing mood is humour. Laughter in all tones and keys, now with the world and now at it, is heard continually. The laughter reminds us often of the bright mocking laughter of Sterne of whom Nietzsche wrote that he, "the freest of all free spirits", resembled a squirrel flying from tree to tree, bewildering the eye with his agility. But then it often resembles the louder laughter of a Shakespeare or a Dickens, delighting in the over-lifesize caricature of human types, the political windbag, the snarling, scurrilous man, the monumental liar. (Budgen, 1960:71)

Laughter is conceived as a method by means of which Stephen manages to free himself from his mind's bondage. Laughter also facilitates the relief of the mind as well as ensuring a sense of mastery over the emotions that oppress and overwhelm it. Actually, it is not Stephen the one who achieves such detachment, but it is Joyce who does.

*Ulysses* is a novel which deals primarily with human experience, specifically with the individual's sense of isolation and his attempts to reach out a meaningful relationship with others. These are the main preoccupations of Bloom, Stephen, Molly and the other Dubliners with whom they mingle. Joyce laughs in order to free himself from the bondage of past memory and present reality. The enormous quantity of autobiographical material involved into the making of the book is undeniable. The details of Joyce's personal life seem to be purposefully introduced in his novels so that he can be easily identified with his characters. Stephen and Bloom are rightfully regarded as aspects of Joyce, Stephen of the young Joyce and Bloom of the mature Joyce. In fact, he contains them both and it is in the writing of *Ulysses* that he effects their reconciliation, both as aspects of himself and as abstract symbols of Life and Art.

Joyce's capacity of getting rid of the spirits that haunt him would not be so interesting to us if he did not determine us realize in *Ulysses* that we, too, experience the sense of bondage that affects Bloom and Stephen as we are bound by memory, knowledge and desire. Joyce provides us with a particular as well as universal meaning of the mind in bondage as we follow in detail the life and thought of his characters. Despite this, we are not allowed to come so close that we do not see them clearly. In the latter part of the novel, Joyce equalizes our sense of involvement by placing his characters on the comic stage to play their parts. He is the one in charge with supplying the comic masks, in this way he manages to guide our responses and make us share his vision. This perspective leads the readers to perceive reality not only as being complex, but also as ambiguous. Through his use of the comic, Joyce succeeds in convincing us that experience can be viewed in more ways than one and that these views qualify each other and experience itself. Only when we get to realize this fact, the ambiguity becomes meaningful.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce employs successfully the ancient methods of the comedian, celebration and scorn. This enables him to harshly criticize the drawbacks of existence without sentencing his characters to perdition. Thus, he displays neither euphoria nor cynicism and he manages to avoid the downsides of sentimentality. Both Bloom and Stephen are presented in such a ridiculous manner throughout the novel that many critics interpreted *Ulysses* as wholly ironic. The intention of the current paper is to demonstrate that the true comic values are prevalent in Joyce's work.

At the beginning of the novel, Stephen Dedalus does not seem to be an explicitly comic figure, as Bloom is. According to L.C. Knights, "*Once an inevitable connection between comedy and laughter is assumed, we are not likely to make any observation that will be useful to criticism*". (Knights, 1964: 181) This statement refers to the fact that a character does not have to be comic or have a sense of humour in order to appear in a comedy and take part into the comic impulse. In *Ulysses*, Joyce presents the continuation of Stephen's efforts to become that self which he feels he is "*ineluctably preconditioned to become*", the mature creative artist. For Stephen, this process began in the early pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and progressed through a patterned series of struggles, triumphs and reversals towards the decision to look for freedom through flight. *Portrait* ends in a thrilled manner as Stephen proclaims his artistic destiny with a jubilant flourish. The beginning of *Ulysses*

presents a reversal of this triumph. In the *Telemachus* episode, Stephen's image is profoundly altered; his self-confidence vanished, being replaced by a depressed hostility and that "curious mixture of sinister genius and uncertain talent" that Arthur Symonds found in the young Joyce. (Hart, 1968: 29)

Stephen strives through *Ulysses* to overcome those same oppressors that he thought to have defeated or escaped from in *Portrait* – Priest and King, Mother and Father, Church and State, Christ and Caesar – spiritual and temporal authority. While in *Portrait* the representatives of temporal and spiritual power were exterior to Stephen, in *Ulysses* the elements of the struggle have become internalized and consequently display a more dangerous threat to Stephen's free development. (Ryf, 1966: 27)

Another important aspect of Stephen's struggle makes reference to his attempt of escaping the influences of Dublin by separating himself from them completely through his move to Paris. After this, he adopted an attitude of cold and arrogant indifference mixed with contempt towards family and friends, religion and nation. After a while, Stephen realizes that these attitudes do not represent a proper or appropriate response to the realities of his human condition. Besides this, they had no contribution to the improvement of his artistic potential. Physical separation does not necessarily lead to artistic objectivity and mere indifference is useless. As long as Stephen cannot find the freedom to develop in Paris, because of the excess mental baggage he carries there with him, it is clear that going home is not a solution either.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen deals with a continuous quest for authentic individuality which is modelled upon a classic death-and-resurrection scenario. It becomes obvious his relationship to Dionysus, the god who every year dies and is reborn, the god whose ritual gave rise to comedy. Throughout *Ulysses*, Stephen is "in a pivotal moment of becoming". When *Telemachus* opens, twelve months have passed since the death of his mother and Stephen prepares to be reborn. The gestation period has been a long one, for "the soul of man has a slow and dark birth...". Since his mother's death, Stephen has been drifting, aimless and inefficient, on the fringes of Dublin literary circles, allowing himself to fall victim to the encroachments of Buck Mulligan. He embodies the threat to Stephen's success and identity as an artist posed by the Dublin environment. In Stephen's view, Mulligan is typical of all that is worst in the Anglo-Irish: companion of an Englishman, perfidious, lacking in any spiritual awareness. He represents the triumph of the inauthentic. (Niemayer, 1976: 188)

Stephen's quest in *Ulysses* is shown to be simpler than Bloom's. The former has one goal in life, to write well, to become an artist. His comic pattern has to do with his efforts to overcome all the obstacles which prevent him from accomplishing this supreme objective. Unlike Stephen, Bloom does not have any brilliant future perspectives in his life. His life is fixed within the confines of Dublin's city limits. He has a long-time marriage, an adolescent daughter and an ordinary job as a canvasser for advertisements on a daily newspaper. He has no chance of voyaging overseas, no getting away from it all. He is firmly and inescapably established in the distasteful world of Edwardian Dublin. Their ages also indicate the existing gap in terms of possibilities open to them. Stephen is young, talented, with the best part of his life ahead. Bloom is already middle-aged, he is thirty-eight years old, he does not possess literary talents and his wife's infidelity drives him into a major personal crisis which determines him to question all aspects of his being and the purpose of life itself.

Bloom is filled with horror at the thought of his own mortality. He is obsessed with the idea that his time is running out, not only in the immediate sense of the approach of Molly's four o'clock deadline, but in the broader sense of ageing. This

concern is highlighted by his numerous allusions to the passage of time. Bloom is surrounded by clocks throughout the day: St. George's clock in *Calypso*, the cuckoo clock in *Nausicaa*, the clock on the ballast office. Bloom's bitter awareness that his life is passing away from him is aggravated by the absence of a successor. His frustration at his inability to produce a son is linked closely to his inability to accept the fact of his dissolution.

### Conclusion

As a consequence, to the time spent with Bloom, Stephen manages to relax, to abandon the hostile watchfulness, the mistrust and the self-pity which were characteristic of his relationship with others. Even though he does not accept to stay in Bloom's house and goes out into the world alone, he maintains a good relationship with the older man. Thus, Stephen succeeds in reconciling to his roots and to the bonds which unite man to man. The comic patterns of *Ulysses* enable him to attain relief. He accepts his fate with serenity and goes back to his home and his wife a more complete, integrated individual. His optimistic nature, which combines the comic with the heroic, offers him the possibility to accommodate to the realities of his existence without pessimism.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce employs the internalisation of the comic plot putting the emphasis on individual release rather than on social integration. When *Ulysses* ends, the protagonists are as far from inclusion in their society as they were in the beginning. Their comic triumph consists in overcoming the blocking forces which exist in their minds. Therefore, Bloom and Stephen are atypical as comic heroes in the conventional sense. At the end of the novel, nothing has changed except in the minds of the protagonists. Stephen does not write anything and Bloom is not transformed into a model of virility.

*Ulysses* does not contain the usual elements of a novel. Joyce is not greatly interested in the plot and his characters cannot be defined judging from their human actions. The comic resolution of *Ulysses* depends to a great extent on the mythological dimension of the novel.

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## **QUEEN ELIZABETH II HAS TEA WITH PADDINGTON BEAR. OR ROYAL HUMOUR AS CARRIER OF SOCIAL MESSAGE**

**Marina-Cristiana ROTARU\***

**Abstract.** *The aim of this paper is to investigate how Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom uses her sense of humour to communicate with her people and answer why the monarch has invited Paddington Bear for tea at Buckingham Palace during her Platinum Jubilee celebrations. The analysis also tries to identify features of visual humour (incongruity and surprise) and investigate the queen's verbal humour using the isotopy disjunction model theory. Our research also underlines how visual humour and verbal humour articulate together in a royal context in order to help the monarch convey a powerful message to the nation in an authentic and equally entertaining way.*

**Keywords:** *Elizabeth II's sense of humour, the isotopy disjunction model, inclusiveness*

### **Introduction**

This paper aims to analyse how Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom used humour (both visual and verbal) to send a notable social message to her people in her Platinum Jubilee Year. The monarch managed to convey her message in a highly suggestive way: by means of a short, comic sketch. In our investigation we will focus on how the humorous effect is constructed both at visual and verbal levels and we will also try to decipher the dimensions of the royal message and their rationale.

The skit stars Queen Elizabeth II (in her own role as monarch) and Paddington Bear (the cartoon character) created, in the 1950s, by Michael Bond, an English author best known for his fictional children's stories. The little bear is voiced, in this short video, by the English actor Ben Whishaw. Simon Farnaby, another well-known English actor, appears in the sketch as the queen's footman. The short video is the successful outcome of a collaboration between Buckingham Palace, BBC Studios and Heyday Films/Studiocanal.

The main script writer of the sketch is Frank Cottrell-Boyce, who co-authored the text with Jon Foster and James Lamont (Cottrell-Boyce, 11 September 2022). The video was filmed at Windsor Castle, and Paddington Bear was added later by means of computer-generated imagery (BBC, 15 September 2022). The story, however, is set at Buckingham Palace, the queen's official residence in London. The skit was aired in the opening of the Platinum Party at the Palace concert during the queen's Platinum Jubilee Central Week in June 2022.

To celebrate the seventieth anniversary of her reign, the queen invited Paddington Bear to Buckingham Palace to have tea together. Forgetting royal etiquette, Paddington hastily guzzled the steaming hot tea right from the spout of the teapot, without offering any tea to the queen, leaving her equally surprised and amused. After smashing some creamy eclairs, Paddington offered the queen a marmalade sandwich which he kept underneath his red hat for emergencies. The sovereign replied that she, too, kept a marmalade sandwich in her bag. The video ended with the queen and the little bear tapping their spoons to the musical beat of *We Will Rock You*, the famous hit of the British rock band *Queen*, thus marking the kick-off of the party.

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What makes this skit unprecedented is the cast. Although Elizabeth II appeared in another surprising sketch ten years before, in 2012, when she apparently jumped from a helicopter accompanied by her secret agent, James Bond, this time she is filmed having tea with a bear, Paddington Bear, the little bear from Peru and a much-loved British cartoon character. The Platinum Jubilee sketch is a surprising manifestation of what we can generally call a new royal genre – *the royal sketch*. What sets this sketch apart from the 2012 one is the social message, wrapped up in humour and fun.

### **The Symbolism of the Timing of the Sketch**

The royal sketch premiered right before the BBC Platinum Jubilee Party at the Palace Concert, which took place outside Buckingham Palace. The concert represented the start of the popular celebrations of the queen's platinum jubilee, following the state events which marked the seventieth anniversary of her reign: Trooping the Colour and the Service of Thanksgiving at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. The British sovereigns have, apart from their official role as head of state, a more informal role as head of the nation. In this latter capacity, they are expected to bring the country together in both times of joy and times of sorrow. The queen's platinum jubilee was a time of great celebration and the queen, through the concert outside her official residence, invited her fellow Britons to join her in celebrating the seventieth year of her reign. She was the host and the concert was the background against which ancient royal traditions and ceremonial blended with British pop culture. As a charming and generous host, the queen wanted not only to invite people at her party and make them enjoy it to the full, but entertain them herself. Having both a good sense of humour as well as an acute sense of propriety, the queen knew how to strike a balance between being the sovereign and the head of the nation and being an atypical entertainer for one evening: a tea at Buckingham Palace, where Elizabeth II, the longest serving monarch in the history of the country met Paddington Bear, Britain's favourite cartoon character.

### **Theoretical Framework and humour analysis**

In investigating Queen Elizabeth II's humour as revealed in this sketch, we have blended the analysis of visual humour (based on the mechanism of visual humour) and the analysis of verbal humour (based on the *isotopy disjunction model* theory).

According to Alexander G. Mitchell, the mechanism of *visual humour* is based on two main elements: *surprise* and *incongruity*. According to Mitchell, surprise, or "the unexpected" is often combined with incongruity, which "consists in different elements being incompatible with each other" (Mitchell, 2009: 30). Furthermore, the incongruity theory of humour underlines that "humour is created out of a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke" (Ross, 1998: 7). Surprise and suspense (meaning tension and excitement) go hand in hand as they intensify each other. From the very first scenes of the skit, we recognize the interiors of a royal residence, so we expect to see the queen. Quite surprisingly, the first character whom we see is not the queen, but Paddington Bear, who discloses who he is having tea with seconds later, when he says: 'I do hope you'll have a lovely jubilee'. The camera swiftly moves towards the queen and the surprise is revealed.

Tension is created from the very start when the queen offers Paddington tea and the little bear instantly forgets all manners, grabs the teapot and starts drinking hot tea right from the pout, slurping it and leaving only a few drips for his host, prompting the sovereign to say: 'Never mind.' Suspense continues to build up as Paddington's

chair starts to slide out from underneath him, making the little bear lose balance. Trying to regain it, Paddington lands on the creamy eclairs that had been prepared for him and mashes them, splashing cream on the footman's face. At this point, suspense becomes more and more intense as it is difficult to predict what may come next.

Humour also results from the juxtaposition of surprise/suspense and incongruity. Incongruity is present from the very beginning of the skit: we see an elegant tea tray, with the teapot covered by a tea cozy to keep the tea hot, gracefully carried to and placed on a beautifully arranged table by a footman, announcing, apparently, a very stylish five o'clock tea. Our expectations contrast with Paddington's bad table manners: instead of sipping tea, he drinks it with a loud slurp. On the one hand, there is Paddington, behaving clumsily, like a bull in a china shop, unintentionally forgetting his good manners at times. On the other hand, there is the queen, a charming host, in whose presence etiquette and proper behaviour are paramount. Moreover, Paddington's embarrassment contrasts with the queen's good nature.

The skit depicts a type of visual humour known as *situation comedy*, which Alexander G. Mitchell defines as "the set of relations between one or several characters, their surroundings, and particular circumstances in which they will act". He adds that what makes people laugh is not only the situation, but also "the quality of performance of the actors, that is the style of the narration" (Mitchell, *op.cit.*: 35). In the refined atmosphere of a royal drawing room in Buckingham Palace, the queen – the head of the nation – invited a cartoon character to have tea with her and warmly welcomes him. A footman was present to ensure that everything went off without a hitch. In addition, the presence of the footman enhances the sense of decorum anyone would expect in such a context. And yet, no sooner had the tea started than things took an unexpected turn. Bound by royal protocol and in the queen's presence, the footman kept his composure even when splashed with cream and looked disapprovingly at Paddington, trying to make him mind his manners. The perfect host, the queen pretended not to see the footman's face. All these visual elements articulate with each other to create a humorous response in the audience. As far as the quality of the performance is concerned, it is not only Paddington's hilarious behaviour or the footman's apparent calm which are amusing, but the queen's performance, too. She remains unflappable as accident-prone Paddington makes a mess of his royal tea. And yet, her face is highly expressive in reaction to Paddington's insatiable appetite for tea. Her eyes fixed on Paddington and having a bemused expression, she raised her eyebrows as if to say: 'Well, I've never seen such craving before!' She strikes an adequate balance between remaining collected and showing surprise in a genuine manner, thus giving a convincing comic performance which reveals her ludic side.

But the lines in the skit are as suggestive as the images. Let us review the dialogue between the queen and Paddington<sup>1</sup>:

1. Paddington: 'Thank you for having me! I do hope you'll have a lovely jubilee!'
2. The queen: 'Tea?'
3. Paddington: 'Oh, yes, please!'
4. Butler: Hmm, hmm (clears his throat). He nods towards the queen, making Paddington aware of her presence.
5. Paddington: 'Oh, terribly sorry!... Ah...'
6. The queen: 'Never mind.'

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<sup>1</sup> We have numbered the lines of the skit in order to make the text of the analysis reader friendly.

7. Paddington: Oh, dear... Ahh, perhaps you would like a marmalade sandwich? I always keep one for emergencies.'
8. The queen: 'So do I! I keep mine in here, for later.'
9. Butler: 'The party is about to start, Your Majesty!'
10. Paddington: 'Happy Jubilee, Ma'am! And thank you, for everything!'
11. The queen: That's very kind. (Cottrel-Boyce, Foster, Lamont, 2022)

In our analysis of the queen's *verbal humour*, we have used the isotopy disjunction model theory, initially developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas in the 1960s, because it is more apposite for our context than other humour theories. In our investigation, we rely on Salvatore Attardo's own contribution to the isotopy disjunction model (henceforth IDM).

According to Attardo, the IDM enriches the theory of humour with two key elements: the linear organization of verbal jokes and the disjunction mechanism by means of which the intended meaning of the joke is revealed (Attardo, 1994: 92). The linear organization of the joke underlines its semantic chronology: there is a first sense disclosed (S1), followed immediately by the disclosure of a second sense (S2), which is the intended meaning of the joke.

Drawing on the previous literature, Attardo lists the three narrative functions of a joke without naming them, perhaps in order to avoid the varied and sometimes overlapping taxonomies regarding these functions. He simply presents them as Function 1 (F1), Function 2 (F2) and Function 3 (F3). These narrative functions mirror the linear structure of the text of the joke (*ibidem*: 87-89).

For Attardo, Function 1 "consists of a textual sequence, often narrative, that introduces the characters, determines the situation, and in general establishes the context of the events narrated in the text" (*ibidem*: 88). Even without the visual input, the first two lines in the text outline the background, the word "jubilee" being essential in deciphering the situation. For Attardo, the term *context* is more encompassing than the definition provided in a dictionary. He underlines that "context" can have two interpretations. On the one hand, it can mean "the non-linguistic environment of an utterance". On the other hand, it can mean "the other utterances that precede and/or follow a given utterance" (Attardo, *op.cit.*: 294-295). Drawing on Michael Halliday and Janos Petöfi, Attardo names the first meaning *con-text* and the second meaning *co-text* (*ibidem*: 295).

Following the chronology of the narrative, Function 2 arouses "expectations" by creating the "need for a resolution in the story". It often manifests itself as questions that require answers or solutions for the joke (*ibidem*: 88-89). Function 1 and Function 2 introduce the first meaning of the joke (S1). Function 3 is present at the end of the story, where the second meaning of the joke, the intended meaning (S2), is revealed.

The disclosure of the second meaning (S2) of the joke is prompted by the articulation of two key elements in the mechanism of humour: the *connector* and the *disjuncter*. The connector is the element of transition, which leads up to the passage from S1 to S2. It prepares the ground for the revelation of the intended meaning of the joke. It is usually introduced by questions, which carry out F2 – the function which is responsible for building up expectations. Once the connector has reached its goal, it triggers the disjuncter, which brings about the change from the initial meaning to the intended meaning of the joke. It fulfils Function 3 – the revelation of the true meaning of the joke. In order to create the humorous effect, Function 3 must be characterized by "brevity and immediacy" (*ibidem*: 89).

As far as the royal skit is concerned, the visual input of the skit (the royal palace where Paddington was invited for tea, Paddington's manners, the queen's composure and the butler's body language) creates the con-text, the non-linguistic background. Suspense, which is built up gradually, reaches its thrilling climax when Paddington asks the unanticipated question: "Ahh, perhaps you would like a marmalade sandwich?". Trying to make amends for his table manners, he offers the queen his own marmalade sandwich which he always keeps under his hat for emergencies, a sign of his own generosity. Paddington's question includes the connector and performs Function 2, which prompts the on-lookers to speculate about what may happen next: What will the queen's reaction be? Will she accept the sandwich or not? Will she be amused or not bemused by Paddington's question?

And then comes the queen's immediate reply, which takes us by surprise: "So do I. I keep mine in here, for later", answers the sovereign, pulling her own marmalade sandwich out of her bag. Line 8 in the dialogue includes the disjunctive, the aim of which is to cause the shift in meaning and reveal the second sense (S2). Paradoxically, there is no shift in meaning, so, no passing from the first meaning (S1) to the second meaning (S2). The connector and the disjunctive are in place, but while the former's role is aligned with the findings of the literature, the latter's is not. The disjunctive in this joke does not introduce a new meaning but preserves the original one. Both Paddington and the queen enjoy marmalade sandwiches, which they keep well-hidden if need be. Here, the humorous effect is not the result of the fulfilment of Function 3 through the agency of the disjunctive, but the outcome of the queen's own unforeseen reaction. The humorous effect is created by the mix of linguistic and visual input. Although the disjunctive does not introduce a new meaning, its capacity to produce humour is not minimized by the conservation of meaning, but somehow preserved, if not even enhanced, by the royal interlocutor and the unpredictable revelation of the queen's soft spot for marmalade. The element of surprise, carried by the disjunctive, coherently articulated with the visual con-text and the co-text, ensures that the humorous effect is produced.

The fact that the disjunctive did not introduce a new, unexpected meaning can be explained by the purpose of the joke: the queen's line (Line 8) does not only bring about a humorous effect, but it also manifests an inclusive character. Humour often "creates commonality and inclusion withing groups [...]" (Clements, 2020: 7). The short sketch reveals that marmalade is not only Paddington's favourite treat, but the queen's, too. Thus, marmalade (and the five o'clock tea) bring together two voices: Paddington's voice, which can be interpreted as the voice of the common individual, and the queen's voice. In this way, the queen aims to say that, in spite of being the sovereign, she is as English as any other Brit.

#### **Why Paddington Bear and not another famous British cartoon character: the social dimension of the Queen's message**

We claim that this short sketch fulfils not only an entertaining function, but a social function, as humour is "a form of social communication", too (*ibidem*: 8). By means of the royal skit, the queen meant more than having and sharing a funny moment with her nation. For pure fun, she may have invited other famous British cartoon characters to have tea with her at Buckingham Palace: Wallace and Gromit, Winnie the Pooh, Rupert Bear or Bonzo the Dog. And yet, she chooses Paddington Bear because she wanted to send a message with fundamental social implications. And she does so discreetly, over a cup of tea.

According to Walter Bagehot, a constitutional monarch has three rights: “the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn” (Bagehot, 1966: 111). As heads of state, the British monarchs are expected to maintain their political impartiality and refrain from expressing political views. In practice, this implies that the sovereign is expected to listen more and speak less. This attitude is embodied by Elizabeth II even when having fun. A quantitative analysis of the dialogue between the sovereign and Paddington Bear reveals the following:

	THE QUEEN	PADDINGTON BEAR	THE BUTLER
No. of words/total	17/70	45/70	8/70
Percentage	24,29%	64,29%	11,42%

Table 1. The number of words produced by the three characters in the royal sketch and the corresponding percentage of the words of each character.

Of the two main characters in the sketch, Paddington uttered 45 words out of the total of 70 words that make the script of the dialogue, while the queen uttered only 17, which means that Paddington spoke almost three times more than the queen. This quantitative analysis illustrates that the queen is aware of the way in which she is expected to conduct herself even during a time of national celebration.

But her political neutrality does not prevent her from acting when necessary. In choosing Paddington as her interlocutor over a cup of tea, she invited to Buckingham Palace not only Britain’s most loved cartoon character, but someone with a life story that makes him relevant for the message the monarch wants to convey to the entire nation during a special moment: her platinum jubilee.

Paddington Bear is not just a loveable little bear from Peru, who loves marmalade. He is a refugee. When the British author Thomas Michael Bond created the character of Paddington Bear in the 1950, he was inspired by his memories of the Second World War, when Britain turned into a haven for London children, who were evacuated to the safer surroundings of the British countryside, and for Jewish refugee children, who fled Europe trying to escape Nazi terror. These children wore labels on their clothes in order to be identified and taken by the host families. Hence, Paddington Bear, with a sign around his neck, which reads “Please, look after this bear. Thank you.”, and his story represent the plight of refugees. In the context of Europe facing new waves of migration in recent years, caused by war and severe economic crisis in various parts of the world, Paddington’s symbolism is as powerful as ever.

But Paddington Bear’s experience as a refugee may also make reference to a particular chapter in Great Britain’s more recent past which involves the members of the so-called Windrush Generation. These are people from the islands of the Caribbeans mostly (Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago) who left their native countries and came to Britain between 1948 and 1971, at the request of the British government, in order to redress the acute labour shortages in post-war Britain. They are collectively known as the Windrush Generation in reference to the name of the ship which brought them on British shores: MV Empire Windrush. As their native countries were considered British territories, with the British monarch as head of their countries, these people naturally assumed that they had British citizenship, a right also granted to them by the British Nationality Act 1948. Furthermore, the British Home Office did not keep official records of these people and did not issue any legal document in order to help the Windrush migrants have their status clarified by an official act of the British government. In 1971, the executive greatly curbed immigration by introducing the

Immigration Act 1971, by means of which “Commonwealth citizens already leaving in the UK were given indefinite leave to remain” while a British citizen born in Commonwealth countries belonging to the British Crown “could only settle in the UK with both a work permit and proof of a parent or grandparent being born in the UK” (The BBC, 24 November 2021).

In April 2018, a major political scandal known as the Windrush Scandal broke out in Great Britain as the British Government, ignoring historical reality, informed the Windrush migrants (who had already worked in the country for decades, and started a family) that they were considered illegal workers because they did not possess official documents to prove their legal status. Hence, they were threatened with deportation.

In inviting Paddington (and no other British cartoon character) to have tea with her, the queen uses two of her constitutional rights, the right to encourage and the right to warn, to make reference, diplomatically, to the immigration issue in general. But as head of the British state and of the British nation, Elizabeth II may also have attempted to considerately point back at the Windrush Scandal, and indirectly warns that the immigration topic, a very sensitive issue, should be handled appropriately. By her sympathetic and warm attitude, and her generous hospitality towards the little bear from Peru, the queen also encourages the entire British society to show kindness, understanding and tolerance towards refugees.

### **Conclusion**

Humour can turn into a highly versatile form of communication by means of which messages are conveyed. Furthermore, the particular nature of humorous communication may sometimes cushion the impact of the message. Limited, in expressing her views, by constitutional restrictions, Elizabeth II had to act creatively and find subtle ways to convey her views in a manner that would not erode her role of arbiter of the political game. She proved that she was able to use humour ingeniously and shrewdly in order to emphasize key points. In this sketch, she was not just a welcoming host, but the monarch who managed to issue a warning and provide an encouragement wrapped up in gentle humour and delivered obliquely, yet unambiguously and gracefully. The message she sends in this skit, a message not only for her nation, but for the whole world, is rooted in her Christian faith: love, kindness and tolerance, contained in the commandment “Love thy neighbour as thyself” should be the foundation of our life. In retrospect, the queen’s words and attitude towards Paddington Bear can be considered part of Elizabeth II’s spiritual legacy.

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## **THE COMIC EXPRESSION OF THE COMMON LANGUAGE IN MARK TWAIN'S "THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN" AND ION CREANGĂ'S "CHILDHOOD MEMORIES"**

**Alina-Maria UNGUREANU\***

**Abstract:** *The stylistic aspects that are found in Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Ion Creangă's Childhood Memories are related to the way in which the common language is used in their works. The individual particularity of their style is to be seen in the numerous elements which form the oral character that is marked by the artistic usage of both Romanian and English language. The pleasure of telling stories, of using words that are characteristic to the popular language is specific to both Mark Twain and Ion Creangă.*

**Keywords:** *language, orality, humour, satire, childhood*

Mark Twain and Ion Creangă are two important writers of the American, respectively Romanian literature. Although their works were influenced by different cultures and their lives were marked by a distinct society and civilization, the common subject that unites their writings and makes them similar refers to the way both of them present the wonderful period of childhood in their well-known novels, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Childhood Memories*.

Both novels present the adventures that the main characters, Huck and Nică, have on their way to maturity.

Mark Twain's novel opens with the introduction of the characters and the presentation of the events that were described in the author's previous novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The writer also presents the milieu in which Huck is raised and educated by Widow Douglas and Miss Watson.

*Now the way that the book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece—all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round—more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back. (Twain, 2004: 1-2)*

Huck's story presents the events that are related to the boy's relationship with his father and Jim, Miss Watson's slave, whom the boy befriends on Jackson's Island after he has escaped from Pap. Huck wants to help Jim free himself from slavery and decides to go on a trip down the Mississippi River to the free states. Tom Sawyer, Huck's friend, also helps them. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Jim is a free man since Miss Watson died two months before and freed him in her will. Pap, Huck's father, is dead, too, so the boy is taken and educated by Aunt Sally.

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Ion Creangă's work stays true to life in depicting his memories, offering a great insight into the culture, structure and conflicts of the traditional rural society which the author describes ever since the beginning of the novel.

*Stau câteodată și-mi aduc aminte ce vremi și ce oameni mai erau în părțile noastre pe când începusem și eu, drăgăliță-Doamne, a mă ridica băiețaș la casa părinților mei, în satul Humuleștii, din târg drept peste apa Neamțului; sat mare și vesel, împărțit în trei părți, care se țin tot de una: Vatra satului, Delenii și Bejenii. Și apoi Humuleștii, și pe vremea aceea, nu erau numai așa, un sat de oameni fără căpătăiu, ci sat vechi răzășesc, întemeiat în toată puterea cuvântului: cu gospodari tot unul și unul, cu flăcăi voinici și fete mândre, care știau a învăța și hora, dar și suveica, de vuia satul de vatale în toate părțile; cu biserică frumoasă și niște preoți și dascăli și poporeni ca aceia, de făceau mare cinste satului lor. (Creangă, 2013: 11)*

Some of the most famous events of *Childhood Memories* are: the stealing of Aunt Marioara's cherries, the hoopoe's story, the episode that recounts Nică's adventures when he went swimming or when he caught mange from Irinuca's goats.

Comparing Huck's universe with Nică's, it can be mentioned that Creangă's character is a lucky child. Nică is protected by his parents who take care of everything.

*Ce-i pasă copilului când mama și tata se gândesc la neajunsurile vieții, la ce poate să le aducă ziua de mâne, sau că-i frământă alte gânduri pline de îngrijire. Copilul, încălecat pe bățul său, gândește că se află călare pe un cal de cei mai strașnici, pe care aleargă, cu voie bună, și-l bate cu biciul și-l strunește cu tot dinadinsul, și răcnește la el din toată inima, de-ți iè auzul; și de cade jos, crede că l-a trântit calul, și pe băț își descarcă mânia în toată puterea cuvântului... Așa eram eu la vârsta cea fericită, și așa cred că au fost toți copiii, de când îi lumea asta și pământul, măcar să zică cine ce-a zice. (Creangă, 2013: 33)*

Just like Mark Twain, Ion Creangă presents the wonderful period of childhood not only from the point of view of an adult, but also through the eyes of "the universal child" (Călinescu, 1986: 481). The two novels evoke the age of innocence, but also the complex process of human formation.

The charm of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Childhood Memories* lies not only in the evocation of the events, but, above all, in the way they are evoked, the two writers possessing the art of storytelling that is highlighted by a special dynamism and narrative technique. Mark Twain's and Ion Creangă's writings also represent a clear and vivid reflection of the values which the popular language has in a literary text.

The language that Huck uses to address others is realistic, an aspect which gives the novel the element of realism. Creangă's work represents an effective model of how to use the language of the Romanian peasants without changing its authentic popular character.

The impact that this type of language has on the reader is influenced by different factors. One of the most important elements is the presence of orality, which represents a stylistic characteristic of the literary text and consists in reducing the differences between the oral and written communication, also offering authenticity and originality to the writings.

The orality is specific to Ion Creangă's *Childhood Memories*, but it can also be found in Mark Twain's novel.

It is considered that the orality has an important contribution in diversifying the possibilities of expression of the artistic style and "the encounter of literature with orality not only nourishes the actual literary creation, encouraging it, but it effectively

contributes to the formation and development of the national literary language” (Milaş, 1988: 20), thus enriching the reader’s culture and vocabulary.

The orality, defined as being the quality of the style of a fictional writing to seem spoken, due to the spontaneous and lively character of the dialogues that note the particularities of the characters’ speech and of the narrative itself, is found especially at the level of literary texts. Among the marks of orality one can mention: the use of dialogue, verbs and pronouns in the second person; greetings; structures in the vocative case; verbs in the imperative mood; interjections; exclamatory and interrogative statements; suspension points; regional and popular structures, idiomatic expressions.

All these elements are also used to render the comic aspects in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Childhood Memories*. So, the orality is strongly connected to the comic aspects of the two novels in which the pleasure of joking is evident, the humour sometimes having the role of potentiating even the reasons of pain. In order to achieve the comic effects, the writers use a whole series of means by which they exaggerate, caricature, ironize and even self-deprecate.

The sources of humour in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Childhood Memories* are different. While in Twain’s novel they are represented by the conditions of the West, the gold rush in Nevada and California, the inhospitable environment and the pioneers’ struggle with the awful circumstances, which made human life unbearable and difficult to live, Creangă’s humour deals with the life and condition of the peasants in the Moldavian village, Humuleşti.

When referring to the humour found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain explained certain aspects in his essay entitled *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays*: “The humorous story is American, the comic story is English, the witty story is French. The humorous story depends for its effect upon the manner of telling; the comic story and the witty story upon the matter...The Humorous story bubbles gently along, the others burst. The humorous story is old gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it; but the teller of the comic story tells you beforehand that it is one of the funniest things he has ever heard, then tells it with eager delight, and is the first person to laugh when he gets through. Very often, of course, the rambling and disjointed humorous story finishes with a nub, point, snapper, or whatever you like to call it.” (Twain, 1897: 1)

As it can be seen, Mark Twain considers that a story is humorous if its humour is spontaneous, natural and not affected. A humorous story should end with a twist that creates irony in the narrative, an irony which is unexpected by the casual reader.

Twain contributes to the American humour through his superior handling of language. His humour is often exclusively verbal. It is a comic mask for the common sense, manners and morals that belong to the satire, the main tool which the author uses in order to attack the society.

*Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching—all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordination, and I don’t know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet.* (Twain, 2004: 112)

On the other hand, Creangă’s humour comes out from his prankish, witty and funny way of writing.

*Și să nu credeți că nu mi-am ținut cuvântul de joi până mai de-apoi, pentru că așa am fost eu, răbdător și statornic la vorbă în felul meu. Și nu că mă laud, căci lauda-i față: prin somn nu ceream de mâncare, dacă mă sculam, nu mai așteptam să-mi deie alții; și când era de făcut ceva treabă, o cam răream de pe-acasă.* (Creangă, 2013: 54)

The technique of the first-person narrative, used by both Twain and Creangă, has the same role in the two novels, that is, to give the sense of relaxation to the readers, that what they are going to read is true and realistic, although fictional.

*You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.* (Twain, 2004: 1)

*Hai mai bine despre copilărie să povestim, căci ea singură este veselă și nevinovată. Și, drept vorbind, acesta-i adevărul. Ce-i pasă copilului când mama și tata se gândesc la neajunsurile vieții, la ce poate să le aducă ziua de mâne, sau că-i frământă alte gânduri pline de îngrijire. Copilul, încă lecat pe bățul său, gândește că se află călare pe un cal de cei mai strașnici, pe care aleargă, cu voie bună, și-l bate cu biciul și-l strunește cu tot dinadinsul, și răcnește la el din toată inima, de-ți iè auzul; și de cade jos, crede că l-a trântit calul, și pe băț își descarcă mânia în toată puterea cu vântului... Așa eram eu la vârsta cea fericită, și așa cred că au fost toți copiii, de când îi lumea asta și pământul, măcar să zică cine ce-a zice.* (Creangă, 2013: 33)

These fragments make the readers identify themselves with the narrator; they are invited to become more involved in the story. For example, by using such words as: *you don't know about me, hai, să povestim*, the writers urge the readers to participate directly in the evoked events.

The figurative language, that both Huck and Nică use, represents the main source of humour in the two novels. The varied and mostly stylistically marked vocabulary represents the main expressive-aesthetic source in the work of the two writers.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim uses the local dialect which is understandable to his friends, but it is difficult for the other people.

*Yo' ole father doan' know yit what he's a-gwyne to do. Sometimes he spec he'll go 'way, en den agin he spec he'll stay. De bes' way is to res' easy en let de ole man take his own way. Dey's two angels hov- going to be. There is ways to keep off some kinds of bad luck, but this wasn't one of them kind; so I never tried to do anything, but just poked along low-spirited and on the watch-out. I went down to the front garden and clumb over the stile where you go through the high board fence. There was an inch of new snow on the ground, and I seen somebody's tracks.* (Twain, 2004: 17-18)

The fragment suggests a sort of confusion on the part of the speaker and also shows how people were greatly influenced by superstitions when the novel was written. Jim's way of communicating with Huck seems absurd and ludicrous, but, at the same time, it reveals the local colour, the exoticism of the characters' language. The regional elements have contextual, expressive and aesthetic values that involve different attitudes, emotions and moods as it also appears in Ion Creangă's novel.

*Când auzeam noi de masă, tăbăram pe dânsa, ș-apoi, aține-te, gură! Vorba ceea: "De plăcinte râde gura, de vârzare, și mai tare". Ce să faci, că doar numai de două ori pe an este ajunul! Ba la un loc, mi-aduc aminte, ne-am grămădit așa de tare și*

am răsturnat masa omului, cu bucate cu tot, în mijlocul casei, de i-am dogorit obrazul părintelui de rușine. (Creangă, 2013: 17)

The excerpt creates a hilarious image, full of humour, suggesting at the same time feelings of nostalgia combined with some embarrassment.

The comic aspects are also obtained through the excessive use of proverbs, sayings, words of wisdom, idiomatic expressions. The examples are numerous both in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Childhood Memories*: *and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out* (Twain, 2004: 2); *To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin* (Ibidem:139); *all kings is mostly rapscallions, as fur as I can make out* (Ibidem:156); *I don't want no better book than what your face is* (Ibidem:192); *It's as mild as goose-milk* (Ibidem:235); *because right is right, and wrong is wrong, and a body ain't got no business doing wrong when he ain't ignorant and knows better* (Ibidem:248); *de când îi lumea asta și pământul, măcar să zică cine ce-a zice* (Creangă, 2013: 33), *Cele răle să se spele, cele bune să s-adune, vrajba dintre noi să piară, și neghina din ogoare!* (Ibidem:47), *Ursul nu joacă de bunăvoie. Mort-copt, trebui să fac pe cheful mamei, să plec fără voință și să las ce-mi era drag!* (Ibidem:84) etc.

From a stylistic point of view, the proverbs, sayings, words of wisdom, idiomatic expressions are symbolical and metaphorical in meaning and are used especially to impart knowledge, offer pieces of advice, teach morals, but also in order to make the readers laugh as it is the case of most of the given examples.

In order to obtain the comic effect, the two writers appeal to some types of rhetoric figures, too. Among the most frequently used, one can mention: the irony, the metaphor, the repetition, the personification, the similes, the onomatopoeia.

For example, the description of some characters imply a mixture of irony, metaphor and comparison: *One was a woman in a slim black dress, belted small under the armpits, with bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves, and a large black scoop-shovel bonnet with a black veil, and white slim ankles crossed about with black tape, and very wee black slippers, like a chisel, and she was leaning pensive on a tombstone on her right elbow, under a weeping willow, and her other hand hanging down her side holding a white handkerchief and a reticule, and underneath the picture it said "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas"* (Twain, 2004: 104); *Și părintele Ioan umbra acum cu pletele în vânt să găsească alt dascăl, dar n-a mai găsit un bădița Vasile, cuminte, harnic și rușinos ca o fată mare. Era în sat și dascălul Iordache, fărânitul de la strana mare, dar ce ți-i bun? Știa și el glasurile pe dinafară de biserică, nu-i vorbă, dar clămpănea de bătrân ce era; ș-apoi mai avea și darul suptului...*(Creangă, 2013: 16)

The repetition of some verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, interjections is mostly used by the two writers to give the text a rhythmic effect.

"Yes," says I, "and other times, when things is dull, they fuss with the parlyment; and if everybody don't go just so he whacks their heads off. But mostly they hang round the harem."

"Roun' de which?"

"Harem."

"What's de harem?"

"The place where he keeps his wives. Don't you know about the harem? Solomon had one; he had about a million wives." (Twain, 2004: 80)

Și nici tu junghi, nici tu friguri, nici altă boală nu s-a lipit de noi, dar nici de râie n-am scăpat. Vorba ceea: "Se ține ca râia de om." ... (Creangă, 2013: 27)

The use of personification and onomatopoeia combined with the authors' writing skills makes the actions even more alive.

*The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me.* (Twain, 2004: 3)

*Pupăza, zbrrr! pe-o dugheană și, după ce se mai odihnește puțin, își ia apoi drumul în zbor spre Humulești și mă lasă mare și devreme cu lacrimile pe obraz, uitându-mă după dânsa! ... Eu atunci, haț! de sumanul moșneagului, să-mi plătească paserea...* (Creangă, 2013: 46)

Although the vision of childhood is different in the two novels, what makes them resemble is the cheerfulness of the two main characters, Huck and Nică, and the colourful language that they use, which is a mixture of different dialects, misspellings, proverbs and sayings, words of wisdom and idiomatic expressions.

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## **L'INTERLINGUISME ET L'INTERCULTURALITÉ COMME SOURCES D'HUMOUR**

**Marius Octavian MUNTEANU\***

***Abstract:** Advances in technology and the development of transportation have determined profound changes in society and the collective mind, significantly changing the social psychology. We live in a global society where the Other (as a general rule) is no longer a source of anxiety, but a beneficial source of Self-development, the Other constituting a point of reference for a self-reflective approach to self-knowledge. In this new psycho-social landscape, the differences captured through the experience of the 'Other' lifestyle can provide rich material for the humorist's keen eye. This is the subject of our analysis, as such a humorist's discourse deals with the theme of cultural and linguistic confrontations; we therefore propose to carry out a discursive analysis in which interculturality and interlingualism become sources of humor, the objects of a communication that does not separate, but unites two languages, two cultures, two civilizations - American society, the New World, and French society, the illustrious representative of Europe. We will therefore examine the mechanisms, techniques, and discourse triggers, of producing the perlocutionary effect of this type of discourse, namely, to make people laugh.*

***Keywords:** humour, interlingualism, interculturality*

### **Introduction**

Nous vivons depuis plusieurs décennies dans une société mondialisée où le changement est le mot d'ordre, où le rythme de ces changements s'accélère de plus en plus et où les moyens de communication contribuent à une perception accrue de ceux-ci. Et l'un des principaux déclencheurs de ce changement psycho-social est représenté par la confrontation permanente entre les cultures et les civilisations, soit de manière virtuelle, via les réseaux sociaux, soit de manière immédiate, par les déplacements des individus de leur société d'origine vers une société d'accueil. Le dernier type de déclencheur de changement identitaire et des représentations culturelles représente l'une des sources des plus importantes, des plus riches, de questionnement identitaire, de révision des stéréotypes et clichés antérieurs projetés sur la société d'accueil, occasion idéale de faire confronter cet ethos préalable à l'ethos réel, perçu de manière immédiate, grâce au vécu dans la société d'accueil concernée. C'est aussi une occasion idéale de communiquer ces constatations culturelles et civilisationnelles par un discours critique qui, loin d'attaquer les différences constatées, se constitue dans une invitation bienveillante adressée au destinataire (la société d'accueil) de réfléchir à ces aspects civilisationnels caractéristiques. Et l'une des communications les plus efficaces pour atteindre ce but réflexif et surtout autoréflexif serait le discours humoristique. L'humour permet à l'énonciateur de prendre de la distance et de faire remarquer à son destinataire que son discours n'est qu'une convention comique, convention à laquelle l'énonciateur l'invite à adhérer et y participer, permettant aussi au destinataire de se rapprocher de l'objet de la communication et de l'accepter sans considérer l'acte locutoire initié comme une attaque à sa face, comme une tentative de ridiculiser ce que fait l'essence de son identité psycho-ethno-sociale.

Dans cette analyse discursive menée sur la transcription d'un spectacle de l'humoriste Sebastian Marx (de 2019)

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<sup>1</sup> nous nous proposons de démontrer que :

- l'humour dérive d'une mise en cause de la *doxa*<sup>2</sup>, dialogue critique, polémique avec un discours préalable véhiculant stéréotypes et clichés psycho-ethno-sociaux<sup>3</sup> ;
- le discours humoristique est une forme de discours autoréflexif et (auto-)évaluatif ;
- l'interculturel et l'interlinguisme contribuent à l'aboutissement de cette réévaluation critique de l'image identitaire nationale, jouant un rôle de catalyseur ;
- le taux d'efficacité du discours humoristique (en termes pragmatolinguistiques) dépend des affinités psycho-socio-ethniques du locuteur-énonciateur et de l'allocutaire ainsi que du thème traité ;

Le fondement théorique sera constitué sur des concepts dérivés de la théorie de la culture – *interlinguisme*, *interculturalité*, sur les diverses approches pragmatolinguistiques, sociolinguistiques, psycho-sociales, stylistiques de l'humour ainsi que sur l'approche communicationnelle et énonciative de l'humour de P. Charaudeau (2006, 2011).

## **1. Fondements théoriques**

### **1.1 Interculturalité, interlinguisme**

L'*interculturalité*<sup>4</sup> est considérée comme l'ensemble des relations et interactions des cultures différentes générées par des rencontres ou des confrontations, qualifiées d'interculturelles. Cette notion d'interculturalité est fondée sur le dialogue, le respect mutuel et le souci de préserver l'identité culturelle de chacun.

Gérard Marandon considère que la « communication interpersonnelle et communication interculturelle peuvent être distinguées en termes de « saillance de l'identité culturelle » (Collier & Thomas, 1988/1996; Cupach & Imahori, 1993: 115) » (2006 : 266). L'interculturalité déclenche donc une surexposition de l'identité (surtout nationale et/ou ethnique) qui pourrait se traduire par des relations conflictuelles, de confrontation, ou par des relations harmonieuses, de mise en partage des valeurs, idéaux et principes identitaires des cultures en dialogue à des effets bénéfiques pour toutes les parties concernées (occasion de « réglage » psycho-social identitaire, le rapport à l'Autre permettant de mener une analyse critique de sa propre identité). C'est toujours Marandon qui fait des précisions particulièrement intéressantes pour notre analyse où l'interculturel sera un élément clé :

« La notion d'interculturalité, pour avoir sa pleine valeur, doit, en effet, être étendue à toute situation de rupture culturelle — résultant, essentiellement, de différences de codes et de significations —, les différences en jeu pouvant être liées à divers types d'appartenance (ethnie, nation, région, religion, genre, génération, groupe social, organisationnel, occupationnel, en particulier). Il y a donc situation interculturelle dès que les personnes ou les groupes en présence ne partagent pas les mêmes univers de significations et les mêmes formes

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<sup>1</sup> spectacle disponible sur YouTube : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-FN\\_IT5fU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-FN_IT5fU).

<sup>2</sup> « doxa couvre (...) deux notions : (...) 'le bon sens' ou 'sens commun', l'autre, plus connue, interroge sa conséquence naturelle, *l'opinion commune*, et avec elle le conditionnement du lien social. » (Jaubert, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> v. « Pour l'humour, l'acte que l'on peut identifier est un acte contre-doxique » (Jaubert, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> v. <https://www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Interculturalite.htm>.



d'expression de ces significations, ces écarts pouvant faire obstacle à la communication. »

(Marandon, 2006 : 266)

Les fondements philosophiques de l'interculturalité résident à des courants modernistes et postmodernistes, à savoir les concepts d'*altérité* d'E. Levinas (*Altérité et transcendance*, 1995) et de P. Ricoeur (*Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990), de *pluralisme* (Deleuze), de *différence* et de *déconstruction* de Derrida.

Le concept d'interculturalité vient remplacer les concepts de *multiculturalisme* et d'*assimilationnisme*, concepts « critiqués pour leurs approches de la vie collective à travers une ségrégation des groupes »<sup>1</sup>. L'interculturalité présuppose un dialogue des cultures en position interactionnelle, de l'égalité ainsi que des valeurs communes. Par interculturalité on reconnaît la pluralité des identités des individus, aucune des deux cultures en contact n'étant en position de force, dominante, s'imposant au détriment de l'autre, on met en œuvre une idéologie pluraliste par laquelle le système de valeurs est mis en commun à travers le dialogue interculturel.

Quant à l'interlinguisme, ce concept sera défini par de la manière suivante :

« dans le processus de déterritorialisation des langues vers des espaces d'interlocution, la réalité langagière, dans les échanges, contribue à un processus d'interculturalité des langues, ce que j'appelle l'interlinguisme, où se créent de nouveaux continuums et de nouvelles oppositions entre des langues en contact, dans les limites plastiques de temps et d'espace réel ou virtuel. »

(Chardenet, 2008 : 159)

L'auteur ci-dessus cité fait référence aussi au concept d'« entre-les-langues » (Chardenet, 2008) en essayant de définir le concept d'interlinguisme.

## **1.2 Le discours humoristique – approche communicationnelle**

L'humour est défini par P. Charaudeau comme

« une stratégie discursive qui consiste à :

- s'affronter au langage, se libérer de ses contraintes, qu'il s'agisse des règles linguistiques (morphologie et syntaxe) ou des normes d'usage (emplois réglés par des conventions sociales en situation), ce qui donne lieu à des jeux de mots ou de pensée ;
- construire une vision décalée, transformée, métamorphosée d'un monde qui s'impose toujours à l'être vivant en société de façon normée résultat d'un consensus social et culturel quant aux croyances auxquelles il adhère ;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uni-r.org/linterculturalite-et-la-communication-interculturelle/>

• demander à un certain interlocuteur (individu ou auditoire) de partager ce jeu sur le langage et le monde, d'entrer dans cette connivence de "jouer ensemble", mais un jouer qui engage l'individu à devenir autre, l'instant de l'acte humoristique, ce qui permet de dire que l'acte humoristique n'est jamais gratuit. Au total, l'humour correspond toujours à une visée ludique, mais à celle-ci peuvent s'adjoindre d'autres visées plus critiques, voire agressives, qui engage le sujet humoriste et son interlocuteur à partager un engagement bien plus profond. En tout cas, il s'agit toujours d'un partage de liberté, du fait que l'acte humoristique est tourné, à la fois, vers le monde, dans le désir de le mettre en cause, et vers l'autre, dans le désir de le rendre complice.

(Charaudeau, 2011)

Le cadre théorique dans lequel nous situons notre analyse appartient à P. Charaudeau qui étudie l'acte humoristique en fonction de quatre paramètres, à savoir « la situation d'énonciation dans laquelle [l'acte humoristique] apparaît, la thématique sur laquelle il porte, les procédés langagiers qui le mettent en œuvre et les effets qu'il est susceptible de produire sur l'auditoire » (Charaudeau, 2006 : 22).

a) Dans ce cadre communicationnel, le premier paramètre, la situation d'énonciation implique le locuteur, le destinataire et la cible<sup>1</sup>. Le locuteur doit détenir une certaine légitimité qui lui permette d'énoncer un fait humoristique qui soit accepté par le récepteur. Quant au destinataire<sup>2</sup>, il peut être soit complice<sup>3</sup>, soit victime<sup>4</sup> du locuteur. La cible<sup>5</sup> sera une personne, une situation ou une idée (Charaudeau, 2006 : 22-24). C'est intéressant de remarquer que dans le cas du discours humoristique que nous allons analyser, l'auditoire réel représente aussi le destinataire idéal – c'est bien un destinataire concret sous la forme de destinataire-échantillon, complice et victime du locuteur humoriste. De plus, ce destinataire idéal incarne aussi la cible de l'acte humoristique, les aspects civilisationnels de la société d'accueil mis en cause par l'humoriste.

b) En se référant aux thématiques des actes humoristiques, Charaudeau opère une distinction très importante entre la *thématique* et la *doxa* (*l'opinion commune*). Il considère que la thématique représente « un découpage du monde en domaines d'expérience qui, lorsqu'on les parle, deviennent des *domaines thématiques* ou *thémas* » (Charaudeau, 2011), tandis que la *doxa* représente « le jugement porté à l'intérieur de l'un ou l'autre de ces domaines thématiques » (Charaudeau, 2011). Quant aux thèmes, le chercheur mentionné en distingue trois :

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<sup>1</sup>v. aussi « l'acte humoristique est produit par un certain locuteur ayant une certaine identité sociale (l'humoriste qui est à l'origine de l'intention humoristique), lequel s'institue en énonciateur ayant une identité discursive (celui qui énonce), à l'adresse d'un certain interlocuteur ayant sa propre identité sociale, via l'image d'un certain destinataire ayant une identité discursive construite par le locuteur, en visant une certaine cible » (Charaudeau, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> « Le destinataire (qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec le récepteur) est également un être de parole idéalement construit par le locuteur (...) » (Charaudeau, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> « appelé à partager la vision décalée du monde qui lui est proposée ainsi que le jugement qui l'accompagne ; il est alors un destinataire-témoin (...) susceptible de co-énoncer l'acte humoristique (phénomène d'appropriation) ; » (Charaudeau, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> « victime de l'acte humoristique, lorsqu'il fait l'objet d'une critique négative ; il est alors un destinataire-cible (Freud aussi parle de "victime") d'un jugement négatif porté sur lui, comme dans certains actes ironiques. » (Charaudeau, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> « la cible est ce sur qui ou sur quoi porte l'acte humoristique » (Charaudeau, 2011).

- la vie et la mort, qui englobent « tout ce qui évoque la misère humaine » (Charaudeau, 2006, p. 24) ; la vie publique ; la vie privée (Charaudeau, 2006, pp. 24-25).

c) Les procédés langagiers traités par Charaudeau sont linguistiques ou discursifs. Les procédés linguistiques « relèvent d'un mécanisme lexico-syntaxico-sémantique qui concerne l'explicitation des signes, leur forme et sens, ainsi que les rapports forme-sens » (Charaudeau, 2006 : 25-26). Quant aux procédés discursifs, ils « dépendent de l'ensemble du mécanisme d'énonciation déjà décrit » (Charaudeau, 2006 : 26).

d) L'effet de l'acte humoristique représente une connivence qui peut être ludique, critique, cynique ou de dérision (Charaudeau, 2006, pp. 35-38).

## **2. Interculturalité et interlinguisme comme source d'humour. Etude de cas – spectacle stand-up de Sebastian Marx**

### **2.1. Interculturalité et humour**

Sebastian Marx est un comédien de nationalité américaine (ethnique juif résidant à New-York avant de décider de déménager en France et devenir citoyen français), ses spectacles ayant comme thématique les aspects identitaires nationaux, psycho-sociaux, ethniques et linguistiques de la société d'accueil (la société française). Son discours humoristique relève une ironie bienveillante à l'adresse de quelques aspects définitoires de l'identité nationale et sociale française. Il confirme des stéréotypes culturels, une doxa et l'ethos préalable sur la nation française. Quoique déjà intégrant la société française (de ce point de vue, il devient lui-même destinataire complice et victime de son propre discours – d'où probablement ce clin d'œil bienveillant de son discours matérialisé dans une subtile raillerie ironique), sa perspective reste celui d'un *externe*, d'un Etranger prototypique. Au fait, ce rôle de l'Autre analysant les aspects civilisationnels qu'il doit s'approprier pour être perçu comme Français, comme *interne*, lui permet de se distancier afin de pouvoir les mettre en cause dans une approche rationnelle, ludique et aussi ironique. Sa position interculturelle et interlinguistique (entre-deux-langues) lui offre l'occasion idéale pour un raisonnement comique, mais aussi affectueux, une sorte de remerciement discursif à l'adresse de la société d'accueil. Il confirme des stéréotypes, en construit d'autres, exagère certains aspects par une vision réductionniste non seulement pour atteindre son but – faire rire, mais aussi pour réussir à surmonter les obstacles de l'interculturel par l'un des plus efficaces moyens – l'éducation, la prise de conscience des différences et le respect de celles-ci pour aboutir un dialogue social harmonieux entre les membres de la communauté d'accueil et les Autres.

En termes d'interculturalité et discours humoristique, nous aimerions souligner la dimension psycho-ethnique de l'humour. Il y a un *humour juif*, un *humour français*, un *humour américain*, un *humour britannique*, etc. Et il ne s'agit pas, bien sûr des moyens linguistiques utilisés – le code linguistique représentant toujours une barrière et un facteur de brouillage du sens (dans une perspective traductologique, par exemple) – ou de références (les aspects intertextuels, les implicites discursifs, tout ce palimpseste que représente le discours humoristique), mais tout simplement d'un certain type d'humour caractérisant un tel ou tel peuple.

Nous faisons cette précision parce que le comédien Sebastien Marx n'est pas seulement américain, mais aussi juif : *Et je ne suis pas seulement américain, je suis aussi juif.* (11 : 29) ; *Donc je suis juif et américain.* (11 : 35). Pour bien comprendre la spécificité de ce genre d'humour, il faudrait souligner que l'humour juif « correspond à cette « brisure du Moi (...), cette possibilité d'affronter une réalité souvent tragique et

de s'adapter à un éternel exil » (Ouaknin, 1990 : 169 cité par Landau, 2000). On décrit ce type d'humour comme « une volonté de désarmer la haine froide en l'apprivoisant par le sourire » (Mandel, 1946 : 94 cité par Landau, 2000) - un rire de soi, des autres et de son peuple, un humour ironique et aussi autoironique. Landau complète : « le Juif est moqueur, comme le Français. Comme le Français, poli et plein de soi, il aime à se railler soi-même par politesse et par orgueil. Il parle de ses qualités à voix basse et à voix haute de ses travers » (Spire, 1913 : 60 cité par Landau, 2000).

La raillerie, l'autoironie envers soi-même et son ethnie sont retrouvables dans l'extrait suivant : *Donc je suis juif et américain, donc si les djihadistes viennent ce soir je serais le premier à partir.* (11:35) où il fait référence à Daech, à la politique actuelle et au fait qu'il représente un double ennemi à l'organisation terroriste par son ethnie et sa nationalité.

Dans un autre extrait, l'humoriste américain tourne la dérision vers humour noir, voire sarcasme : *Moi, je suis leur Pokémon. Ils ont des applications pour nous.* (11 : 42). Il s'y identifie au personnage fictif d'un jeu vidéo, le rire étant doublé d'un rictus morbide implicite, soulignant l'absurde d'une situation sociopolitique qui transforme un être humain dans un personnage anonyme à chercher et tuer pour des raisons politiques et ethniques. Dans cet extrait il fait aussi un clin d'œil à la doxa, à l'image stéréotypique du juif – éternelle victime de l'histoire mondiale, sans prendre en compte les époques. Dans cet extrait il faudrait remarquer la présence de ce *contrarium*<sup>1</sup> spécifique de l'ironie comme source d'humour (la chasse aux juifs, c'est un jeu historique tragique accepté et dont la gravité est réduite par l'humour, par la dérision).

Cette victimisation – réelle ou feinte, a quand même le rôle de justifier ses « attaques » comiques et d'atténuer l'impact d'une possible réaction trop vigoureuse de la part de son destinataire idéal visé par ses « tirs » discursifs.

La raillerie, l'auto-ironie envers soi-même et son ethnie continuent dans les extraits qui suivent : *Donc moi j'ai grandi en pensant que j'étais le plus beau, d'un peuple élu* (12 :59) ; *...en vivant dans la meilleure ville du monde. Il n'y a personne de plus arrogant* (13:05). Ce discours auto-ironique repose sur le stéréotype culturel du peuple élu, un dialogue complice avec la doxa, l'implicite ironique renvoyant au fait à un contenu contre-doxique ; l'épithète auto-attribuée *arrogant* caractérise non seulement sa personne, mais aussi une collectivité toute entière, le peuple juif (fausse auto-attribution, au fait, il s'agit d'un discours apparemment assumé, mais implicitement récusé, réfuté – c'est une scénarisation de la voix de l'Autre, collectif et anonyme, le locuteur lambda doxastique de Ducrot). Nous pouvons y discerner de nouveau le même trait de l'ironie comme source d'humour – le faux semblant, le *contrarium* implicite discursivement. L'humoriste ne se limite pas à sa personne dans son processus d'autodérision, mais il se réfère aussi à sa famille, incarnation du légendaire juif errant (de nouveau un renvoi culturel, de nature doxique, mais toujours sous une forme ironique au fait, anti-doxique) traversant les sociétés et les époques : *L'histoire de ma famille est typiquement juive. Mes grands-parents ont fui les nazis en Europe. Mes parents ont fui les dictatures en Argentine et moi je suis venu en Europe pour fuir mes parents.* (13:22). L'ironie fine, raisonnée, repose sur le même dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> v. « L'aspect distinctif nécessaire de l'ironie est la présence plus ou moins transparente des formes du *contrarium* » (Jereczek-Lipińska, 2017 :77) ; « Le premier trait essentiel est, bien sûr, la présence du *contrarium* qui peut se manifester de façon directe et visible ou de façon indirecte et inférable sur la base du type de réfutation utilisé ou enfin par une intonation ironique » (Eggs 2009 : 10).

avec la *doxa*, sur les représentations stéréotypées du peuple juif (la fuite comme réaction historique contre les oppressions exercées par les peuples autochtones).

L'autodérision vise la diminution de l'importance de sa personne et de son ethnie et représente une sorte de *captatio benevolentiae* adressée à son public qui sera la vraie cible de ses ironies, public formé en majorité des membres de la communauté parisienne.

Dans deux extraits distincts il oppose le *rêve français*

Souvent les gens me demandent pourquoi la France, pourquoi j'ai choisi la France. Je leur dis que comme beaucoup d'américains **je suis en France pour ne pas travailler**. Moi je suis là pour réaliser le **rêve français**, qui est **5 semaines de congés payés**, une **sécurité sociale de folie**, et la **liberté de pouvoir s'asseoir à la terrasse d'un café**. En **fumant une cigarette**, en **buvant un apéritif**, et en **disant des saloperies** sur tous les gens qui passent devant. Ça c'est le rêve français.

au *rêve américain*

Moi j'étais spécialement attiré par le **rêve français** parce que moi j'ai grandi dans le **rêve américain**. J'ai grandi dans le **film Le Truman Show**. Vous connaissez Le Truman Show ? C'était vraiment le Truman Show où j'ai grandi parce que ma **mère** était une **Desperate Housewives**. Mon **père** était un **mad man** et **moi** je rêvais de **Sex and City**. Et comme Truman dans le film le Truman Show, je m'ennuyais grave. Je rêvais de quitter la bulle... (14:10-14:22)

L'humour dérive de la présentation scénarisée des deux cultures, l'interculturel se manifestant au niveau idéologique comme une confrontation entre Réel, Vrai et Faux, Fictif, Fictionnel, entre la vraie vie dans le respect de l'humain et une vie soi-dite « parfaite » contraire aux rythmes naturels de l'homme. Plus précisément, l'humour est de nature situationnelle, l'effet étant de connivence critique (dénonçant un fait, étant donc « polémique »), sinon cynique (visant à « faire partager une dévalorisation des valeurs que la norme sociale considère positives et universelles » Charaudeau, 2006 : 37). L'humoriste d'origine américaine dénonce et critique par cette référence filmique la toxicité de sa culture d'origine – le culte du travail, le train de vie aliénant des femmes au foyer américaines, la vision non-réaliste sur les relations humaines, etc.

### 2.1. Interlinguisme et humour

L'interlinguisme comme source d'humour repose surtout sur les divers calembours, soulignant la difficulté ressentie par un étranger ne connaissant que de manière approximative le français et n'ayant pas les connaissances encyclopédiques nécessaires pour éliminer les possibles contaminations de sens de deux syntagmes avec une prononciation similaire. Quand même, dans le calembour **gilet jaune / Gilles et John** l'humoriste simule l'ignorance de l'Autre pour s'attaquer de manière indirecte à la prononciation défectueuse des noms propres anglais par les locuteurs natifs français : *Juste pour être honnête la première fois que j'ai entendu gilet jaune, je pensais qu'on parlait de deux mecs, Gilles et John*. L'humour dérive donc de la mécompréhension interlinguistique qui permet un jeu de mots, mécompréhension issue de cette situation « entre-les-langues ».

Dans l'exemple suivant *Il y avait des soirées où il y avait des mecs qui draguaient ma copine pendant que moi je disais : « J'aime le vélo parce que c'est vite ! »*, la critique

visent le manque de pragmatisme communicationnel dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères qui ne permet pas aux apprenants une rapide insertion sociale via le linguistique et une adaptation aisée à la culture d'accueil.

Dans les exemples *une fois elle m'expliquait une recette de cuisine en anglais Elle m'a dit : « The key to this recipe that to have to rape the cheese. » « Rape the cheese ? »* (La clé de cette recette, c'est qu'il faut violer le fromage.) et *Vous dites râper en français, vous dites que ça doit être pareil en anglais. Mais non. Mais finalement j'ai compris pourquoi dans l'emmental il y a des trous* le calembour repose toujours sur les signifiants des deux langues en contact présentant quelques similarités formelles, ignorant bien sûr la prononciation correcte des verbes en question, *to rape* et *râper* (se basant sur des verbes francisés du type *to stop / stopper*).

### Conclusions

- l'acte discursif humoristique reposant sur l'interculturel et l'interlinguistique s'appuie sur un dialogue avec la doxa, c'est une scénarisation de ce dialogue avec la voix de l'Autre
- les enjeux humoristiques dépendent de la contextualisation, l'efficacité de ce type de discours dépend des inférences et des connexions réalisées avec des données préexistantes.
- les éléments interculturels et interlinguistiques représentent un catalyseur de l'effet humoristique
- l'efficacité de l'acte humoristique tient aussi à des données de psychologie sociale et ethnique pour arriver à ce désirable effet de connivence entre le locuteur et l'allocataire.
- l'humour peut dissimuler les effets corrosifs de la critique et de la polémique

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## **LES MOYENS LINGUISTIQUES DE L'EXPRESSION DE L'HUMOUR DANS LE PREMIER MAGAZINE SATIRIQUE D'ORIENT MOLLAH NASREDDIN**

**Ulfet Zakir Oglu IBRAHIM\***

***Abstract:** In this research we are interested in the lexical peculiarities and means of humorous expression used in the satirical magazine Mullah Nasreddin published in Azerbaijani from 1907 to 1931 during a period of tormented socio-political events in the country which largely influenced its society and its culture. Criticism and exposition of social issues as well as colorful caricatures had ample space. Those who created the magazine wanted to develop the social and political consciousness of the people. As the definition of humor varies from one language to another and the means of expressing them too. The different references in the French and Azerbaijani languages justify it. For example, in the satirical magazine Mullah Nasreddin we find proverbs and anecdotes, the laughter provoked by the opposite meaning which serves to determine the ideal, the target of criticism. The most widely used means of humorous expression in the articles of the magazine are the play on words, the use of Russian words which had a strong influence at the time and the various characteristic expressions in spoken language expressing mockery, irony and sarcasm.*

***Keywords:** humour, satirical magazine, Mollah Nasreddin*

### **Introduction**

Au début du XXe siècle les événements socio-politiques tourmentés en Azerbaïdjan ont largement influencé sa société et sa culture. La complexité et la difficulté des conditions historiques ont renforcé la détermination des intellectuels azerbaïdjanais à développer la culture nationale. Cette période est l'une des périodes riches et complexes de la littérature azerbaïdjanaise. Les manifestations populaires constantes et les revendications des réformes dans la vie sociale ont provoqué des vues différentes placées sous l'angle de l'humour comme un des moyens de la lutte contre le gouvernement. C'est à cette époque-là à l'aube du XXe siècle qu'apparaît le premier magazine satirique du monde musulman Mollah Nasreddin devenu très vite le magazine le plus populaire d'Orient grâce à ses idées progressistes et accessible pour de larges pans de la société.

Ce magazine, publié une fois par semaine en langue azerbaïdjanaise, était la seule publication satirique en couleurs et en images dans tout le monde musulman et au Moyen-Orient. Chaque numéro du magazine se composait de 8 pages. La critique et l'exposition des problèmes sociaux ainsi que les caricatures colorées avaient amplement d'espace. Ceux qui ont créé le magazine ont voulu développer la conscience sociale et politique du peuple en révélant les déficits de la société, et l'inclure dans les rangs des nations les plus avancées du monde.

Dans le cadre de cette contribution, nous nous intéressons aux particularités lexicales et moyens humoristiques utilisées dans les différents numéros du magazine satirique. Cette recherche s'est fixée pour but l'étude des différents moyens linguistiques utilisés par les journalistes, écrivains et homme de lettres qui publiaient des articles dans les numéros de ce magazine satirique. Nous essayerons de contribuer à ce champ de recherche en répondant à la problématique suivante ; quels sont les procédés de création lexicale les plus productifs de l'humour dans les différents

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numéros du magazine ? De quelle façon et par quels moyens linguistiques les auteurs du magazine expriment et diffusent les idées de l'humour ? Comment les auteurs du magazine satirique influencent-ils leurs lecteurs ? De cette problématique découle l'hypothèse suivante : la créativité lexicale se manifesterait, dans les textes et les illustrations, à travers des énoncés qui imiteraient de différentes formes de l'humour. Pour ce faire, nous nous sommes basés sur une étude de cas tirés d'un corpus composé d'une vingtaine de numéros du magazine qui s'inscrivent dans une période de la vie politique active en Azerbaïdjan. Le travail consiste, dans une première étape d'analyse, à classer les numéros de magazine édités depuis 1907, dans une deuxième étape, il est question d'identifier les différents procédés créatifs mobilisés dans chaque catégorie.

## **2. Définition de la notion de l'humour dans les références françaises et azerbaïdjanaises**

Le rire est un terme généraliste qui englobe moult notions et définit différentes réalités. Ainsi, le rire est pluriel et comprend diverses acceptions particulières et situations différentes, comme le comique de situation, l'ironie, la moquerie, le mot d'esprit, la blague, la dérision, qui sont des armes de contre-pouvoir, et aussi l'humour [7, p.13]. Aristote, Socrate, Platon, Kant, Descartes, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud, des auteurs contemporains, tous ont perçu l'importance du phénomène du rire et ont essayé d'en comprendre le sens et les mécanismes. Dans leurs travaux ils sont à la défense du caractère uniquement humain du rire, en affirmant qu'il est le propre à l'être humain.

Certainement la définition de l'humour n'est pas identique dans les différentes langues et dans les cultures. Patrick Charaudeau, linguiste français, professeur émérite de l'université Paris-XIII, chercheur au CNRS présente l'humour comme une « certaine manière de dire à l'intérieur de diverses situations, un acte d'énonciation à des fins de stratégie pour faire de son interlocuteur un complice ». Tout fait humoristique est un acte de discours qui s'inscrit dans une situation de communication. Mais il ne constitue pas à lui seul la totalité de la situation de communication. Pour preuve, il peut apparaître dans diverses situations dont le contrat est variable : publicitaire, politique, médiatique, conversationnel, etc.

“L'humour, disait Boris Vian, est la politesse du désespoir.” C'est qu'il évite d'en incommoder les autres. Il y a du tragique dans l'humour ; mais c'est un tragique qui refuse de se prendre au sérieux. L'humour nous permet donc de mieux supporter notre condition humaine, en portant attention à ses contradictions, en souriant au tragique, et en prenant soin des relations. L'humour est aussi un outil politique qui permet de mettre en lumière les contradictions du pouvoir [12].

Le célèbre linguiste azerbaïdjanais Gazanfar Kazimov, auteur de plusieurs livres sur les expressions de l'humour et de diverses formes du rire définit l'humour et la satire comme une force en les appelant les deux grandes branches du comique qui sert à lutter contre l'ignorance, l'oppression, la violence, la souffrance et le retardement [3, p.7].

Le dictionnaire azéri expliqué définit l'humour comme « une capacité de décrire les faits, les incidents, les défauts, les points faibles etc. de manière amusante, gaie et joyeuse ». Le dictionnaire présente également une seconde signification de l'humour « dans l'œuvre artistique ou littéraire décrire quelque chose de manière amusante, drôle ou comique sur le style artistique » [6, p. 38].

Selon le dictionnaire Larousse, l'humour c'est une forme d'esprit qui consiste à dégager les aspects plaisants et insolites de la réalité, avec un certain détachement. → esprit.



L'humour britannique. Humour noir, qui s'exerce à propos de situations graves, voire macabres [10].

En bref, le rire est une façon de prendre un plaisir interdit, en passant par un détour, c'est pourquoi il est proprement humain. Le sens de l'humour est toujours quelque chose de très difficile à définir, puisqu'il joue sur une déviation ou un décalage du sens initial d'un mot ou d'une situation. Sans compter qu'il est encore plus complexe de pouvoir définir le sens de l'humour à travers les cultures ! On ne rit pas des mêmes choses ni de la même façon dans chaque pays du monde. En comparant les définitions données par les linguistes françaises et azéris nous pouvons constater que ces définitions sont identiques par contre l'humour varie d'une langue à l'autre, d'une culture à l'autre. L'exemplaire exceptionnel de l'humour d'Orient est présenté dans les magazines satiriques du monde musulman Mollah Nasreddin.

### 3. Magazine satirique “ Molla Nasreddin “

Le magazine satirique Molla Nasreddin, a été publié à Tbilissi en 1906-1918, à Tabriz avec 8 numéros en 1920-1921 et à Bakou en 1922-1931. En lançant la publication du magazine “ Mollah Nasreddin “, Jalil Mammadguluzade, célèbre écrivain azéri a jeté les bases du journalisme satirique en Azerbaïdjan, ainsi qu'au Moyen-Orient. Parallèlement aux problèmes révolutionnaires

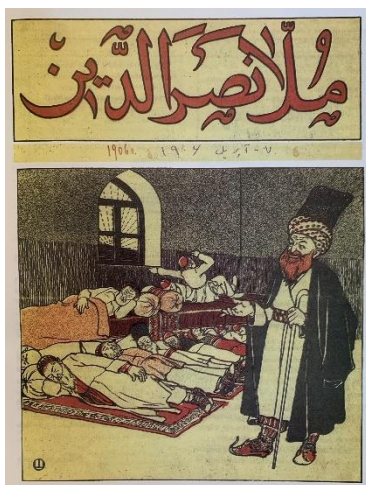
les plus modernes de l'époque, “ Mollah Nasreddin “ pensait également aux problèmes du peuple azerbaïdjanais qui durent depuis des milliers d'années. Parmi ces problèmes, le fanatisme religieux était le plus important. Au début du XXe siècle, des événements complexes se déroulaient en Azerbaïdjan. Il y avait un besoin d'un organe de presse qui transmettrait les problèmes actuels aux masses dans un langage plus simple. Le magazine “ Mollah Nasreddin “ est apparu en raison d'une nécessité sociale et politique. Mollah Nasreddin est un héros de la littérature folklorique orale, et il a toujours ri de l'ignorance et de l'injustice. J. Mammadguluzade a également utilisé la langue de Mollah Nasreddin pour exprimer les souhaits et les rêves des gens, les a fait rire, les a fait réfléchir et leur a également montré le chemin. Le magazine a joué un grand rôle dans le développement de la pensée nationale et de l'éducation populaire, et ses employés ont eu des services incomparables. “Mollah Nasreddin” a également pu rassembler autour de lui les forces progressistes du peuple azerbaïdjanais et des personnes à l'esprit démocratique. Omar Faig Nemanzadeh, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev, Ali Nazmi, Aligulu Gamkusar, Mammad Said Ordubadi, Mirzali Mojuz et d'autres poètes, écrivains, journalistes, dont O. Shmerling, I. Rotter, Azim Azimzadeh ont travaillé dans le magazine. Dès le premier numéro du magazine, la lutte pour l'existence et la pureté de la langue azerbaïdjanaise a été lancée. D'innombrables ouvrages sur la langue dans différents genres ont été imprimés dans ses numéros ultérieurs, même pendant toute la période d'activité. Des questions telles que



l'éducation, les connaissances et l'éducation des femmes ont également été reflétées dans les pages de " Mollah Nasreddin " .

### Le premier numéro du magazine

La couverture du premier numéro du magazine montre un groupe de musulmans profondément endormis. Mollah Nasreddin, l'ancien sage de l'Est, veut se tenir à côté des endormis et les réveiller. Cette caricature a été dessinée par un artiste allemand



Oskar Schmerling. La deuxième page s'ouvre avec l'article "Je vous l'ai dit". Sur les pages suivantes, des nouvelles satiriques, des télégrammes, des proverbes, l'histoire " Dallek ", la rubrique " Trouble de la langue " et quatre dessins animés ont été imprimés. L'article " Je vous l'ai dit " commence par ces mots : « Je vous l'ai dit, mes frères musulmans ! J'ai mentionné ces gens qui n'aiment pas ma conversation, ils me fuient sous certains prétextes, par exemple, pour dire la bonne aventure, caresser un chien, écouter une histoire de derviche, dormir dans un bain, etc. activités importantes. Parce que les autorités ont dit : « Dis tes paroles à ceux qui ne t'écoutent pas. Ô mes frères musulmans ! Quand vous avez entendu

quelque chose de drôle de ma part, que vous avez ouvert la bouche vers le ciel et fermé les yeux, que vous avez ri si fort que tes tripes ont failli éclater et que vous vous êtes essuyé le visage avec votre jupe au lieu d'un mouchoir, " putain de diable ! " vous avez dit, alors ne pensez pas que vous vous moquez de Mollah Nasreddin.

Ô mes frères musulmans ! Si vous voulez savoir de qui vous vous moquez, alors regardez devant vous et regardez attentivement votre apparence."

Ces paroles, défiant l'environnement féodal-patriarcal de l'époque, ont commencé à inquiéter les forces qui ne voulaient pas le réveil du peuple. Dans le magazine, des télégrammes, des proverbes et des questions comptables, qui avaient un effet sérieux en surface, étaient présentés dans un esprit sarcastique - parfois satirique, parfois humoristique. Par conséquent, le magazine a été attaqué dès le premier numéro, parfois pour cette raison, et parfois pour des raisons financières, il a dû arrêter son activité à plusieurs reprises.

Abdurrahim Bey Hagverdiyev, un écrivain bien connu de l'époque, écrit dans ses mémoires : " Le nombre du magazin a explosé comme une bombe parmi la population de la ville. Ce magazine ne doit pas entrer dans la maison d'un musulman, il est interdit non seulement de le lire, mais aussi de le ramasser : il faut le ramasser avec des pinces et le jeter sur le trottoir [4, p 52].

Mollah Nasreddin " a séduit les lecteurs analphabètes, contrairement à d'autres publications qui étaient les plus lues en Turquie, en Russie et en Iran à cette époque. Ses textes étaient très simples et ses caricatures étaient immédiatement compréhensibles. Les caricatures représentaient des religieux, que le magazine qualifiait souvent d'ennemis de l'éducation et de la société laïque.

Ces caricatures montraient la différence entre l'État religieux et l'État laïc, et s'opposaient à l'ingérence de la religion dans la vie privée et la vie de l'État laïc. Les

cibles de ses rires et de ses critiques étaient nombreuses : la tyrannie orientale, l'inertie et l'arriération musulmanes, la vulgarité, l'ignorance, le sectarisme, le colonialisme, etc. À l'aide de diverses formes artistiques - récits satiriques, feuilletons, poèmes et articles, les employés du magazine ont fait de ces lacunes, qui ont contribué à la vie de la société, la cible de rires mortels. Des nouvelles drôles, des lettres, des annonces, des proverbes, des proverbes et des blagues étaient sur les pages du magazine.

“ Mollah Nasreddin “ a commenté les événements internationaux, critiqué la politique coloniale des États impérialistes et encouragé la lutte des peuples orientaux pour la liberté. La renommée du magazine a grandi, il a dépassé le cadre d'une zone géographique spécifique, s'est répandu dans toutes les régions de la Russie, du Caucase et de l'Asie centrale, et a joué un rôle important dans le développement social et politique des peuples turc et musulman, comme ainsi que le développement socioculturel et politique des peuples de pays tels que l'Iran, la Turquie, l'Égypte, l'Inde et le Maroc, ont eu une grande influence sur son évolution. Le rédacteur en chef du magazine, un grand satiriste et pédagogue C. Mammadguluzade, s'est fixé pour objectif de montrer les lacunes de la société aux lecteurs et de les encourager à se battre pour une vie meilleure.

En fait, “ Mollah Nasreddin “ a été la première agence de presse à créer une école littéraire en Azerbaïdjan. Les auteurs ont utilisé diverses méthodes pour transmettre clairement leurs idées à plus de gens, ils ont présenté des blagues amusantes, des feuilletons, de l'humour et de la satire, des anecdotes, des conversations et de délicieuses caricatures en langue azerbaïdjanaise. Utilisant la douceur de leur langue maternelle, les « Mollanesraddinchi » sont devenus les auteurs d'un nouveau style de prose et de poésie azerbaïdjanaises. Des œuvres brillantes et audacieuses publiées dans les pages du magazine sont ensuite entrées dans le fonds d'or de la fiction et du journalisme azerbaïdjanais [1, p. 54].

#### **4. La langue de Mollah Nasreddin**

Sur les pages du magazine “ Mollah Nasreddin “, on peut trouver de nombreux feuilletons, poèmes, dernières nouvelles, histoires, nouvelles caucasiennes, images et caricatures consacrés à la lutte pour la pureté de la langue maternelle. Le magazine “ Mollah Nasreddin “ a vivement critiqué les intellectuels qui ont manqué de respect à la langue azérie et l'ont corrompue avec des mots étrangers dans son article “ Langue maternelle “. Les auteurs de Mollah Nasreddin étaient impitoyables envers les personnes qui n'aimaient pas la langue azérie, négligeaient leur langue maternelle, la dépréciaient dans toutes leurs actions et travaux pratiques et la critiquaient sévèrement dans les pages des magazines. Ils étaient très impitoyables envers certains « éduqués » qui essayaient de corrompre la langue maternelle avec des mots étrangers et critiquaient leurs défauts sans hésitation. Selon le magazine, de tels intellectuels ont gâché la langue maternelle avec des mots étrangers et l'ont éloignée de la position universelle [2, p 78].

Dans le magazine “Mollah Nasreddin”, l'idée de dispenser une formation dans la langue maternelle afin d'inculquer la conscience de soi nationale dans la nation et d'enseigner la vitalité morale a été largement promue, et l'enseignement de la langue maternelle a été placé au premier plan. Dès son premier jusqu'à son dernier numéro tous les articles du magazine “Mollah Nasreddin” ont été rédigés dans sa langue maternelle, en 1927 en caractère latin.

Ce n'est pas un hasard si le premier numéro s'appelle “... mes frères turcs (azerbaïdjanais), je vous parle dans la langue maternelle claire du turc. Je sais que parler turc est un péché et cela montre le manque de connaissances d'une personne. Mais

parfois il faut se souvenir des jours passés : se souvenir de ces jours où ta mère te berçait dans le berceau et te disait lay-lay (une berceuse) en turc... qu'y a-t-il de mal à se souvenir des bons jours du passé en parlant à sa mère langue de temps en temps ! - Le magazine " Mollah Nasreddin ", qui a commencé par les mots, est resté fidèle à sa parole jusqu'au dernier numéro, a montré du respect pour la langue maternelle et en est devenu le promoteur actif [5, p.76].

Chaque nation a son propre vocabulaire. La créativité orale du peuple azerbaïdjanais, qui a commencé depuis des temps très anciens, est passée de bouche en bouche, de génération en génération et a atteint notre époque actuelle. La littérature populaire orale fait partie intégrante de la littérature écrite de chaque nation, son commencement. Et les études folkloriques au sens large, faisant partie des études littéraires, sont une science qui étudie les étapes de développement historique de la créativité orale du peuple, les caractéristiques de ses types et genres littéraires. Nos écrivains et poètes bien connus ont également écrit et créé sur la base de ce folklore et étaient aimés du peuple.

Le magazine " Mollah Nasreddin " rend un grand service en rapprochant la littérature azerbaïdjanaise de la vie des gens vivants et en la fondant sur le principe du véritable nationalisme dans la langue littéraire et artistique de l'Azerbaïdjan. Selon l'esprit du magazine, les « Mollanesraddinistes » (les partisans du magazine) ont changé les proverbes et les anecdotes, le rire provoqué par le sens opposé a déterminé leur idéal, la cible de la critique. Par exemple : dans la langue populaire on trouve des proverbes suivants :

*Anlayanın qulu ol, anlamayanın ağası.* (Soyez l'esclave de celui qui comprend, le maître de celui qui ne comprend pas)

*Çox oxuyan çox bilməz, çox gəzən çox bilər.* (Celui qui lit beaucoup ne sait pas grand-chose, celui qui voyage beaucoup sait beaucoup). Selon ce proverbe la personne qui voyage découvre beaucoup par rapport à celui qui lit beaucoup.

*Tısbağa qınından çıxdı, qınıni bəyənmedi.* (La tortue est sortie de sa carapace, elle n'aimait pas sa carapace, traduction littérale) par rapport à une personne qui ne reconnaît pas son passé, ses proches.

Les auteurs du magazine en se moquant des inconvénients des êtres humains présente à leur façon ces proverbes dans les rubriques du magazine :

*Anlayana da qul ol, anlamayana da.* (Soyez l'esclave de ceux qui comprennent et de ceux qui ne comprennent pas)

*Çox oxuyan çox bilməz, çox yatan çox bil.* (Celui qui lit beaucoup ne sait pas grand-chose, celui qui dort beaucoup sait beaucoup)

*Tısbağa qınından çıxsə, obrazovanni olar.* (Si la tortue sort de sa carapace, elle sera bien éduquée)

À travers les proverbes de "Mollah Nasreddin", divers défauts dans les relations sociales, la morale et la conscience ont été critiqués. Le style populaire a été absorbé dans le sang du magazine "Mollah Nasreddin", ce qui était l'une des raisons pour lesquelles il était aimé du public.

## 5. Conclusion

En effet, il n'est pas possible de pouvoir « donner à l'humour une définition satisfaisante », comme le disait Escarpit [8, p. 6] époques, et ses approches sont multiples (philosophique, littéraire, psychologique, sociologique...). Cependant, bien que phénomène complexe, de nombreux écrits en évoquent des traits constants : langage et moyen d'expression, forme de liberté de pensée, posture intellectuelle, voire philosophique, phénomène ludique et convivial, créateur de liens. Dans la société azerbaïdjanaise du début du XX s. l'humour occupe une place et un rôle importants dans l'action sociale. Le magazine satirique Mollah Nasreddin parut en 1906 est un exemple exceptionnel qui implique de savoir rire de soi-même et des événements qui se produisent pendant cette période dans le pays. D'une part, il apporte un nouvel aspect à la perception habituelle ; d'autre part, il joue un rôle essentiel dans l'équilibre de la personne, et libère les tensions. L'humour influence les rapports entre humains. Il a un aspect de correcteur social. De plus, l'humour signifie une intelligence sociale. D'une part, il fait appel à la pensée et à l'intelligence, d'autre part, il est porteur de messages. Pour mieux réussir tous ses objectifs les moyens linguistiques sont primordiaux afin de transmettre ce sens d'humour. Dans le magazine satirique Mollah Nasreddin les moyens les plus efficaces sont le jeu de mots, les proverbes, les expressions phraséologiques, les anecdotes et les emprunts.

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## **LE COMIQUE ALGÉRIEN EN SITUATION COLONIALE**

**Mohamed-Karim ASSOUANE\***

**Abstract:** *Many Algerian authors and some Europeans have described laughter in Algeria and especially through the theatrical scene as a “weapon of political resistance” against the multidimensional machine of colonization. Linked to the comic genre of the stage, laughter vacillates at the antipodes of Algerian critics of the 4th art between “imitative laughter” and “hysterical laughter” in a situation of colonization. It is a social laughter of an enslaved community within the “colony-Algeria” (CA) that interests us through this contribution. We will try to question certain views and opinions on the basis of specifically Algerian documentation and in both languages (French and Arabic) and most of which remains unknown to foreign readers. From 1912 to 1926, it was the effect of laughter that marked a certain change in stage art in Algeria, shared and widely disseminated by a popular imagination within an extremely impoverished and deprived society.*

**Keywords:** *laughter, theatre, Algeria*

### **Introduction**

L'Histoire du 4<sup>e</sup> art en Algérie est étroitement liée avec celle des évolutions politiques et sociales et ce depuis le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, avant J.C. à savoir depuis l'apparition des deux principautés Amazigh (Berbères) et sa colonisation par les Romains. De la territorialité historico-politique à celle du fait culturel, l'Algérie comme entité du Maghreb central, draine derrière elle quelques vingt siècles d'histoire culturelle jusqu'à la veille de la colonisation de peuplement européen au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

De l'Empire romain et latin aux Etats islamiques, les formes dramatiques ont presque toutes ignorées par l'historiographie générale en Algérie. Nous ignorons largement tout des manifestations artistiques, populaires soient-elles, durant un peu plus de 10 siècles de règnes. Les douze édifices Romains, entre théâtres et amphithéâtres, témoignent d'une vie artistique profanes et religieuse bien riche. Mais nous ignorons encore un peu plus sur les contenus qui s'exécutés à ces époques, vue qu'aucune trace textuelle n'a été jusque là mise à jour ou encore ont totalement disparus.

De plus, il est regrettable de signaler que l'historiographie théâtrale algérienne est marquée par de grands « blancs » dans nos pages d'études sur la forme dramatique ou de théâtralisation durant toute la période d'islamisation de cette contrée centrale du Maghreb. Aujourd'hui et afin d'évoquer quelques 1075 années d'histoire culturelle, nous préférons parler de formes culturelles à caractère religieux, moulues dans les fêtes religieuses et quelques manifestations populaires exécutées lors des fêtes familiales, rencontres publiques et marchés publics hebdomadaires ou fêtes tribales. La plupart de nos auteurs en histoire culturelle, préfèrent se cloîtrer dans l'existence de ces manifestations afin d'éviter toute recherche approfondie dont l'exigence méthodologique pourrait remettre en cause toute une vision irrationnelle de notre propre Histoire politique.

« Théâtre en Algérie » et « théâtre algérien » ou encore « théâtre arabe algérien » semblent être des terminologies qui se lient intimement dans une totalité historiographique théâtrale du pays lui-même. Ceux, qui, par intérêts idéologiques ont tentés de les distingués n'ont pu réussir à apporter une quelconque clarification sur un fait qui exige un plan épistémique bien approfondi.

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Nous noterons, mais avec de prudentes interrogations que la vingtaine d'écrits d'auteurs Algériens des deux langues, rassemblés dans la critique universitaire, les mémoires de dramaturges et témoignages d'hommes de scènes, tentent de traiter la question de l'origine du théâtre algérien comme une nécessité répétitive d'évoquer une même chronologie dont l'intérêt vise à adhérer à l'un des deux modes de pensées :

1) – La tendance qui s'imprègne du discours politique officiel, limitant la datation historique à la première représentation théâtrale de comédiens « Algériens » à savoir, la représentation de la pièce *Djeha*, en 1926 ;

2) - Un second courant bien arabiste, celui-là, qui estime que l'avènement scénique en Algérie s'est inscrit avec la venue des premières troupes théâtrales d'Égypte et du Liban en Algérie et inscrivant tout un devenir dramatique dans l'approche historique et identitaire au fait géographique.

La tenace influence de ces lectures se poursuivent encore de nos jours, éclipsant toute tentative de porter un regard critique et rationnel sur l'Histoire du 4<sup>e</sup> art en Algérie refusant toute autonomie d'une aire géographique, culturelle et politique face à son histoire d'avoir subi des périodes d'occupations étrangères.

#### **Le théâtre en Algérie de la notabilité**

A lire l'ouvrage du journaliste et écrivain algérien arabophone, Ahmed Bayoud<sup>1</sup>, il y a eu cette première gestation théâtrale en tant qu'art européen, dès l'année 1912 sous l'impulsion de l'émir Khaled, le petit-fils de l'émir Abdelkader et qui, profitant de la promulgation de la loi 1901 sur les libertés associatives, lança 03 associations à caractère culturelle et sportive dans trois villes du centre du pays (Alger, Blida et Médéa). Autour de ce dignitaire algérien et officier de l'armée coloniale formé à l'École de Sant-Cyr, des enfants de notables lettrés se sont rassemblés dans des salons littéraires et artistiques privés. C'est ainsi qu'à Médéa, l'*oukil* (prudhomme musulman) M. Skander Ibrahim Benkadi Abdelmoumen interpréta en 1912, à son domicile un texte du Syro-libanais Khalil Al-Yazidji, *Al Mouroua Wal Wafa* (Courage et fidélité).

A Alger, dans la propriété de M. Kaddour Benmahieddine Lahlou, dite Palais Mahieddine, on y joua une traduction arabe de *Macbeth* de Shakespeare réalisée par l'égyptien Mohammed Ifat Al-Masri en 1889. Les comédiens présents à ces représentations privées étaient pour la plupart des amateurs et adhérents d'associations culturelles et nous citerons pour illustration, Sid-Ali Bahloul, cheikh Halim Bensmaïa, Turki Mourad, Ben Ounich et cheikh Dhimen. Dans l'assistance, us pouvions voir M. René Basset un professeur de l'Institut français d'Alger et orientaliste connu et que Ahmed Bayoud qualifie « *d'ennemi de la langue arabe* », alors que ses amitiés arabes de la colonie-Algérie laisse entendre le contraire. La Société artistique initiée dans la ville de Blida par l'émir Khaled est présidée par M. Mahieddine Benkheda, un cadî (juge musulman) et poète de langue arabe Mahmoud Zribi qui interprétèrent au sein de la zaouïa (lieu de culte musulman) de Sidi Mohammed El-Kébir, un spectacle à contenu religieux dont la référence n'a pas été citée avec exactitude.

Lors d'une interview-témoignage en date de 1976, <sup>2</sup> M. Mahboub Stambouli (1912-2000) lettré et homme de théâtre ayant quelques 200 textes dramatiques à son répertoire, évoquait de son côté que dans la ville de Médéa, sud d'Alger, on y représenta

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<sup>1</sup> - Bayoud, Ahmed, *Théâtre algérien: Sa genèse et son évolution*, éd. Dar Houma, Alger, 2011 (En arabe).

<sup>2</sup> - Stambouli, Mahboub, dans la revue culturelle *Ame*, n° 35, septembre-octobre 1976, Alger.

à la zaouïa de Sidi-Mohammed Aberkane, une représentation à caractère religieux intitulée *L'assassinat d'Al-Hussein ben Ali*, l'imam leader de la confession chiite-Khâridjite. Le texte été alors rédigé collectivement entre l'émir Khaled, le muphti Hamid Fekkar et Mohamed Bencheneb. A ce niveau de lecture, nous estimons que ce qui est mis en exergue c'est bel et bien une dramaturgie liturgique occasionnée par les fêtes islamiques tels que le mois de jeûne du ramadan où l'on comblés les longues soirées de veille par des petits spectacles à caractères éducatifs faisant le privilège d'un milieu social bien aisé.

A Tlemcen (ouest de l'Algérie) en 1913, on constitua une Société artistique, religieuse et caritative sous le nom d'*El-Barkanya* qui interpréta des textes à contenu religieux dont l'écriture est collective. A Médéa et en 1914, on y joua un texte sous le titre *Jacob le juif* qui montrait le caractère spéculatif et usurier d'une communauté religieuse à un moment fort de la montée de l'antisémitisme dans la colonie. Le déclenchement de la 1<sup>er</sup> Guerre mondiale a mis fin à ce genre de spectacles d'élites et dès 1919, il eu apparition de jeunes artistes, à leur tête Mahieddine Bachtarzi (1897-1986), un jeune muezzin de la mosquée d'Alger et diplômé du conservatoire de musique de la même ville, d'une voix ténor exceptionnelle et à un niveau maghrébin, il intégrera la *Moutribia* (L'Enchanteresse) que dirigeait l'artiste algérois de confession israélite Edmond Nathan Yafil (1874-1928). Bachtarzi a tenté de relancer ce genre de spectacles et d'activités au sein de la société musicale et avait comme partenaire les premiers artistes de scènes algériens, à savoir Sellali Ali, dit Allalou (1902-1992), Abdelaziz Lakhel, Allal Larfaoui et Brahim Dahmoune.

Entre 1919 et 1924 à Médéa encore, l'association culturelle et sportive présenta *El-amîr al-andaloussi* (Le prince d'Andalousie) en 1920 et de son côté l'émir Khaled créa à Alger l'Unité Algérienne et monta la pièce *Fi sabil el-Tadj* (Au nom de la couronne) et *Ghofran el-amîr* (Le pardon du prince).

Nous estimons que jusque là, l'activité théâtrale proprement dite n'a pas fait son apparition en tant qu'art indépendant sur une scène de jeu à l'italienne. L'émir Khaled né à Damas et venant à Alger via Paris où il a suivi une scolarisation au lycée Louis-le-Grand jusqu'à l'école militaire de Saint-Cyr, n'évolua que dans son petit cercle d'amitiés créant une sorte de « Cénacles » de jeune notabilité bien éloigné de la population de colonisés et autres laissés pour compte.

Les activités citées plus haut, ont été marquées par la reprise de la tradition religieuse des confréries islamiques sans aucune dimension humoristique et éloignée du dérisoire. Les textes sont à teneur éducative et morale et les quelques tentatives de mettre en spectacle des textes d'auteurs n'ont été en réalité que des instants de lectures et de dictions loin de toute interprétation et gestuelles scéniques proprement dite.

Les « Cénacles » algériens en question n'étaient qu'une sorte de réaction à ce qui se faisait sur les scènes d'opéra et théâtres que la colonisation à construite pour la population européenne dans les plus grandes villes de la colonie. Tout comme il est important de relever que ces tentatives sont restées en marge de la majorité d'une population frappée d'illettrisme, d'épidémies et de famines. Sur un tout autre plan de l'historiographie théâtrale, l'historien algérien d'origine tunisienne Ahmed Toufik Madani (1889-1983) estime que l'apparition de l'art des monologues qui serait à l'origine du théâtre en Algérie, date de 1919 avec l'apparition du Cercle culturel musulman du progrès (*Nadi el-Taraqi*) qui a vu le jour dès 1933 et dont la section dramatique a eue le privilège de présenter des spectacles en France, en Italie et en Espagne. De même que l'on évoque le rôle de l'association de l'Amical des étudiants musulmans qui interpréta de courtes pièces d'un acte et ayant comme scène, le domicile



du notable et commerçant Omar Bensmaïa à la rue Bab-Djedid (centre d'Alger) avec la participation du jeune Bachtarzi, Lakhtri Bendjelloul, Bachir Abdelouahab, Boumali, Ben Habilès, Ferhat Abbas, Chérif Saâdane et le propriétaire des lieux en question. Les recettes de ces spectacles étaient versées à une aide de la scolarisation des enfants de familles démunies, tout comme il y a lieu de préciser que ces étudiants de la Faculté d'Alger étaient aussi des militants de la Fédération des élus musulmans de tendance patriotique et réformiste. A l'ouest de la colonie, dans la ville de Tlemcen et dès 1919, une publication liée à la Medersa franco-musulmane du nom de *L'Élève-Le Talmid* que publiait M. Tahar Ali-Chérif dans les deux langues en proposant aux élèves des chants dramatiques aux titres « patriotiques ». C'est à partir de 1921, qu'il fondera l'association *El-Mouhadibia* (L'Educatrice) proposant alors des textes de 1 à 4 actes dont *El-chifa baâd El-ghina* (La guérison après la fortune), une pièce en un acte et de même pour *Kadi el-gharam* (Magistrat de l'amour) en 4 actes et enfin en 1924, *Badi'* (Le prodigue), un texte de 3 actes.

Entre projet éducatif et action caritative sociale, le programme dramaturgique Algérien de la première décennie du XXe siècle, ne permettait pas à ces animateurs d'être des hommes de scène. La main mise de la colonisation sur les conservatoires et écoles dramatiques destinées aux seuls européens, ne pouvait favoriser l'apparition d'un théâtre d'autochtones d'une manière indépendante. L'arme juridique de ces premières décennies s'intitule le Code de l'Indigénat qui sera en vigueur jusqu'en 1946 et rendant quelques 9 millions d'Algérien au code du servage.

### **Théâtre algérien du grotesque**

Pour Rachid Bencheneb (1915-1991) et dans une étude sur le théâtre algérien,<sup>1</sup> considère que le théâtre algérien « *n'a pas surgi brusquement au milieu du désert. Il est né en 1921 à Alger, dans une société en pleine mutation, animée par une élite bourgeoise très active, qui s'était donné pour mission de réveiller, d'instruire et d'éduquer une population souffrant de son ignorance, consciente de son retard dans le domaine économique, social, politique et intellectuel* » et estimant qu'à travers cet art de scène, le mouvement nationaliste est bien l'œuvre d'une bourgeoisie citadine à travers son élite lettrée, au moment où la population rurale était beaucoup plus préoccupée par les problèmes de la survie au quotidien et ne pouvant s'élever « *à la conscience civique et pouvant par là constituer un élément moteur* » à tout changement.

Si nous choisissons d'introduire cette partie du présent écrit en nous référons à un des membres de la famille intellectuelle algérienne, c'est tout juste pour montrer qu'une dynamique de pensée à toujours subsister au sein d'une certaine catégorie sociale durant la colonisation et animés par des intérêts artistiques.

Le même Rachid Bencheneb écrivait plus loin dans son étude que « *jusqu'en 1945, le théâtre de la satire conserva son caractère essentiellement éducatif, illustrant de préceptes de morale pratique, prêchant les devoirs familiaux et les vertus domestiques, dénonçant tour à tour l'ignorance, la débauche, l'ivrognerie, l'égoïsme des riches, devenant après 1945, un instrument de propagande, un théâtre de combat* », estimant encore que « *la plus banale pièce est avec ses tirades chantées, bourrée d'allusions politiques* ».

Si la première compagnie dramatique a été constituée à Alger, le 5 avril 1921 sous l'égide de la Mouhadiba (citée plus haut), ses animateurs étaient d'anciens élèves

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<sup>1</sup> - Bencheneb, Rachid, « Allalou et les origines du théâtre algérien », in, Revue de l'Occident Musulman et la Méditerranée, n°24, Aix-en-Provence, 1977.

de la Medersa franco-musulmane et ne produira que 03 textes autour des méfaits sociaux de l'alcoolisme et ne représenta que quelques spectacles dans l'arabe classique que tout juste certains initiés ont pu suivre chaque vendredi dans la salle Kürsaal du quartier européen de Bab El-Oued. Nous signalons au passage que sur le plan historiographique de la littérature théâtrale en Algérie, on évoque la parution du premier texte théâtral algérien voire arabe dès 1848, rédigé par un interprète israélite d'Alger de l'armée coloniale long de 62 pages où il relate une histoire d'amour se déroulant dans une ville imaginaire d'Irak, Tiryak, et composée de 22 personnages entre notables, serviteurs et chanteurs. L'auteur n'est autre qu'Abraham Daninos, dit Ibrahim Ibn Daninous (1798-1872) et auteur de fascicules arabe-français pour des militaires de la colonisation.

Il en demeure que sur un tout autre plan, celui de la scénographie théâtrale, on s'accorde à mentionner que la pièce *Djeha* d'Allalou est bien le texte représenté à la scène, constitue le début réel d'un théâtre populaire en Algérie. Pour ce comédien et notant de son vivant,<sup>1</sup> qu'avant 1914, il débuta dans « la comédie espagnole » et qu'entre 1918 et 1921, il composa des sketches et que du 12 avril 1926 au 5 mai 1931 il n'avait écrit que 07 textes dramatiques, à savoir : *Djeha*, *Mariage de Bouakline*, *Abou el-Hassan et le somnambule*, *Le pêcheur et le Djinn*, *Antar le h'chaïchi*, *Le Khalife et le pêcheur*, enfin *Le Barbier de Grenade*. Considérer comme un acteur-auteur centré sur l'éducation à travers la scène du rire, Allalou traita dans ses textes les maux sociaux tels l'alcoolisme, la drogue, les mariages précoces entre jeunes-filles et vieux, l'avarice, etc. les questions politiques n'ont été traités que par allusions afin de détourner la censure coloniale, comme le précise-t-il dans le document de 1982, que « *C'est notre manière de lutter contre l'occupant colonisateur* ».

Autour de l'œuvre de ce comédien-auteur des années 1920, le sociologue algérien, Abdelkader Djeghloul<sup>2</sup> montre que le théâtre d'Allalou a apporté trois nouveautés :

1 – Une attitude nouvelle vis-à-vis de l'action culturelle. Avec la pièce *Djeha*, la culture est plus une action évoluant vers le spectacle ; le rire remplace le sérieux et la langue avec des jeux de mots exprimant la vie quotidienne en actionnant plusieurs niveaux d'expression langagier ou ce que l'on a nommé une 3<sup>e</sup> langue ;

2 – La troupe théâtrale comme nouvel objet culturel. En sont sein, il y a des artistes amateurs, des chanteurs femmes, tel que : Amina, Zoubida, Ghazala et Farida.

3 – C'est aussi une nouvelle approche du réel populaire. Allalou et par la suite Rachid Ksentini (1887-1944) feront des adaptations tant à partir de la tradition culturelle locale qu'arabe, notamment les *Mille et nuit* qu'ils ajoutent aux préoccupations quotidiennes de l'époque.

A travers le théâtre d'Allalou, le succès au sein du large public algérien fut grandiose puisqu'il était lui-même objet de ce théâtre. Il est d'autant vrai que le comédien-auteur n'a pas réussi à constituer un théâtre tel que nous le saisissons aujourd'hui, mais il a bien laissé une large empreinte par le rire d'une façon, certes primaire et d'un niveau qui exprime un peu plus la connaissance de Soi. Un théâtre beaucoup plus marqué par l'expression thématique des valeurs arabo-islamique et des questions ayant trait à la morale religieuse. En 30 années d'existences, depuis 1912 jusqu'aux événements

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<sup>1</sup> - Sellali, Ali, « L'aurore du théâtre algérien : 1926-1932 », in *Cahiers du CREDISSH*, n°9, Oran, 1982, réédition à Dar El-Gharb, Oran, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> - Djeghloul, Abdelkader, *Colonisation et combats culturels en Algérie*, traduction de Salim Kastrun, Dar Al-Hadatha, Beyrouth, 1984. (En arabe)

génocidaire du 8 au 19 mai 1945 en Algérie, l'expression théâtrale algérienne est restée figée dans le récréatif et le socio-éducatif à porter moralisateur. C'est ainsi que la satire et le rire aux larmes, se débrident plus âprement et devenant plus agressive, mais en général le programme de chaque spectacle comprenait deux parties :

1 – La récitation de versets du coran et de psaumes religieux ;

2 - La représentation de la pièce annoncée, dont la thématique est d'orientation politique et le spectacle s'achève par une soirée de chants et de danses traditionnelles.

Les années 1930 ont été réellement l'âge d'or du théâtre algérien de la satire et du grotesque, notamment avec Rachid Ksentini qui fut le premier artiste-auteur à introduire l'art de l'improvisation. Dans *El-Bouziri Fel-Askaria* (Le paysan au régiment) dont l'écriture est partagée entre Bachtarzi (en arabe) et Louis Chaprot (en français), Ksentini interpréta des situations cocasses qui portaient le plein effet et font éclater à tout moment des rires et des applaudissements. Un tel comique réussit à faire éclater la verve chez le public algérien de l'époque. Dans *Fakou* (Ils le savent) ce sont trois heures de fou-rire et la pièce est présentée comme moralisatrice d'un rire irrésistible, traitant de la vie de l'arabe, de tous ces maux et tous ses malheurs, mettant au grand jour, tous ceux qui profitent de la crédulité de l'arabe pour le gruger et vivre de ses dépens.

Le dramaturge et ex-directeur du Théâtre national algérien (ex-Opéra d'Alger) et cousin de l'écrivain Kateb Yacine, considère que l'apparition du théâtre humoristique en Algérie est passé par 04 étapes essentielles : 1) L'apparition parmi les larges masses populaires, non instruites et dans les cafés des quartiers populaires, représentant une sorte de théâtre commercial appartenant à des professionnels qu'ils soient artistes ou organisateurs ; 2) C'est un théâtre qui s'est lié au chant, dans une langue simple et légère pouvant transmettre l'idée et l'expression artistique et satisfaire le public et son goût. La chanson humoristique ; 3) Un théâtre d'humour de nature populaire et non intellectuel, d'où son éloignement des hommes de lettres ; 4) Les comédiens ont pris eux-mêmes en charge l'écriture de leurs textes et leur mise en scène.

En provoquant le rire aux larmes, les premiers artistes-comédiens du théâtre algérien révèlent et cachent une sourde angoisse, un drame profond. Un rire qui avoisine la mort dans un univers de survie et de déraison par la dérision.

#### Notes

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## **LE COMIQUE DE DANIEL PENNAC A TRAVERS LES COUVERTURES DE SES LIVRES**

**Raluca Cristina DRAGOMIR\***

**Abstract:** *We all know the saying “don’t judge a book by its cover”. But, in fact, the cover is an invitation intended to catch the eye, to arouse the interest of the reader to buy the volume and dive into the story. Its composition must, therefore, be carefully crafted to reflect the content of the book as much as possible and not to betray the intentions of the writer. In this paper, we analyze the front cover and the back cover of the novels of the Malaussène Saga by Daniel Pennac, a novel cycle published by Gallimard Publishing House between 1985 and 2023.*

**Keywords:** *Daniel Pennac, Saga Malaussène, book covers*

### **Introduction**

D’origine commerciale et à vocation promotionnelle, la première de couverture d’un livre et la quatrième de couverture, ou plus simplement « la quatre » fournissent des détails sur le contenu du livre et ont pour but d’orienter l’horizon des lecteurs, en leur donnant envie de lire, donc d’acheter l’ouvrage. « ...la couverture illustrée, cette première interface visuelle entre un livre et son lecteur, s’affirme à la fois comme un espace de représentation – lieu de figuration et de théâtralité offert à l’œil [...] et comme le *stimulus* visuel indispensable au déclenchement de l’acte d’achat. » (Le Bail, 2020) C’est bien de penser que les livres les mieux écrits sont les plus populaires, mais cela n’a jamais été vrai. Avec plus d’un million de livres publiés chaque année, ce sont les auteurs et les maisons d’édition qui doivent trouver un moyen de sortir de l’encombrement, d’attirer l’attention des gens et de les convaincre d’acheter les livres qu’ils publient et de commencer à lire.

Dans ce travail, nous nous proposons d’analyser la première et la quatrième de couverture des romans de la *saga Malaussène* de Daniel Pennac, cycle romanesque publié aux éditions Gallimard entre 1985 et 2023, dont la plupart des volumes ont connu plusieurs éditions. Ces éléments font partie du « périphrase éditorial » tel que Genette le définit, à savoir « toute cette zone du périphrase qui se trouve sous la responsabilité directe et principale (mais non exclusive) de l’éditeur, ou peut-être, plus abstraitement mais plus exactement, de l’édition, c’est-à-dire du fait qu’un livre est édité, et éventuellement réédité, et proposé au public sous une ou plusieurs représentations plus ou moins diverses ». (Genette, 2002 :28)

L’étude de ces contenus visuels et textuels nous permettra d’analyser les choix des éditions Gallimard, format Poche et comment « la promesse imagée de la couverture [...] se double d’une opacité programmée, puisque la validité des informations programmatiques contenues dans le titre [...] ou dans l’illustration liminaire, ne pourra se vérifier qu’*a posteriori*, une fois la lecture terminée. » (Le Bail, 2020).

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### **La première de couverture**

La première de couverture doit attirer l'œil et donner envie au lecteur de s'intéresser à l'ouvrage. Sa composition doit donc être soigneusement pensée pour refléter aussitôt que possible le contenu du livre, sans pour autant dire trop. A la fois informative, esthétique et attractive, c'est elle qui fait le lecteur pousser la porte de la librairie.

La couverture d'un livre se compose presque toujours des éléments suivants : le nom de l'auteur, parfois remplacé par un nom de plume. Si l'écrivain est célèbre, son nom est bien mis en valeur ; si ce n'est pas le cas, il peut être écrit en plus petit ou même inexistant. Le titre, élément indispensable qui donne souvent du fil à retordre à l'auteur, est généralement centré et bien mis en évidence. C'est la photo de couverture qui influence énormément le regard des potentiels lecteurs car c'est l'image ou le dessin choisi que le lecteur voit, juste avant de lire le titre. Le plus souvent, sur la première de couverture apparaît aussi le nom de la maison d'édition.

### **La quatrième de couverture**

La couverture arrière d'un livre est la deuxième chose que les lecteurs regardent, sinon la première. C'est ici que le lecteur décide si une œuvre a le potentiel de leur plaire. Il s'agit généralement d'un synopsis, qui peut être suivi d'extraits représentatifs ou d'une très brève biographie de l'auteur.

L'un des objectifs importants de la couverture arrière est le marketing. En fait, tout dans sa conception est dédié à cet objectif, en commençant par des visuels attrayants et en terminant par un contenu intéressant. Si les gens sont d'abord attirés par l'apparence, alors il faut faire attention au contenu, c'est-à-dire à l'intérêt de cette présentation.

La promotion d'un livre est le deuxième objectif de cette partie du livre. Grâce au court texte récapitulatif en fin d'ouvrage, les lecteurs intéressés ont déjà une première impression, et établissent par la même occasion une notoriété pour l'auteur et son œuvre.

Pour réussir une quatrième de couverture, il faut se mettre à la place du lecteur et essayer de trouver un moyen d'attirer son attention. Cela nécessite l'utilisation des techniques suivantes : rester concis, lire rapidement et de manière décisive, saisir le lecteur dès la première ligne et lui donner envie d'en savoir plus, maintenir le suspense, écrire exactement ce dont il a besoin. Pour présenter l'intrigue, garder le ton du livre, pour que le lecteur comprenne immédiatement le genre littéraire et le type d'intrigue proposé, souligner ce qui rend le livre original et, pourquoi pas, surprenant. Parce qu'en fin de compte, il n'y a pas de recette pour écrire une couverture de livre. L'écrivain ou la maison d'édition doivent trouver le meilleur angle, la phrase la plus attractive et le meilleur reflet de l'univers nouvellement créé.

### ***La Saga Malaussène***

Auteur de grand talent, figure de proue de la littérature française, Daniel Pennac a connu le succès dès les années 1980 avec la saga de la famille Malaussène, huit volumes, dont le dernier, appelé *Terminus Malaussène*, fut publié en janvier 2023. A l'exception *Des chrétiens et des maures*, dont la majeure partie de l'intrigue se passe avant *Au bonheur des ogres*, les ouvrages présentent chronologiquement l'histoire des personnages.

Toute la saga, ainsi qu'une foule de personnages minutieusement décrits et construits à travers les romans tournent autour de Benjamin Malaussène, le frère aîné

d'une famille nombreuse, un caractère inspiré de l'essai du philosophe René Girard, paru dans les années '80, *Le Bouc émissaire*.

Ce sont souvent les différences de réalité qui nous font rire : la différence entre ce qu'un personnage veut faire et ce qu'il fait (maladresses et malchances), la différence entre ce qu'un personnage pense qu'il est et ce qu'il est (ce que les commentaires du narrateur peuvent révéler), des thèmes sérieux et les thèmes légers dans la façon dont il est traité entre le choix des personnages et le contexte (comique de situation).

Chez Pennac, le lecteur passionné et fidèle à ses écrits est pleinement satisfait du comique de situation, des trouvailles de style, des jeux des mots et du langage familier, souvent argotique des personnages. De plus, l'intrigue policière se marie à merveille avec ses personnages atypiques et attachants.

C'est Jacques Tardi qui a illustré en format Folio de nombreux livres de Pennac, dont la saga Malaussène, des dessins qui, à notre avis, rendent parfaitement l'œuvre de Pennac avec son comique irrésistible, son rythme vif et sa plume tonique où l'ennui est interdit. Auteur de bandes dessinées, illustrateur de couvertures pour romans et auteur d'affiches cinématographiques, Tardi a des cohérences affectives et imaginaires avec les auteurs de son choix.

#### *Au bonheur des ogres (1985)*



« Côté famille, maman s'est tirée une fois de plus en m'abandonnant les mômes, et le Petit s'est mis à rêver d'ogres Noël. Côté cœur, tante Julia a été séduite par ma nature de bouc (de bouc émissaire). Côté boulot, la première bombe a explosé au rayon des jouets, cinq minutes après mon passage. La deuxième, quinze jours plus tard, au rayon des pulls, sous mes yeux. Comme j'étais là aussi pour l'explosion de la troisième, ils m'ont tous soupçonné. Pourquoi moi ? Je dois avoir un don... »

Publié en 1985, *Au bonheur des ogres* est le premier roman de la Saga Malaussène. Peut-être le plus connu et avec le plus grand succès au public, ce roman connaît de nombreuses éditions traduites dans plus d'une dizaine de langues. Le titre est inspiré du roman *Au bonheur des dames* d'Émile Zola, pour entraîner le lecteur dans le monde des grands magasins.

Le lecteur tombe dans un univers baroque où tout est possible, car la famille Malaussène est particulièrement tumultueuse et diverse: la mère, souvent absente, va d'amour en amour. Le fils aîné, Benjamin, chef de famille malgré lui, prend soin de ses demi-frères et sœurs : Clara, la photographe, Louna, l'infirmière, Thérèse, qui voit l'avenir dans les étoiles et les lignes de la main, Jérémy, qui aime vivre de nouvelles expériences, et Petit, qui est encore à la maternelle en rêvant aux ogres de Noël. Benjamin agit comme le bouc émissaire du grand magasin, assumant toute la responsabilité lorsque les clients se plaignent des produits. Une bombe, puis deux,

exploient dans le magasin. Benjamin, toujours présent lors de l'explosion, est le suspect numéro un de cette vague d'attentats... Le tout sous les yeux de Julius, le chien épileptique, et de Tante Julia, la journaliste volcanique

Comment exprimer tout cela par une simple image et faire vendre le livre ? La première édition du roman fut publiée dans la *série noire* des Editions Gallimard, donc un polar avec une couverture sombre, qui suggère l'angoisse, le suspense ou un crime. L'image de l'ourson décapité lors d'une explosion y correspond parfaitement et renvoie à la bombe explosée au rayon des jouets mentionné sur la quatrième. La deuxième édition a sur la première de couverture le célèbre tableau de Francisco Goya - *Saturne dévorant un de ses fils*, mais, surprise, devant le tableau il y a un petit garçon et son chien accablés par cette image terrifiante. D'ailleurs, l'image du chien apparaîtra sur toutes les couvertures de la saga, en tant que témoin de cet univers où Pennac adore multiplier ses personnages secondaires et faire appel aux digressions. La troisième édition place sur la première des couvertures trois personnages négatifs, les « ogres », la dynamite à la main, prêts à tout faire et le chien Julius. Toute la famille Malaussène se presse sur la couverture de l'édition suivante ; au premier plan il y a toujours les ogres et le chien, alors qu'au fond une explosion vient de se passer.

### *La fée carabine (1987)*



« Si les vieilles dames se mettent à buter les jeunots, si les doyens du troisième âge se shootent comme des collégiens, si les commissaires divisionnaires enseignent le vol à la tire à leurs petits-enfants, et si on prétend que tout ça c'est ma faute, moi, je pose la question : où va-t-on ? » Ainsi s'interroge Benjamin Malaussène, bouc émissaire professionnel, payé pour endosser nos erreurs à tous, frère de famille élevant les innombrables enfants de sa mère, cœur extensible abritant chez lui les vieillards les plus drogués de la capitale, amant fidèle, ami infailible, maître affectueux d'un chien épileptique, Benjamin Malaussène, l'innocence même (« l'innocence m'aime ») et pourtant... pourtant, le coupable idéal pour tous les flics de la capitale.

A la fois roman policier et roman comique, *La fée carabine* est le deuxième roman de la saga. Le titre fait référence à la fée Carabosse des contes pour enfants, l'archétype de la fée malfaisante, vieille et laide, facile à reconnaître à cause de sa bosse. L'histoire policière est plus sombre que la précédente, mais un prétexte idéal pour faire découvrir au lecteur le quartier parisien de Belleville et faire la critique de la société occidentale de la fin des années '80. Benjamin Malaussène, fils aîné de sa famille, est toujours au centre de ce roman, gentil, loyal et attentionné, et pourtant le coupable idéal pour tous les flics de la ville. Il habite Belleville, un quartier de Paris où de vieilles dames se font voler et assassiner. Désormais, elles ne se promènent plus sans un revolver dans leur sac à main.

Ainsi, la première de couverture met l'accent sur l'image d'une vieille dame dans la rue pendant un jour d'hiver, les cheveux serrés et un panier à la main où l'on



voit clairement la partie arrière d'un fusil. Si l'édition série noire se limite à ces détails, dans l'édition suivante le lecteur fidèle de Pennac reconnaît la silhouette du petit garçon et de son chien de la couverture *Au bonheur des ogres* qui jouent dans la neige sous les yeux de la vieille dame. Le dessin devient anecdotique lors de la troisième édition, quand la vieille dame ne porte plus son fusil, mais un poireau dans son panier d'achats. Sur la couverture de la dernière édition se pressent une foule de personnages, policiers, malfaiteurs et quelques membres de la famille.

### *La petite marchande de prose (1990)*



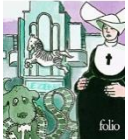
« L'amour, Malaussène, je vous propose l'amour ! » L'amour ? J'ai Julie, j'ai Louna, j'ai Thérèse, j'ai Clara, Verdun, le Petit et Jérémy. J'ai Julius et j'ai Belleville... « Entendons-nous bien, mon petit, je ne vous propose pas la botte ; c'est l'amour avec un grand A que je vous offre : tout l'amour du monde ! » Aussi incroyable que cela puisse paraître, j'ai accepté. J'ai eu tort. » Transformé en objet d'adoration universelle par la reine Zabo, éditeur de génie, Benjamin Malaussène va payer au prix fort toutes les passions déchaînées par la parution d'un best-seller dont il est censé être l'auteur. Vol de manuscrit, vengeance, passion de l'écriture, frénésie des lecteurs, ébullition éditoriale, délires publicitaires, *La petite marchande de prose* est un feu d'artifice tiré à la gloire du roman. De tous les romans.

Benjamin Malaussène est le bouc émissaire des éditions Talion et, en tant qu'aîné de sa fratrie, il est à l'origine de cette petite tribu atypique et fantasque. Du jour au lendemain, dans le but de relancer les ventes, à la demande de Zabo, la directrice, il devient l'homme de paille de JL Babel, l'auteur anonyme du best-seller édité par la maison d'édition. Il accepte le rôle, mais ce n'est pas si simple car cette usurpation d'identité apparemment anodine cache bien d'autres secrets, et Benjamin paiera cette imposture.

Pennac aborde un thème qu'il connaît bien : l'édition des livres. L'intrigue est riche en rebondissements et les personnages prennent une ampleur nouvelle, même si Benjamin est le moins présent dans le roman.

La première édition a sur la première de couverture Zabo, assise à son bureau, entourée de livres, la main sur un revolver. Cette image renvoie sûrement à *La fée carabine* et son fusil. L'édition suivante met Zabo et Julius en premier plan, alors que les livres signés JLB volent autour d'eux. La dernière édition reprend le modèle des autres : la couverture est pleine à ras bord de personnages et de situations, facilement reconnaissables par les lecteurs fidèles. Julius, le chien, est comme toujours au premier plan, affolé par ce qui se passe autour.


### **Monsieur Malaussène (1995)**

 <p>Daniel Pennac Monsieur Malaussène</p>	<p>« - La suite ! réclamaient les enfants. La suite ! La suite ! » Ma suite à moi c'est l'autre petit moi-même qui prépare ma relève dans le giron de Julie. Comme une femme est belle en ces premiers mois où elle vous fait l'honneur d'être deux ! Mais, Julie, crois-tu que ce soit raisonnable ? Julie, le crois-tu ? Franchement... hein ? Et toi, petit con, penses-tu que ce soit le monde, la famille, l'époque où te poser ? Pas encore là et déjà de mauvaises fréquentations ! - La suite ! La suite ! Ils y tenaient tellement à leur suite que moi, Benjamin Malaussène, frère de famille hautement responsable, bouc ressuscité, père potentiel, j'ai fini par me retrouver en prison accusé de vingt et un meurtres. Tout ça pour un sombre trafic d'images en ce siècle Lumière. Alors, vous tenez vraiment à ce que je vous la raconte, la suite ?</p>
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Le plus volumineux de la série, le quatrième volume témoigne de l'enquête la plus tordue. Le nombre de caractères devient astronomique, mais le lecteur n'est jamais perdu car ils sont décrits minutieusement. Ce roman parle du cinéma à travers l'histoire d'un Film unique. L'auteur parle de son amour pour les images.

C'est d'ailleurs une des couvertures les plus simplifiées de la série : d'un côté, Julius, en train de mâcher une pellicule cinématographique, de l'autre côté, une femme enceinte habillée en nonne, alors qu'en arrière-plan est esquissé le cinéma « Le Zèbre ». Dans ce long texte sur la quatrième de couverture, par la voix de son personnage principal, l'auteur s'adresse directement à ses lecteurs. Malgré ce long chemin déjà parcouru, il ne peut que continuer à écrire.


### **Des chrétiens et des maures (1996)**

 <p>Daniel Pennac Des chrétiens et des Maures</p>	<p>Un matin, Le Petit a décrété : « - Je veux mon papa. » Il a repoussé son bol de chocolat et j'ai su, moi, Benjamin Malaussène, frère de famille, que Le Petit n'avalerait plus rien tant que je n'aurais pas retrouvé son vrai père. Or ce type était introuvable. Probablement mort, d'ailleurs. Après deux jours de jeûne Le Petit était si transparent qu'on pouvait lire au travers. Mais il repoussait toujours son assiette : « - Je veux mon papa. »</p>
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A peine cent pages au format poche, l'histoire tourne autour du Petit qui, regardant le dernier-né de la tribu Malaussène, veut absolument connaître son père. Insouciant au début, Benjamin se rend compte qu'il doit commencer l'enquête. Par ses personnages et l'intrigue, Pennac rend hommage à *Bartleby* d'Herman Melville - selon lui, l'une des plus belles nouvelles du monde.

La première de couverture joue sur les mêmes thèmes : il y a Petit qui nous regarde droit dans les yeux, le chien Julius, omniprésent et curieux, le personnage négatif avec son revolver.


### *Aux fruits de la passion (1999)*

 <p>Daniel Pennac Aux fruits de la passion</p>	<p>La tribu Malaussène et ses proches sont le regret de vous annoncer le mariage de Thérèse Malaussène avec le comte Marie-Colbert de Roberval, conseiller référendaire de première classe. Cet avis tient lieu d'invitation.</p>
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Cette fois, nous avons affaire au fait qu'une des sœurs de Benjamin va se marier. Tout le monde dans la famille est heureux sauf lui. L'homme que Thérèse projette d'épouser est le chef d'une « prison artistique », où les condamnés sont libres de peindre, dessiner ou écrire. Ce type de prison révolutionnaire attire certes l'attention, et l'histoire se construit autour d'un meurtre qui s'y déroule.

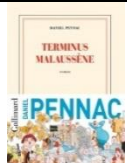
Dans la saga, Thérèse utilise ses dons de voyance pour prévoir l'avenir de la famille. Cette première de couverture présente la caravane où elle s'installe à Belleville où les gens font la queue patiemment. Pour plus de discrétion, ils sont illustrés le dos tourné, alors que le chien, complice, paraît nous faire un clin d'œil.

### *Le Cas Malaussène - Ils m'ont menti (2017)*

 <p>Daniel Pennac Le cas Malaussène Ils m'ont menti</p>	<p>Sept, Mosma et Maracuja, les derniers-nés de ma tribu, n'auraient pas dû grandir. Vingt ans plus tard les voilà jetés dans un monde on ne peut plus explosif, où on kidnappe Georges Lapietà, l'homme d'affaires le plus cinglé de son espèce, où ça mitraille à tout va pour le récupérer, où les romanciers prétendent écrire au nom de la vérité vraie quand tout le monde ment à tout le monde. Tout le monde sauf moi, bien sûr. Moi, comme d'habitude, je morfle. Benjamin Malaussène</p>
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Dix-huit ans plus tard, Pennac est de retour avec son septième tome : à la demande de la reine Zabo, Benjamin Malaussène est chargé d'abriter et de protéger l'écrivain Alceste Fontana, dont le roman vient d'être publié aux éditions Talion. Cette mission est accomplie dans la région de Vercors, loin de Paris et de plusieurs membres de sa famille. Pendant ce temps, l'ex-ministre Georges Lapietà est kidnappé à Paris et bientôt une rançon est demandée pour sa libération. Sur la première couverture, le lecteur retrouve le chien Julius, un fusil de chasse assis sur un bureau, symbole du polar et, le plus probablement, Benjamin Malaussène le dos tourné devant une fenêtre.

## 8. Le Cas Malaussène - Terminus Malaussène (2023)

	“Je ne savais pas que les enfants avaient failli se faire tuer dans le volume précédent. Quand j’ai appris que c’était Pépère qui avait fait le coup, j’ai pigé un truc : qui ne connaît pas Pépère ne sait pas de quoi l’être humain est capable.” Benjamin Malaussène
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Pour ses anciens lecteurs mais aussi pour les nouveaux, le dernier tome de la saga ouvre avec un arbre généalogique de la tribu Malaussène et finit avec un répertoire des personnages. Peut-être la plus importante dans ce volume est la connivence forgée entre les lecteurs et les personnages multiples, dont les visages et les formes ont été si bien illustrées par Jacques Tardi. Hors de l’intrigue policière, il y a l’humour et la tendresse de Belleville, les monologues de Benjamin et les nombreuses références à la réalité quotidienne.

### Conclusions

La première de couverture est une interface visuelle qui participe fortement à la compréhension de l’œuvre. Les couvertures analysées ont le pouvoir d’attirer l’œil et de faire vendre car elles réussissent à créer une forte liaison entre l’auteur, l’illustrateur et le lecteur et orienter la réception des romans.

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## **LES COULEURS ET LES SENS DANS L'ŒUVRE DE NICOLAS BOUVIER**

**Ionela-Camelia DUMITRU-PETRE\***

**Abstract:** *Nicolas Bouvier's work represents for his audience a continuous invitation to travel, a perpetual stimulation of imagination and interest in what is to be presented by the subject – narrator during his initiatory journey. Nicolas Bouvier takes the color out of the sphere of what is common and ordinary by giving them other valence and other connotations, thus managing to capture the reader's attention and keep them with him throughout the entire narrative. Through his novels, Nicolas Bouvier presents the readers with paintings of rare beauty and highlights the spiritual aspects, the richness of soul of the narrator subject, the material part remaining in the background.*

**Keywords:** *color, senses, painting*

### **Les couleurs**

L'œuvre de Nicolas Bouvier se distingue par ses particularités et réussit à mettre devant le public une panoplie variée et intéressante des procédés d'expression et de moyens de transmettre ses sentiments les plus coïncés, ses pensées les plus intimes, secrètes, ses perceptions et ses convictions les plus sincères.

Pour Nicolas Bouvier les couleurs se constituent dans un instrument d'expression, dans un canal de communication qui réussit à préciser clairement ses concepts et les connotations, même les dénnotations attribuées à différents objets concepts qu'il veut valoriser. Les couleurs de point de vue affectif représentent la stimulation des sens, la joie des yeux, une richesse de sentiments et d'émotions.

Nicolas Bouvier dans *l'Usage du monde*, dès qu'il fut arrivé à Téhéran, évoque la faune locale en focalisant son intérêt et son regard sur les platanes uniques qui sont particuliers, qui dépassent le connu du narrateur même et de tout être vivant, ainsi l'attribut de ces arbres-là est : « *comme on n'en voit qu'en songe* ».

Le narrateur voyageur continue l'exposition de ses expériences sensorielles et visuelles en plongeant sur la couleur bleue: « *Et surtout il y a le bleu. Il faut venir jusqu'ici pour découvrir le bleu. Dans les Balkans déjà l'œil s'y prépare ; en Grèce, il domine mais il fait l'important : un bleu agressif, remuant comme la mer, qui laisse encore percer l'affirmation, les projets, une sorte d'intransigeance. Tandis qu'ici ! Les portes des boutiques, les licous des chevaux, les bijoux de quatre sous : partout cet inimitable bleu persan qui allège le cœur, qui tient l'Iran à bout de bras, qui s'est éclairé et patiné avec le temps comme s'éclairait la palette d'un grand peintre.* »<sup>1</sup>

*Le bleu* dépasse son sens dénnotatif, *le bleu* dans l'œuvre de Bouvier acquiert des connotations qui dépassent la sphère de l'habituel, du connu, cette couleur ne constitue plus *le bleu* que nous, tous, connaissons, il cesse d'être une simple couleur parmi les autres et atteint, reçoit d'autres valeurs, ainsi, dans cette circonstance narrative, *le bleu* ... « *il domine (...) il fait l'important* ».

*Le bleu* devient un point d'attraction, l'essentiel, le but unique d'un voyage. Le narrateur / sujet-voyageur adresse l'invitation à ses lecteurs d'y venir pour le voir tout comme quelqu'un nous invite à visiter un musée célèbre pour découvrir, regarder ou

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<sup>1</sup> N. Bouvier, *L'Usage du monde*, La Découverte, Paris, 1985, p. 214

admirer un chef-d'œuvre. *Le bleu* représente un monde, un espace géographique, même une société. Tout est *bleu* : « *Les portes des boutiques, les licous des chevaux, les bijoux de quatre sous* », mais il y a un *bleu* tout spécial qui touche le cœur de ceux qui le regarde « *cet inimitable bleu persan qui allège le cœur* ». On remarque notamment la personnification du *bleu* qui est « *un bleu agressif* », qui « *allège le cœur* » et qui « *tient l'Iran à bout de bras* ».

*Le bleu* est comparé avec la mer « *remuant comme la mer* » et il est intégré dans l'art « *s'est éclairé ... comme s'éclaire la palette d'un grand peintre* ».

Tout au long de son œuvre, on remarque la faiblesse de Bouvier pour les couleurs, il se perd dans la description de la couleur comme dans la description d'un paysage féerique : « *L'émerveillement que j'ai éprouvé dans le sud iranien en découvrant ces harmonies de couleurs, qui sont très douces et comme usées, était doublé du fait que je venais de passer sept mois à Tabriz, dans une sorte de bichromie noir blanc. Il y avait les paletots noirs de ces ruffians, la neige, et ici et là un peu de bleu dans les mosaïques des mosquées à moitié ruinées.* »<sup>1</sup>

La préoccupation, la faiblesse et la sensibilité de Nicolas Bouvier pour les couleurs sont évidentes et clairement exprimées, mais ce qui fascine le lecteur, c'est la manière dans laquelle il expose sa vision sur les couleurs. Bouvier s'érige dans un maître qui maîtrise d'une manière exceptionnelle son art, ainsi il réussit à donner l'impression à son lecteur de se trouver devant une peinture soigneusement conçue et peinte minutieusement qui se propose de transposer celui qui la regarde dans un monde idéal, parfaite, où tout est en ordre et en harmonie ce qui fait penser à Charles de Baudelaire, à son chef-d'œuvre *Invitation au Voyage* où « *..., tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté / Luxe, calme et volupté* ».

Bouvier s'assume le chapeau d'un peintre bien intelligent, habile, perspicace, même emphatique qui expose certaines images sous la forme des peintures, des peintures qui font le lecteur vivre, éprouver des sensations uniques, inconnues, d'un autre monde et innombrables.

Même son jardin apparaît comme un œuvre d'art, comme un espace unique et merveilleux. La manière dans laquelle Bouvier choisit d'organiser, d'embellir son jardin est tout à fait originale et profondément, minutieusement étudiée. Bouvier dit qu'il plante des fleurs dans son jardin en choisissant avec soin les couleurs et en pensent au tableau qui sera créé par les couleurs des fleurs qui vont apparaître : « *Quand je plante des dahlias en mai, je pense déjà à la chromographie du jardin en septembre.* »<sup>2</sup>

Bouvier apparaît comme le peintre habile, même génial de son œuvre, en générale et des images qu'il a insérées dans son œuvre, en particulier. Bouvier se présente devant ses lecteurs à la fois comme le peintre de son œuvre, du monde qu'il déploie devant son public et le peintre de son jardin, ce qui lui offre l'opportunité de mettre sous les yeux de ses lecteurs des images séduisantes, uniques, nouvelles et provoquantes qui réussissent à susciter l'intérêt pour la lecture et le désir du lecteur d'en découvrir d'autres, ce qui gère la mise en œuvre de tous les sens et la stimulation de l'imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Bouvier, *L'Echappée belle*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> N. Bouvier, *L'Echappée belle*, op. cit., p. 235

### Les sens

Dans ce voyage où le narrateur est avant tout un voyageur et après il se constitue dans l'écrivain ou le photographe de son voyage, les sens reçoivent d'autres dimensions et d'autres perceptions au-delà des valeurs, des perceptions habituelles, quotidiennes.

L'odeur et le goût apparaissent dans l'espace sensoriel de l'œuvre de Nicolas Bouvier, associés, le plus souvent, à une autre composante du milieu environnant. Dans ce contexte, il est important de retenir et de souligner les odeurs de latrines, de fumée, de melon : « *l'odeur mûre et brûlée du continent indien* »<sup>1</sup> et le goût qui n'occupe pas une place privilégiée parmi les préférences, les aspects observés, analysés par le narrateur-voyager qui reconnaît, quant à lui, qu' : « *une indifférence quasi-totale à la gastronomie a fait de moi un voyageur très endurant.* »<sup>2</sup>

Dans ce voyage qui s'avère à être initiatique, durant lequel le voyageur se construit et se déconstruit, se fait et se défait, le narrateur – voyageur / le sujet - voyageur semble être plutôt préoccupé par l'ambiance, il s'intéresse surtout au degré d'amitié qui unit les convives, aux gestes, aux preuves d'humanité, de solidarité et d'empathie qui se manifestent durant une réunion des gens.

Dans *L'Usage du monde*, le sujet – voyageur raconte le moment où un meunier a besoin et attend de l'aide pour replacer une pierre. C'est le contexte idéal pour Bouvier – voyageur de détailler, de décrire un moment de convivialité. Ainsi, le sujet-voyageur peint le tableau de la reconnaissance du meunier. Pour récompenser les gens qui l'ont aidé, le meunier étend « *des peaux sur l'herbe autour d'une corbeille de tomates et d'oignons, et remplit de raki une cafetière d'émail bleu. Nous avons commencé à faire ripaille, assis sur nos talons, pendant qu'Eyoub, le luth entre les cuisses, les veines du cou gonflées par l'effort, nous berçait de sanglots suraigus. Il faisait bon. Pendant les pauses, on entendait soupiner au cœur du moulin ; c'était le chaudron où le chamois mitonnait sur un lit d'aubergines qui lâchait vers le ciel d'automne une bouffée de vapeur.* »<sup>3</sup> Ce tableau nourrit la curiosité visuelle des lecteurs qui s'imaginent le paysage et la richesse des plats, mais en même temps, il satisfait également le côté spirituel du lecteur qui essaie de saisir l'atmosphère de l'événement.

Le narrateur - voyageur relate avec un plaisir particulier ce moment de convivialité et offre des détails qui animent le lecteur et qui lui suscitent l'imagination, l'intérêt et la curiosité. Même si le repas s'achève tard, ils profitent de ce contexte et passent encore de temps ensemble, ce qui prouve l'attention et l'importance que Bouvier accorde à de tels moments d'union, d'amitié des convives : « *Le chamois nettoyé jusqu'à l'os, on s'est tous allongé dans le trèfle pour une de ces siestes où l'on sent la terre vous pousser dans le dos.* »<sup>4</sup>

Dans le même œuvre, Bouvier raconte un autre moment de convivialité tenu par un Grec, à Zahidan, dans une auberge : « *Une pastèque, des œufs, un pied de mouton, de la bière et du thé. La cuiller tournait dans le verre, brassant la fatigue avec les souvenirs. J'oubliais délibérément les menaces de la piste de Quetta. Je cétais aux sirènes. Petit débit d'alcool perdu dans une province d'Asie, alimenté par camions ou*

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<sup>1</sup>, N. Bouvier, *L'Usage du monde*, La Découverte, Paris, 1985, p. 349

<sup>2</sup> N. Bouvier, *L'Echappée belle*, op. cit., p. 41

<sup>3</sup>N. Bouvier, *L'Usage du monde*, La Découverte, Paris, 1985, p. 61

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 63

*trirèmes, qui ressemblaient sans doute à celui qu'autrefois Jason avait dû tenir en Crimée. »*<sup>1</sup>

Bien que Nicolas Bouvier présente en détails les nourritures qui sont servies au repas : « *Une pastèque, des œufs, un pied de mouton, de la bière et du thé* », il ne s'arrête pas, il ne met pas en discussion le goût de la nourriture, ce qui compte pour lui ce n'est pas le goût des plats, mais le fait d'être ensemble avec les autres, se réjouir de la présence des autres. On peut même affirmer que le sujet-narrateur est intéressé à son parcours spirituel, aux expériences vécues, aux aspects qui lui enrichissent l'âme, qui lui forment, cisèlent le caractère, l'expression des sentiments qui lui apportent la sagesse, si recherchée, par toute personne préoccupée de sa mission dans le monde.

Ces rencontres favorisent les connaissances de différentes cultures, habitudes, impliquent des actions faites ensemble, la collaboration, l'échange des pratiques traditionnelles, la fête de lien et surtout du lien social et facilitent l'interaction entre différentes cultures, modes de vie, traditions, coutumes.

La priorité du voyageur est clairement le voyage et « les fruits » qu'il peut cueillir durant ce voyage, pas les plats, notamment le goût des plats, le voyageur se nourrit l'âme à travers ces rencontres, ces moments de convivialité.

Le sujet-voyageur attribue au repas une signification distinguée, en franchissant les limites de l'ordinaire, les repas ne représentent que les prémisses pour offrir à l'âme la nourriture spirituelle dont il a besoin : « *A midi : un oignon, un poivron, pain bis et fromage de chèvre, un verre de vin blanc et une tasse de café turc amer et onctueux. Le soir les brochettes de mouton et le petit luxe d'un coup de pruneau sous les sorbiers élèvent un peu le prix du repas. En ajoutant les excellentes cigarettes locales et la poste, c'est la vie pour deux, à sept cent dinars par jour. »*<sup>2</sup>

Ces moments de convivialité ont lieu tantôt durant des périodes d'abondance que durant des périodes d'austérité : « *Nous en étions maintenant réduits à l'épi de maïs grillé ou à la gargote de mauvaise mine. Sur la rive d'Asie elles ne manquaient pas, ni l'occasion d'y attraper des infections foudroyantes. »*<sup>3</sup>

Chez Bouvier, quelles que soient les circonstances, les repas se constituent dans des moments de vraie détente, de remerciement sincère, même de connexion au mouvement du monde, aux mystères de l'univers.

Nicolas Bouvier choisit de déguster une bouteille, après avoir réussi à échapper à un accident, ainsi il se propose de déguster, même savourer « *le plaisir de mâchouiller paisiblement dans le noir, entre l'ombre seigneuriale de la mort et la vie de seigneur que la vie nous avait faite* ». <sup>4</sup>

Les repas sont conçus comme des moments qui privilégient les expressions d'amitié et le partage d'impressions, d'expériences, sont pris pour des moments de méditation situés hors du temps physique qui nous sortent, nous éloignent du quotidien et qui nous fait rêver, espérer à découvrir les mystères du monde, l'essence de l'univers.

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<sup>1</sup> *Idem*, p. 251

<sup>2</sup> *Idem* p. 66

<sup>3</sup> N. Bouvier, *L'Usage du monde*, La Découverte, Paris, 1985, p. 78

<sup>4</sup> Bouvier Nicolas, *Routes et deroutes*, p. 87



## ***JEAN COCTEAU'S LETTER TO THE AMERICANS: AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER***

**Corina Amelia GEORGESCU\***

**Abstract:** *Letter to the Americans is a short piece of writing in which Cocteau narrates his short encounter with the Americans and especially with certain aspects of their culture and civilization. He chooses to present America by means of a fictional letter in which he writes down what he can notice while being in New York. Discovering the Other cannot be done without reference to his own culture, the French one. He implicitly or explicitly compares and/or contrasts two different cultures belonging to two different worlds: a new one and an old one. Cocteau is amazed by a number of aspects that he warmly, but still objectively describes.*

**Keywords:** *America, Americans, culture, travel writing*

### **1. Jean Cocteau – life, work and artistic influences**

Born in 1889, Jean Cocteau came from a cultivated Parisian family. His father was a lawyer and committed suicide when Cocteau was only 9 years old a fact which might have left traces upon the young man's later life and carrier. After attending a famous high-school in Paris, le Lycée Condorcet, he will gradually become known by the writers and artists of the time, among which one may mention Proust, Gide, Apollinaire, Picasso or Modigliani. His life and work are certainly influenced by what may be called "decisive encounters" [Lemaître, 1994: 204]; one may mention Diaghilev (with the Russian ballets), Stravinsky, Roland Garros or Picasso. He became little by little an important exponent of what was currently called *avant-garde*. Cocteau's friendship with Raymond Radiguet and generally his way of overtly showing his homosexuality as well as his presence among the French and German intellectuals meeting in Paris under the Nazi occupation or his naming Stalin "the only great politician of the era" [Arnaud, 2016: 745] attracted criticism from his contemporaries making him look like a controversial personality. Despite everything, he becomes, in 1955, one of the members of the French Academy and is internationally acknowledged by being rewarded with the Legion of Honor or by being invited to become a member of the German Academy (Berlin) or of the American Academy. His activity in the cinematographic field makes him become the Honorary President of the Cannes Film Festival.

Cocteau's natural curiosity and talent lead him to experimenting different artistic forms having as a result a very diverse work:

« Cocteau exploite tous les registres du réel et du surréel et tous les modes d'expression: il redécouvre les mythes orphiques de la Grèce, se jette dans un mysticisme velléitaire [...] et compose une œuvre dont la diversité extrême ne manque jamais de faire place au sortilège ; on y trouve des romans, des pièces, des ballets, des films, des poèmes enfin. » [Lemaître, 1994: 204]

His work becomes a mixture of poetry, novels, plays, literary / art criticism, cinema (as a director, scriptwriter, director of photography) and visual arts (drawing or other forms of art); among his famous literary works, one may mention *Les Enfants terribles* (novel, 1929), *La Machine infernale* (play, 1934), *Orphée* (play, 1929), *Les*

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*Parents terribles* (play, 1938) which can be placed near his best known films: *Les Parents terribles*, *The Beauty and the Beast* or *The Testament of Orpheus*. His autobiographical pieces – *La Difficulté d'être* et *Le Journal d'un inconnu* - are perhaps less known, but they are extremely important for those who want to have a complete picture of Jean Cocteau. It is also in the category of his less advertised pieces of work that fall *Mon Premier Voyage: Tour du Monde en 80 jours*, a travel reportage that he made for the newspaper Paris-Soir or the *Lettre aux Américains*. In fact, it is this last piece that we are interested in.

## 2. Cocteau's *Letter to the Americans*

In the winter of 1949, Jean Cocteau travels to New York to give a speech at the screening of his latest film, *The Eagle with Two Heads*. It is on this occasion that he spends about 20 days in the city, where he is welcome by the New York's artistic community. At the time, he is seen as one of the most prominent representatives of the avant-garde and a model for the American artists of the time. Despite the little time spent in the United States of America, he has the opportunity to know some peculiar aspects of the American culture and life that he cannot stand comparing and contrasting them with his own culture, the French one.

Flying to France on a night flight and being still under the influence of what he had seen in New York, Cocteau chooses a less habitual form of expressing his beliefs and opinions, namely what he himself called *a letter*, *Lettre aux Américains* or *Letter to the Americans* as it was translated in 2022, when published for the first time in English, more than 70 years after it was published in French (1949).

As mentioned on the American publisher's website (New Directions Publishing Corporation: <https://www.ndbooks.com/book/letter-to-the-americans/>), it is an essay comparing two cultures in point of their values and underlying America's potential and risks:

“With his unmistakable prose and graceful wit, he compares and contrasts French and American culture: the different values they place on art, literature, liberty, psychology, and dreams. Cocteau sees the incredibly buoyant hopes in America's promise, while at the same time warning of the many ills that the nation will have to confront—its hypocrisy, sexism, racism, and hegemonic aspirations—in order to realize this potential.”

It remains undoubtedly one of the texts that stress the idea that “the departure point of a work of art is in the world” [Bloju, 2011:11]. In spite of the name that Cocteau chooses for this essay (*letter*), it represents the direct consequence of his travel to the United States of America, and more precisely to New York, that is of a real travel proving not only genuinely inspiring for him, but also an opportunity of his thinking more of the American culture as opposed to the French one. Cocteau's short writing may be seen as a kind of bridge between two cultures and two civilizations, one representing tradition and the other, more recent, being the expression of modernity.

In order to better understand Cocteau's *Letter to the Americans*, one should try to include it within the frame of a literary pattern.

## 3. *Travel Writing*

People have always been curious to find out new things and especially new things about territories which situated outside their common environment. This desire has led them to discover new lands, to reveal hidden truths or even to contradict

opinions transmitted from a generation to another previously thought of as general truths or even to understand their own culture better. The result of what they used to write down during these expeditions is generally known by nowadays readers as *travel writing*. And while for ordinary people the concept involves no misunderstanding, critics have long been arguing over its definition as well as over its general features.

*Travel writing* is a term belonging to two different fields of human activities: travelling and writing and this is the reason why it is usually placed in the middle of **cross-disciplinary research**, almost creating what Nicholas Thomas [Thomas: 1993, 19] considered “a postdisciplinary humanities field, in which histories, cultural studies, cultural politics, narratives and ethnographies all intersect and are all open to being challenged”. Summarizing, travel writing should be seen on a more general level as a **cultural activity** establishing a relationship between the traveller-writer’s own culture and the “Other”’s culture, that is of the visited place and, on a more particular level, as a **literary activity**, if it is seen by means of the final product, that is the book. As far as our article’s needs, both of these aspects are suitable to be approached. Most of the critics’ opinions emphasize the idea that *travel writing* is related to “transition” and “change” [Hooper *et al.* :2004, 2] or to “déplacement” [Bloju, 2011: 9]<sup>1</sup>, but Hooper *et al.* [Hooper *et al.* :2004, 2] are right when asserting that “travel writing remains a loosely defined body of literature.” This assumption is supported by the fact that some critics consider travel writing as:

“a subspecies of memoir in which autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, freer than the reader, and thus every such book, even when it depicts its speaker trapped in Boa Vista, is an implicit celebration of freedom”. [Fussel: 1980, 203]

The direct consequence of including it in the category of the *memoirs* is the use of the **first-person singular** arising from the visitor’s encounter with the unknown and from the way he perceives / feels this reality rather from the way it really is. On the other hand, this encounter brings along facts belonging to a period of his/her life, becoming thus a reason for its being considered as an “autobiographical narrative”. It is exactly within the frame of this narrative that its author may include what Hooper calls “historical and geographical digression”: “Some writers employ memoir and historical and geographical digression within the narrative structure of a walk through the countryside”. [Hooper: 2004, 2]

By means of the **digression**, the narrator provides the reader with information on the historical background of the visited places to make him better understand the “Other” or presents geographical elements which might help the reader imagine the place which is being described, even though it remains inaccessible to him/her at the time of the narration.

Contrasting the writer’s cultural identity with the Other’s cultural identity in the process of travel writing creates the background for asserting different ideas and opinions about foreign cultures which transforms the narrative into an essay. Thus, the text turns into a “useful medium for the interrogation of ethnocentrism and for the displacement or estrangement of received ideas about ‘other’ cultures” [Hooper: 2004,

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<sup>1</sup> « Tout voyage, quelle que soit son but – voyage de plaisir, voyage de recherche, voyage administratif ou politique, voyage de libération ou voyage tout simplement, sans un but précis – suppose un déplacement dans l’espace. »

10], acquiring the dimension of an **essay**. Seen from this light, travel writing becomes not only a way of discovering a different country, but also one of better understanding one's own as "Identity is largely constituted through the process of othering." [Trinh T. Minh-ha: 1994, 15]

Exploring unknown territories as well as meeting people belonging to different cultures will give the traveller the opportunity of stepping aside for a moment and allowing himself / herself what one may call a **self-analysis** which inevitably enables the narrator to "construct" himself:

"this process of Othering is seen as an almost necessary component of many early modern travel accounts, as the subject constructs himself – frequently as an English, Protestant, Colonizing Male – in contrast to the natives of Eastern Europe, Persia, North America, and the East Indies." [Hooper: 2004, 5]

or to "re-invent" himself ("Facing the "exotic" then, became a test for these early modern writers, but also a wonderful opportunity for self- (and national) (re)invention, a way of encountering, and then countering, difference" [Hooper: 2004, 5]) in the context of a new culture which urges him/her to reassess the realities that he/she is familiar with when discovering new ones.

A characteristic openly appearing when analysing the content of travel writing is **its versatility** as it gives the reader the opportunity to discover a mixture of literary genres, a multitude of historical and geographical backgrounds as well as different fields and perspectives; thus, this type of text may be characterized [Hooper: 2004, 10; Youngs:1994, 3] through its "absorption of different narrative styles and genres, the manner in which it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters, and its potential for interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives. [...] travel writing [can] be regarded as a relatively open-ended and versatile form."

The common characteristic of all the texts belonging to travel writing, despite their heterogeneity, is their **main theme which is always related to travel**. When analysing these texts as well as their characteristics, some critics claim, given the texts' diversity in point of form and content, that "the travel writing genre seems refractory to any definition that does not also take into account the medium which conveys the text". [Calzati, 2015:153-168].

#### 4. *Letter to the Americans – a reminder of a nation's potential*

"Never before translated into English, *Letter to the Americans* remains as timely and urgent as when it was first published in France over seventy years ago." [New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2022] If the letter is mainly addressed to the American people, the French publisher remarks that except for rendering Cocteau's voyage impressions about the United States, the book also gives the reader the opportunity to find out more not only about America, but also about Cocteau himself: "Au detour d'une page, Cocteau apostrophe les Américains, leur parle de dignité ou de décadence, de psychanalyse et de statistiques, du luxe et de la reconnaissance, de littérature et de cinéma." [Grasset&Fasquelle, 1949: 2] The letter is rather a pretext allowing the writer to compare and contrast the old and the new world i.e. France and America.

The beginning of the letter coincides with what the ancient rhetoric meant by *captatio benevolentiae*, through the direct manner in which the narrator addresses the readers, that is the Americans; he also sets the context of his letter: he is on the plane, coming back from the United States to France, after having spent twenty days in New York. The subjective perception of the time is easily noted as the twenty days seem to the narrator as if they were twenty years, this impression being caused by the intensity of what he lived while visiting New York:

” I’m writing you from the plane that’s bringing me back to France. I spent twenty days in New York and I did so much and saw so many people that I can’t tell if I visited your home for twenty days or twenty years.” [Cocteau, 2022: 9]

Writing on the plane suggests a certain impatience coming directly from his desire of accurately rendering what he saw, without omitting relevant elements, without fearing that some of his feelings may fade or prevent him from noting what is important. It is a way of being sure that nothing of what he felt, found out or lived does not alter or does not interfere with other impressions that he might have when arriving in France.

For Cocteau, America identifies with New York as he considers that the city reflects “immense territories whose clocks don’t correspond, where the night of some is the day of others, where some are awake while others sleep.” [Cocteau, 2022: 9] The writer tries to offer his readers, either Americans, or French, or belonging to other nationalities, a description of the city of New York seen from **different points of view (cultural, social or even economic)**, focusing on the potential that the Americans have in different fields and on what and how they may become in order to improve and better contribute to the world civilization.

**The paradox seems** to be a modus vivendi in New York: “In New York, everything is paradoxical. You need the new but want nothing to change.” [Cocteau, 2022: 11] Explaining what this “cultural paradox” means leads Cocteau to using a series of oppositions: “innovation”/” conservation”, “haste”/” waiting”, “failure”/” success”. Perhaps one of the best examples of this last opposition is the cinema which requires instant success:

“Even if painting, sculpture, music, and poetry can wait, only triumphing after the death of the person that they convey, a film can’t wait, costs too much to wait, and must succeed monstrously on the very first shot.” [Cocteau, 2022: 11]

One of the main features that Cocteau remarked while being in New York is an **openness** which can be noticed everywhere: in the way in which people behave, but also in the way that the architectural space is organized: “New York is open, a wide-open city. Her arms are open, her faces are open, her hearts are open, open streets, doors, windows. This creates a euphoria for the visitor, a current of air where ideas can’t ripen and whirl instead like dead leaves.” [Cocteau, 2022:13] The narrator symbolically attributes this characteristic to the city, while it stands for its inhabitants. He associates a type of impatience with the **crave for novelty**. The latter one is transposed by a revolt against tradition and a passion for anything new which seems to be awarded the status of “being canonized” as if it were a kind of sacred element. But the faster it appears, the faster it disappears as once it manifests itself turns into old and needs to be replaced by something else.

“I repeat: You refuse to wait and to keep waiting. In New York, everyone arrives ahead of time to the meeting. Tradition revolts you, as does the new. Your ideal would be an instantaneous tradition. The new is immediately canonized. From this minute it ceases to exist. You classify it, you label it, and, since you don’t permit artists to experiment, you demand that they repeat themselves and you replace them when they bore you. This is how you kill flies.” [Cocteau, 2022:13]

Another value praised by Americans is **extravagance**. A piece of evidence supporting this idea is the attitude of the journalists working for *Life Magazine* who asked Cocteau to be taken some “eccentric photographs”, in spite of his reluctance, trying to convince him by explaining that the readers were interested in this type of photos. At the same time, they were afraid that the text might not be suitable to the pictures, another paradox that Cocteau notices in the Americans’ attitude:

“*Life Magazine* had pleaded to take a series of eccentric photographs of me. When I told the journalists that neither my age, nor my position as a poet (that is to say, a laborer), gave me the right to let them take eccentric photographs of me, they replied that it was customary and that their readers were solely interested in such photographs.” [Cocteau, 2022:15]

Cocteau differentiates between the genuine American people and the social class of the rich people, noticing the gap which artificially appears inside the same people, between different social classes. This gap is not only a gap between the rich and the poor Americans, but also between America and Europe: “I’m talking about the world of money and immediate return, I’m talking about the gold curtain that is as hard as the iron curtain, the gold curtain that separates America from America, and America from Europe.” [Cocteau, 2022:17] This symbolic separation is caused by a thirst for money which originates in **the contempt for misery**.

The artistic environment also reflects a gap between the producer and his public; the producer considers the public unable to fully understand deep works of art; therefore, he does not make any effort to educate this public offering them only what he considers acceptable. Art seems to be shown to the public only after it is “arranged” which leads to **a lack of authenticity**, especially in the artistic field where Hollywood imposes the rules. This lack of authenticity determines Cocteau to directly address the Americans whom he considers a young and honest people who has succeeded in preserving his childhood. This innocence may be the premise for the authenticity he requires from them, but also for their giving up the superficial way of thinking and replacing it with a deep manner of analysing reality, filtering it through their own eyes and not through the manipulative media interpretations. Cocteau stresses more the inner analysis that the Americans should use, than the one they direct to the other people. He uses metaphors in order to focus on the opposition between superficial and deep manner of seeing the surrounding environment, as he gives a suggestive example of an encounter during which the people are focused not on the mutual conversational exchange, but on the drinks, which are served.

“A people who preserved their childhood. A people young and honest. A people in whom the lifeblood circulates. Disentangle yourselves. Question others less and question yourselves more. Confide in your friends. Don’t content yourself with those encounters where drinks are served but nothing is

said. Don't disorient yourselves with vain activities. Don't surrender yourself to the lethal vertigo of radio and television. Television encourages the mind to stop chewing, to gulp down soft, predigested food. But the mind has robust teeth. Chew things with its robust teeth. Don't let them only serve as the ornamental smiles of the stars." [Cocteau, 2022:19]

Cocteau urges the Americans to think by themselves without being influenced by the media; he uses a suggestive figurative vocabulary made of terms belonging to a isotopy of eating: "chewing", "gulp down", "pre-digested food", "teeth". They need to give up taking for granted everything the media offer and to analyse the facts and the opinions presented by their own minds. The appeal to the genuine friends may be seen as an appeal to France as the text goes on with drawing the attention upon the exchange between the United States and France which should be beneficial for both of the countries.

Cocteau sees France and the United States as being complementary: while the Americans are preoccupied with automatization, the French focus more on the human being. He is **grateful for the way** in which he was welcomed by the American public as he felt as if he had been their "friend" [Cocteau, 2022:24]. He is astonished as he cannot see gossip, at least "on display" [Cocteau, 2022:24]. Moreover, he is amazed by the **kindness** that everybody manifests towards him, especially when he goes on the stage to present his movie, *The Eagle with Two Heads*, and, in spite of his English (which he considers too poor) and the public meets him warmly.

Being in New York enables the writer to notice the **city architecture**: "I felt such a lightness of air where the skyscrapers hang their tulle and erect their hives flowing with golden honey. I repeat, everything is wide open in New York." [Cocteau, 2022:24] The description he offers the reader is a poetic one: the skyscrapers seem to have a fine figure coming down from the sky like a "tulle" and look like some hives. The metaphor may be explained both by the exterior of the buildings and by the resemblance between the bees and the people who are inside the skyscrapers. The taxis in the streets become a part of a sacred procession which is presented by Cocteau using terms belonging to the word field of religion ("procession", "incensed", "mysterious vapours"). In point of the **climate**, New York is a city of oppositions as "the wind, the snow, the sun, the blue sky alternate at full speed. You're overwhelmed by the cold or the heat." [Cocteau, 2022:25]

The Americans seem to **dissimulate** their genuine feelings as if they were afraid to show them openly:

"You graze the real world. Your sects, your clandestine religions, your phantoms, your fevers, your anguish, your disquiet, your crimes, and even your dread of Harlem's beautiful dances, reveal your desire. And yet you are ashamed of it. You hide it. So you sniff out your desire in blurry spectacles that nourish you in secret." [Cocteau, 2022:31].

Cocteau trusts **the Americans'** and he thinks that they are the ones able to save "the old world", "the human dignity", but in order to do it, they need to become aware that meanings should be looked for at a deep level and not at a superficial level; thus, they should not conceive art as a way of having fun or of being distracted, but a type of priesthood: "For such a task you'll need to shake yourselves out of it, to wake yourselves up, to become conscious. You can no longer consider art as a distraction, but instead as a priesthood." [Cocteau, 2022:32] The most important thing that the Americans should be careful with is the depth of the human being: "Be attentive to the

profound lineage of beings, more than to their endeavors, which only reveal fragments.” [Cocteau, 2022:34]

**The importance of cultural exchanges** is underlined by Cocteau who explains this need by a simple example: France is interested in American authors ignored by their compatriots, while some people in New York know better the French habits than the American latest fashion:” France is exclusively interested in your books, in passionately reading the writers who you hardly esteem; and I know of New Yorkers who are ignorant of recent American fashion trends that are already part of our customs.” [Cocteau, 2022:36] For Cocteau, the only valid way to save a nation is neither by guns, nor by fortune; it can be saved only by the “minority of those who think” [Cocteau, 2022:38]; he includes in this category the poets and the people working in the field of the cinema, subtly and sadly remarking that the direction towards which the world is led, that is the primate of the material over the spiritual: “The world expires. It doesn’t think anymore; it spends.”<sup>1</sup> [Cocteau, 2022:38]

**The status of the woman** is an important social issue and Cocteau approaches it by comparing it in the United States of America and in France. In France, women pass from the status of being a “tool” to the one of an “art object” in 1900. On the other hand, New York sees women in different postures: as an “art object”, as a way through which men show how rich they are, as idols or as sportive girls.

One of the differences between France and the United States resides in the fact that in America, **the audience** may lead to the success of a play in spite of the journalists’ opinion.

**Disorder** is a concept approached in an opposed way in the two countries: in France, it allows creators such as Cocteau to approach everything in a movie and to make the best out of it, while the order existing in the USA is related to mechanics: “Manual labor was gracious and infinite. There was something for everyone. But manual labor disappeared. The machine supplanted it.” [Cocteau, 2022:44] If disorder should be replaced by “discipline, order, fear, comfort”, France would be lost. It would be impossible for France to aspire to a huge industry as its specific consists in “artisanship, invention, discovery, accident”. [Cocteau, 2022:47]

Cocteau notices the Americans’ **optimism** as opposed to his pessimism which is, according to his opinion, a form of optimism, too as the latter arises from the decadence:

“It’s quite ridiculous, as well, to speak of decadence on a land which results from decadence. In fact, light results from decomposition. As soon as a star ceases to be in a nebulous state grows old in some way), it decomposes and ignites. When the fire dies down and retreats inward, the star crusts over. In a state of decadence and decay, the land gives birth to life. The star swarms with vermin. That’s us.” [Cocteau, 2022:51,52]

The author concludes by explaining that he, as a free man, addresses the ones who are like him, but who expect to be seen as guilty even if they were complimented. Freedom is, for Cocteau, an important asset as he anticipates a future when everything is controlled (even the dreams!) and this type of control will be performed not by/through a psychiatrist, but by the police.

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<sup>1</sup> The original text in French is built on a subtle association between the verb “penser” (to think) and “dépenser” (to spend).



## 5. Conclusion

*Letter to the Americans* is a piece of writing reflecting the point of view that Cocteau expresses about the Americans, their way of being, of living, of perceiving culture. The French writer cannot help of taking his own country and culture as reference as they are the ones he knows the best. Being in the United States of America for a short time allows Cocteau to discover that they are on one hand the place where a people craving for novelty, being characterized by extravagance lives, and, on the other hand where he is met by kindness and where he feels that culture is perceived in a different way compared to the one he is accustomed to. Different from all his other writings, *Letter to the Americans* stands out, among all his other works, as an impressive and touching confession about the importance of the cultural awareness and about the communication between the peoples. It is through these aspects that he captivates the reader and arises his curiosity as Lemaître rightfully remarks: “Cocteau n’a guère évolué que par des nuances. Plus, exalté dans la période de formation de son art et de son langage, plus serein à l’approche de la vieillesse, il n’a jamais cessé de vouloir envoûter son lecteur ». [Lemaître, 1994: 204]

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## **LE GROTESQUE DU CORPS MALADE NOTHOMBIEN : L'OBÈSE**

**Arabella GOLUMBEANU\***

***Abstract:** Are the monstrous images that Nothomb creates to integrate his obese characters means to make people laugh? This is the first question we ask ourselves and we are going to answer it by analyzing the obese bodies of Melvin Mapple from *A Form of Life and Palamedes* and Bernadette from *Catilinaires*; three characters perceived as disturbing the ideal of body image in the Nothombian universe: thinness. This article proposes to make an analysis of the grotesque of the obese character of Nothombian and we will differentiate the male obese from the female obese.*

***Keywords:** grotesque, obese, body, sick*

Avant de parler du grotesque du corps nothombien ; dans ce cas de l'obèse ; il faut mentionner Amélie Nothomb et l'image qu'elle a construite autour d'elle.

Amélie Nothomb est une écrivaine française connue pour ses apparitions dans des émissions littéraires à la télévision. Elle a un style gothique marqué par des robes noires, du rouge à lèvres épais et des chapeaux extravagants. Ses histoires peuvent sembler simples mais ont un ton acide et une violence sous-jacente qui créent un sentiment d'attraction et de répulsion pour les lecteurs.

Nothomb utilise l'ombre de Dionysos pour représenter la dualité dans ses livres. Ses histoires peuvent passer de situations réalistes à des situations absurdes et incontrôlables, souvent marquées par de l'abjection, de l'horreur, de l'humiliation et d'autres interactions sadomasochistes. Elle combine une légèreté, un humour noir et des références littéraires et philosophiques savantes dans son style, créant ainsi une atmosphère de contes cruels. Les lecteurs s'attendent à ce que les protagonistes de ses histoires finissent toujours dans une situation déstabilisante.

Les personnages obèses dans l'univers de Nothomb peuvent être considérés comme grotesques et peuvent avoir différents objectifs. Cela peut inclure faire rire ou choquer pour mettre en évidence le caractère sublime des autres personnages. Cependant, cela dépend du contexte spécifique de chaque livre et de la façon dont le personnage obèse est représenté. Il est possible que Nothomb utilise les personnages obèses de différentes manières pour explorer différents thèmes et idées dans ses œuvres.

Nothomb représente différents types de corps dans ses histoires. Il y a le corps "réel" représenté dans le cerveau et le corps qui est considéré comme l'expression de notre volonté, la manifestation de nos intentions et le moyen par lequel nous intervenons et transformons le monde. (Petit J-L, 2003 : 140) Elle analyse et interprète les caractéristiques du corps dans ses œuvres, explorant différentes facettes et significations du corps humain.

Amélie Nothomb accorde une grande importance à l'apparence physique de ses personnages, ce qui permet de montrer leurs traits de caractère et de les rendre plus complexes. Elle traite également de la relation entre le corps et la nourriture, notamment l'anorexie et l'obésité, sujets qui lui tiennent à cœur étant donné qu'elle a elle-même été confrontée à des problèmes de santé mentale liés à la nourriture. Dans certains de ses romans, l'obésité extrême des personnages est utilisée pour introduire un corps

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choquant et pour donner un côté négatif à ces personnages, les transformant en bouffons pour ridiculiser et perturber les vies parfaites des autres.

Donc, nous parlons d'un désir de souligner le sublime de certains personnages en antithèse avec la répulsion des autres, dans ce cas, des obèses.

Nous allons analyser les corps obèses de Melvin Mapple d'*Une forme de vie* et de Palamède et Bernadette des *Catilinaires* ; trois personnages perçus comme perturbateurs de l'idéal de l'image corporelle dans l'univers nothombien : la minceur.

Comme nous l'avons mentionné dans une autre conférence, le personnage nothombien est codifié par sa corporalité, il « réagit à un imaginaire esthétique, social et éthique déterminé, étayé par des mythes et par des associations nées de la logique de son univers » (Bugnot, M.-A., 2017 : 105). Et il faut faire une distinction entre l'obèse masculin et l'obèse féminine et nous allons parler premièrement de l'obèse masculin.

*Une forme de vie* de Nothomb est un roman qui aborde la thématique de la guerre et de son impact sur les individus, en utilisant l'obésité de Melvin Mapple comme métaphore. Dans ce livre, le personnage de Melvin est présenté comme une victime de la guerre qui a saboté son propre corps pour échapper à la dure réalité qui l'entoure. Sa solitude totale et sa métamorphose physique reflètent les conséquences psychologiques de la guerre sur les personnes. Nothomb utilise l'obésité extrême de Melvin pour montrer la façon dont les traumatismes peuvent affecter le corps et la vie d'une personne, mettant en évidence la complexité et la profondeur des personnages dans son œuvre :

J'ai découvert la terreur. Il y a des gens courageux qui supportent, moi pas. Il y a des gens à qui ça coupe l'appétit, mais la plupart, dont moi, réagissent à l'opposé. On revient du combat choqué, éberlué d'être vivant, épouvanté, et la première chose qu'on fait après avoir changé de pantalon [...], c'est se jeter sur la bouffe. (Nothomb, A., 2010 : 11)

En effet, dans *Une forme de vie*, Nothomb utilise le personnage de Melvin Mapple pour explorer les conséquences psychologiques de la guerre sur un individu. Son obésité extrême est présentée comme une conséquence directe de ses expériences de guerre traumatisantes. Cependant, Nothomb utilise également ce trait pour mettre en évidence les contradictions et les paradoxes de la condition humaine. En ridiculisant le personnage par son obésité, elle crée un effet comique qui contraste avec la gravité des événements qu'il raconte. Le personnage de Melvin est ainsi à la fois tragique et grotesque, reflétant la dualité et les contradictions qui sont si souvent présentes dans l'univers nothombien.

En somme, le *rire créateur* de Nothomb est un moyen d'exprimer la complexité de ses personnages en utilisant la comédie pour les montrer sous un jour différent, souvent tragique, et mettre en avant leur humanité malgré leur apparence physique ou leurs actions. C'est une technique qui permet à l'auteure de creuser plus profondément les thèmes qu'elle souhaite explorer dans ses romans.

Le corps obèse dans l'univers nothombien peut être considéré comme un moyen pour l'auteure de montrer les conséquences négatives d'une obsession pour la nourriture et le plaisir. La graisse peut être vue comme une source de souffrance et de doute quant à l'identité des personnages obèses. Nothomb utilise ce corps pour mettre en évidence les thèmes de la morale, la culpabilité et la solitude dans ses histoires.

La graisse de Melvin est considérée comme un refuge et une protection contre les horreurs de la guerre et les insécurités de la vie. Cependant, cela le rend également

plus vulnérable aux jugements sociaux négatifs sur les personnes obèses. Il est vu comme irresponsable et peu digne d'amour, ce qui ajoute à sa tragédie personnelle.

En outre, le corps obèse peut être considéré comme un reflet de la société, de ses valeurs, de ses normes. Amélie Nothomb utilise cet aspect pour critiquer les stéréotypes et les préjugés sociaux qui peuvent avoir un impact négatif sur les personnes obèses. Elle montre comment le corps peut être un moyen de s'exprimer et de communiquer des émotions et des idées, et comment la société peut en même temps le réduire à un simple objet de répulsion.

En visitant Melvin, la narratrice découvre la réalité de l'obésité et comprend que la graisse n'est pas simplement une maladie, mais un symptôme de ses insécurités et de ses peurs. Elle réalise que Melvin est plus qu'un simple corps obèse et qu'il ne mérite pas de respect et de compassion. Elle ressent une profonde empathie pour lui et sa situation difficile, et elle se rend compte que sa propre répulsion envers l'obésité était injustifiée. À la fin de sa visite, la narratrice se sent transformée et plus compréhensive envers les personnes obèses.

En allant à la rencontre de Melvin, Amélie Nothomb veut démontrer qu'elle est capable de transcender les apparences et d'aller au-delà des jugements sociaux. Elle veut aider Melvin à surmonter ses défis personnels et émotionnels en lui montrant de l'empathie et de la compréhension. L'obésité de Melvin représente un obstacle important pour le personnage, mais Amélie voit au-delà de cela et veut aider Melvin à se sentir aimé et accepté malgré cette maladie. Le soldat Melvin Mapple est donc le symbole d'une génération qui a été confrontée aux horreurs de la guerre et qui doit faire face à ses conséquences physiques et émotionnelles. Amélie Nothomb, à travers ce personnage, souligne la nécessité de montrer de la compassion envers les personnes confrontées à des défis personnels et de dépasser les préjugés sociaux.

En somme, le personnage de Melvin Mapple représente une réflexion sur les problèmes de l'identité, de l'acceptation de soi, de la dépendance aux apparences et de la différence. Amélie Nothomb montre comment la société juge les personnes en surpoids, ce qui peut les pousser à mentir pour se sentir acceptées. Au final, la fin choquante révèle la vérité sur la vie de Melvin et montre l'importance de la sincérité envers soi-même et les autres.

Un autre obèse - perturbateur de l'image paradisiaque du couple Emile/Juliette – est Palamède qui envahit l'univers parfait de ses voisins avec sa graisse et son mutisme. Il est un monstre qui revient toujours à la même heure et qui non seulement met le héros, Emile, devant ses épreuves, mais le transforme et lui transforme la perception du bien et du mal. Palamède a le rôle de dévoiler le vrai caractère d'Emile parce qu'il se sent menacé par celui-ci et considère légitime sa décision de tuer le voisin : « [j]e l'avais d'abord cru inactif parce qu'il restait des heures à rien faire. Ce n'était qu'une apparence : en réalité, il était en train de me détruire. » (Nothomb, A., *op.cit.* : 84)

Qualifié de « masse inerte » (Nothomb, A., 2010 : 25), de « molosse » (*ibidem* : 80) et de « mufle » (*ibidem* : 96) Palamède est bestialisé et il a un comportement passif-agressif : il est fermé, insatisfait en permanence, sans pouvoir expliquer ou démontrer pourquoi il ressent cela. Il ne veut pas communiquer, et quand il le fait, il ne met en évidence que les aspects négatifs de l'interaction.

Jugé d'imbécile, Palamède fait partie d'une catégorie des personnages qui n'est pas si rencontrée dans l'univers nothombien, celle des idiots. Même si dans son œuvre, Nothomb crée des personnages très près de l'idiotie, elle crée plutôt une pulsion de

néant, une force d'inertie. De cet aspect parle dans son analyse Alvares qui souligne la proximité que ses personnages ont du protagoniste :

L'idiotie de ces personnages consiste donc en cette condition léthargique de la vie sans l'Autre, de la vie sans désir – ce que Nothomb appelle *la vie larvaire*. Ils habitent les limbes de la non-vie et donnent forme et corps au non-être. Cette ontologie paradoxale hante Nothomb. Au fil de ses romans, elle la met en récit dans le cadre d'une rencontre traumatique du Protagoniste avec un partenaire intraitable qui porte le lourd fardeau du néant. (Alvares, 2014 : 2)

Une masse énorme vidée de tout sens humain qui interrompt la vie idyllique des héros, Palamède vient en antithèse du protagoniste, par sa laideur extrême et son langage monosyllabique. Echouant dans tous les registres sociaux, Palamède résiste aux tentatives d'Emile de le faire parler et laisse sur lui un effet toxique.<sup>1</sup>

Alors les personnages obèses masculins dans l'univers nothombien ont la mission de choquer par leur apparence, mais, dans le même temps, par leur manque de considération pour les autres. Si pour Melvin Mapple il est si facile de tromper la confiance d'Amélie et de lui faire penser qu'il était un soldat qui avait des graves problèmes à cause de la guerre, pour Palamède d'embêter ses voisins devient naturel et de leur perturber la vie idéale qu'ils avaient projetée pour eux à la retraite.

La masse, la carcasse, le monstrueux sont des éléments –clés qui caractérisent l'obèse nothombien, mais ces éléments sont mis en évidence par l'espace qu'ils occupent dans le récit. Le néant et la décadence qui surviennent de leur aspect paraît engoutir toute trace de beauté ou de bonheur. Ils sont les porteurs de vide et leur attitude l'accentue.

### **L'obèse féminine**

Dans le cas des personnages féminins il y a seulement une à mentionner, Bernadette, la femme de Palamède, mais son obésité va au-delà du registre humain et s'inscrit plutôt dans le monstrueux, l'animal et le dégoût qu'elle provoque est évident :

Juliette lui donna la saucière : la voisine trépigait, salivait avec fracas. Ses tentacules se refermèrent autour du trésor qu'elle brandit jusqu'à son orifice buccal. Elle en but le contenu d'une traite en mugissant comme un hybride de phacochère et de cachalot.

Le spectacle de ce plaisir réjouissait et répugnait à la fois : un coin de la bouche de ma femme souriait, tandis que le coin opposé s'empêchait de vomir. (Nothomb, A., *op.cit.* : 122)

Etant loin du stéréotype de beauté spécifique à Nothomb, Bernadette est restée dans son état tubulaire et son plaisir lié à la nourriture le met plus en évidence. Si dans le cas de la protagoniste de *Métaphasique des tubes*, l'enfant réussit à surpasser ce stade de son développement, Bernadette y est encore prisonnière et aucune chose

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<sup>1</sup> La conclusion d'Emile sur le manque d'interaction que Palamède a avec eux le détermine de se considérer vaincu dans ses essais de former un lien avec son voisin : « Il me sembla voir passer sur le visage de notre voisin une expression que j'aurais pu traduire en ces termes : 'Pourquoi te donnes-tu tant de mal ? J'ai gagné, tu ne peux pas ne pas le savoir. Le simple fait que j'assiège chaque jour ton salon pendant deux heures n'en est-il pas la preuve ? Si brillants que soient tes discours, tu ne pourras rien contre cette évidence : je suis chez toi et je t'emmerde'. » Nothomb, A., *op.cit.*, p. 54-55

n'annonce qu'elle pourra le dépasser. Toutes les images sonores que le narrateur crée pour décrire la manière de manger de l'obèse sont les preuves de la dégradation du personnage : « madame Bernadette poussa un soupir – un interminable soupir de bien-être, avec une pointe de déception parce que c'était fini » (*ibidem* : 122); « [e]lle l'avalait avec des bruits d'évier » (*ibidem* : 122); [l]e rôle de son sommeil se conjugait à une digestion aussi sonore qu'une lessiveuse » (*ibidem* : 123)

Tout comme dans le cas de son mari, sa vie larvaire est dégoûtante et son apparence hideuse provoque de la répugnance. Caractérisée de « kyste » (*ibidem* : 122), Bernadette passe son temps dans le lit, elle mange et élimine des excréments, elle a toujours besoin d'aide pour survivre et profite de la bonté de Juliette qui prend charge d'elle quand Palamède est incapable de le faire. Si avant elle était le parasite de son époux, elle vient parasiter la vie du couple protagoniste et de l'importuner.

Si nous regardons la définition du dictionnaire du mot kyste<sup>1</sup>, nous pouvons très bien constater que son état kystique a été déterminé par les conditions dans lesquelles elle vivait. Même si nous ne connaissons pas son histoire et son parcours, nous avons l'impression qu'elle a dû surmonter des conditions extrêmes qui l'ont mise dans cette forme.

L'image monstrueuse que le narrateur construit de Bernadette nous montre l'horreur qu'elle a causée au narrateur et souligne le caractère pur de Juliette qui, même si parfois se sent dégoûtée de la femme, continue à lui offrir son aide malgré ses apparences.

L'eau, élément symbolique et très souvent rencontré dans l'œuvre nothombien, apparaît dans le récit à travers les références à la mer, mais ce n'est pas pour redonner de la vie à l'obèse, pour la purifier, mais sinon pour amplifier la condition de la femme : « [j]'imaginai le devenir de ce brouet océanique dans les entrailles du kyste : un véritable déjeuner de baleine, tant par la nature que par la quantité. » (*ibidem* : 121); « [...] les lambeaux de verdure n'entraient pas dans l'orifice buccal et restaient collés au menton, comme du varech sur une plage » (*ibidem* : 122)

Tous ces aspects font de l'obèse féminine nothombienne une inadaptée monstrueuse qui par ses « tentacules » (*ibidem* : 122) réussit à attraper le bien-être du couple et de les mettre au défi. Dans la tradition, la symbolique du monstre est de mettre à l'épreuve le héros pour qu'il puisse transgresser, et dans *Les Catilinaires*, Bernadette est l'image de ce monstre. Elle a le seul devoir d'exister et ainsi elle touche d'une manière irréparable à la vie idyllique du couple protagoniste. Elle est un tube, un néant dans lequel Emile et Juliette perdent leur désir initial d'avoir une retraite tranquille et de revivre leur jeunesse. Ils sont coincés de prendre charge de l'obèse et de vivre le reste de leurs jours dans une épreuve continue.

Par le tableau grotesque que Nothomb construit autour de Bernadette, nous considérons que l'écrivaine n'est pas une féministe, elle utilise les femmes ainsi que les hommes pour démontrer son *civisme*<sup>2</sup>, elle n'a pas besoin de rendre justice aux femmes,

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<sup>1</sup> Dans le Larousse la deuxième définition du mot kyste est : « forme de résistance prise par divers êtres vivants [...] lorsque les conditions extérieures deviennent défavorables. [www.larousse.fr](http://www.larousse.fr) consulté le 7 septembre 2021

<sup>2</sup> Nothomb préfère le terme *civisme* pour le terme féministe : « Je préfère le mot 'civisme' au mot 'féministe', parce que cette notion me paraît beaucoup plus vaste. Mon attitude féministe s'inscrit dans une attitude civique qui regroupe bien d'autres attitudes, qui sont comme le racisme ou toute forme d'inégalité. Mais le féminisme en fait partie. » Bainbrigge S., Toonder, J. *Amélie Nothomb : Authorship, Identity and Narrative practice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, p. 204

elle seulement raconte des histoires et attribue des caractéristiques particulières à ses personnages, sans tenir compte de leur sexe.

Alors, pour répondre à la question initiale, nous jugeons que Nothomb ne considère pas l'obésité une maladie dans le sens du dictionnaire du mot<sup>1</sup> ; ses personnages obèses ne sont pas des êtres qui méritent le respect ou la pitié de quelqu'un, ils sont des inadaptés, des perturbateurs. Leur obésité est le moyen par lequel leur attitude est justifiée. Ils sont dégoûtants et ses caractères reflètent leur apparence ou c'est mieux de dire que leur obésité abjecte est le reflet de ses pensées et ses histoires. Nothomb ne rend pas justice à personne, elle ne tient pas compte du sexe, elle seulement utilise les personnages là où elle en a besoin.

Leur maladie est à l'intérieur, elle est une décadence qui marque irrémédiablement l'extérieur.

En conclusion, Amélie Nothomb accorde une grande importance à l'apparence physique de ses personnages pour montrer leurs traits de caractère et les rendre plus complexes. Elle traite également de la relation entre le corps et la nourriture, notamment l'anorexie et l'obésité. Dans ses romans, l'obésité extrême des personnages peut être utilisée pour créer un corps choquant et pour donner un côté négatif à ces personnages. Les corps obèses de Melvin Mapple, Palamède et Bernadette sont perçus comme perturbateurs de l'idéal de l'image corporelle dans l'univers nothombien. Le personnage nothombien est codifié par sa corporéité. Dans le roman *Une forme de vie*, Nothomb utilise l'obésité de Melvin pour explorer les conséquences psychologiques de la guerre sur un individu. Alors que le rire créateur de Nothomb devient un moyen d'exprimer la complexité de ses personnages en utilisant l'obésité comme métaphore pour mettre en évidence les contradictions et les paradoxes de la condition humaine.

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<sup>1</sup> La première définition du mot maladie dans le Larousse est : « altération de la santé, des fonctions des êtres vivants (animaux et végétaux), en particulier quand la cause est connue (par opposition à syndrome) » ([www.larousse.fr](http://www.larousse.fr) consulté le 9 septembre 2021). Nous considérons que Nothomb ne s'intéresse pas à la santé des personnages, elle n'accorde aucune importance à ça, mais elle utilise l'obésité comme moyen de justifier ou de mettre en évidence des traits.

**ŒDIPE ACTEUR ET METTEUR EN SCÈNE. « JEU » ET « JE ».  
QUELQUES CONSIDÉRATIONS À PARTIR DE L'« ŒDIPE »  
D'ANDRÉ GIDE**

**Diana-Adriana LEFTER\***

***Abstract:** Our paper discusses the issue of theatricality in André Gide's « Oedipus ». We start from the premise that this theatricality does not only reside in the construction of the text, but also in the construction of the story, centered on Oedipus actor and stage director. What we propose in this approach is to show that there is an important projection of Gide's recurring that Gide makes of his Oedipus an actor and also a stage director who is more conscient than ignorant, who knows that he is playing a role and who directs and observes the behavior of others because he knows the story in advance, while pretending to discover it at the same time as the others. Oedipus knows who he is, but he stages the perfection of a conjugal and family happiness which validates his political power.*

***Keywords:** theatricality, stage director, actor, lie, masque*

**Préambule**

Publié en 1930 dans la revue « Commerce », le drame « Œdipe » est, à côté du « Roi Candaule » et de « Saül », l'une des pièces maîtresses de Gide. Le texte suscite un intérêt con indifférent à l'époque, parmi les hommes de lettres, dont le regard n'est pas toujours enthousiaste (Roger Martin du Gard), mais aussi parmi les artistes de la scène qui y voient une théâtralité à exploiter. En effet, deux grands metteurs en scène, Georges Pitoëff et Jean Villard, en proposent des versions scéniques et incarnent eux-mêmes Œdipe sur la scène. En partant de ces prémisses, notre but est de montrer que cette théâtralité ne réside pas seulement dans la construction du texte, mais aussi dans la construction de l'histoire, centrée sur un Œdipe acteur et metteur en scène.

**Gide et le théâtre, une tentation constante**

*[...] le théâtre apparaît pour Gide comme une tentation constante – tant du point de vue de la réflexion que de la création proprement dite – et parallèlement, comme l'objet de frustrations successives, liées à la conviction que si le texte ne peut pas se suffire lui-même, la scène condamne l'auteur à un choix impossible : ou bien demeurer fidèle à lui-même, se vouant à l'insuccès, ou bien aller à la rencontre du public, et donc se trahir. (Codazzi, 2021 : 202).*

Bon nombre d'approches de la pièce « Œdipe » de Gide s'accordent sur l'inspiration que celui-ci a puisée à la mythologie classique, notamment à l'« Œdipe Roi » de Sophocle, dont Gide fait une lecture renouvelante, en accord avec les éléments et les thématiques récurrents de son parcours littéraire : la position critique par rapport à l'étroitesse du dogme catholique, la bâtardise, l'individualisme créateur.

Qu'il y ait une réinterprétation du mythe classique dans son « Œdipe », cela est hors de doute. Les échos en sont évidents : la conservation des épisodes-clé du mythe dans les actes I et III, le renvoi explicite aux pièces antiques dans les exergues de chaque acte. Au-delà de cette évidence, ce que nous nous proposons dans cette démarche est de montrer qu'il y a aussi une projection importante de la pensée récurrente de Gide sur le fonctionnement du moi-acteur et du moi-metteur en scène.

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Autrement dit, nous voulons souligner que Gide fait de son Œdipe un acteur, un *hypocrite* (au sens étymologique du mot), un porteur de masque et aussi un metteur en scène qui est plutôt averti qu'ignorant, qui sait qu'il joue un rôle et qui dirige et observe le comportement des autres parce qu'il sait d'avance quelle est l'histoire, tout en prétendant la découvrir dans le même temps que les autres.

Nous avons déjà montré dans d'autres études<sup>1</sup> qu'en dépit de la prétendue réticence de Gide pour le texte dramatique<sup>2</sup> le monde du théâtre n'a jamais cessé de l'intéresser : fervent spectateur, auteurs de chroniques de spectacles et, surtout, personne constamment hantée par cette polarité typique de l'hypocrite, entre « être » et « paraître ». A ce propos, Jean Claude souligne l'incontestable et le plurivalent intérêt de Gide pour le théâtre : « Que Gide se soit intéressé au théâtre plus qu'il ne l'a laissé croire ou qu'on a pu le dire, il serait difficile de le contester. Qu'il ait eu des idées sur le théâtre, on ne peut le mettre en doute » (Claude, 1992 :8). Encore, Josiane Rolland affirme que la « dramatisation avouée, consciente, de ces « crises » anticipait peut-être le goût que Gide manifesterait ultérieurement pour l'écriture théâtrale, souvent inspirée des mythes grecs » (Rolland, 2005 :85) tandis que Vincenzo Mazza (Mazza, 2021) parle d'un « rendez-vous manqué » de Gide avec le théâtre.

#### **Œdipe metteur en scène**

Œdipe se pose en metteur en scène de son existence et de la vie des autres. Cela renvoie à l'existence d'un projet, de ce que l'on pourrait même appeler « vision de metteur en scène », qu'il actualise dans la conception : de sa vie et de celle de sa famille.

Tout d'abord, le monologue initial le montre dans un dédoublement d'acteur attentivement étudié. La solennité de son discours théâtralisé, lorsqu'il s'assume le masque de « quelqu'un » n'est pas fortuite, mais construite avec l'art du metteur en scène d'un Œdipe qui crée « l'illusion comique » de son bonheur et de la perfection de sa famille : puissance, bonheur, mais aussi infatuation, orgueil, tout cela est présent dans ce monologue. Mais, il y a aussi un indice : « ce gonflement que déjà tu prétends éviter dans ta vie » (Gide, 1931 : 6) Or, « gonflement » est un terme pluri sémantique, définissant l'accès d'un sentiment difficilement contenu, mais aussi l'enflure pathologique d'une partie du corps. Ce n'est pas indifférent de rappeler que le gonflement des pieds était la caractéristique des Labdacides, famille héroïque dont procède Œdipe. En allant plus loin, dans cette clé de lecture on peut affirmer que Œdipe sait par avance qui il est et dirige son existence devant les autres pour se créer une

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<sup>1</sup> *La nature humaine entre « paraître » et « être » : André Gide, de l'écrivain au personnage*, in « L'idée de nature dans les littératures romanes », Actes du Colloque international de Sofia, 2009, pp. 312-325, Presses Universitaires de Sofia Saint Clément d'Ohrid ; *Spatialité dramatique et construction(s) de l'espace dans le théâtre d'André Gide*, in « Langue et littérature. Repères identitaires en contexte européen » no. 9/2011, Editura Universitatii din Pitesti, pp. 150-156 ; *Le texte théâtral entre production et réception. Sur quelques métatextes gidiens*, in « Studii si cercetari filologice. Seria Limbi Romanice », Editura Universitatii din Pitesti, no. 11/2012, pp. 72-83 ; *André Gide et le théâtre : entre identité et altérité*, in « Langue et littérature. Repères identitaires en contexte européen » no. 15/2014, Editura Universitatii din Pitesti, pp. 287-292.

<sup>2</sup> Lorsqu'il n'était âgé que de 22 ans, Gide a écrit une lettre à Paul Valéry, où il présente sa vision sur la littérature à venir : *Donc Mallarmé pour la poésie, Maeterlinck pour le drame – et quoique auprès d'eux, je me sente un peu gringalet, j'ajoute moi pour le roman.* (Lettre du 26 janvier 1891 in *Correspondance André Gide – Paul Valéry 1890-1942*, Paris, NRF Gallimard, 1955, p. 46.)

fausse image. La présence du mot dans le discours initial se constitue dans un indice qu'il donne de son identité.

Ensuite, dans le même monologue, Œdipe ajoute : « Qui ne se soumettrait volontiers à une sacrée puissance, dès qu'elle conduit où je suis » (Gide, 1931 : 6) ; or, cette « sacrée puissance », c'est lui-même qui l'a créée : « J'y parviens en créant au-dessus de moi une sacrée puissance à laquelle, que je le veuille ou non, je sois soumis » (Gide, 1931 : 6) On y reconnaît la main du metteur en scène qui forge l'idée et ensuite la matérialise, dans sa mise en scène. Encore plus, Œdipe est un metteur en scène qui joue, en acteur, le rôle de la vie qu'il aurait voulu avoir. Par conséquent, le bonheur, le pouvoir, la toute puissance ne sont que les ingrédients de cette farce : le paraître et les masques de l'acteur.

Un autre indice de son travail de metteur en scène qui sait pat avance et qui feint de découvrir au fur et à mesure est l'histoire de la querelle au carrefour :

*Il y en a qui se demandent à tout bout de champs et dans tous les embarras de voitures : dois-je céder le pas ? ai-je le droit de passer outre ? Pour moi, j'agis toujours comme conseillé par un dieu.* (Gide, 1931 : 6)

Or, ce dieu, comme il vient d'avouer, c'est lui-même qui l'a créé : il est le suprême metteur en scène, mais c'est toujours Œdipe. Le meurtre de Laïus n'est pas évoqué de manière explicite, mais la recréation visuelle du contexte laisse comprendre l'issue choisie par Œdipe : passer outre, et cela par projet, non pas par mégarde ou par acte forcé.

Encore plus, Jocaste fait savoir que chaque fois qu'elle a voulu éclaircir les conditions dans lesquelles son mari Laïus avait été assassiné, Œdipe lui avait coupé court : « Non, ne me parle pas du passé [...] Je n'en veux rien savoir. Un âge d'or a commencé. Toutes choses sont faites nouvelles... » (Gide, 1931 : 11)

La volonté d'Œdipe est de créer deux mondes, là où il n'y en avait qu'un : le monde des Labdacides. Pour lui, il y a le monde vrai, celui d'avant son arrivée à Thèbes, le monde construit autour du mariage de Jocaste avec Laïus ; il y a ensuite le monde construit<sup>1</sup>, celui après son mariage avec Jocaste. Pour Œdipe, il n'y a pas un continuum entre les deux ères et les deux mondes, mais une rupture qu'il force en refusant l'enquête et même la connaissance de l'histoire – pour orchestrer le nouveau monde.

### **Œdipe acteur**

Tout le tourment de l'Œdipe gidien est l'effort constant de définir son « je » et la difficulté relève de la rupture/l'éclatement d'un référent unique (l'être humain en chair et en os, ayant un statut social et un héritage familial) dans un double « je » : le « je » qu'il est (et il l'est devant soi-même) et le « je » qu'il joue devant les autres. Cette rupture d'ordre psychologique s'actualise dans le discours lorsqu'il y a un passage de « je » à « quelqu'un » – instance dont « je » prend ses distances. Le monologue initial d'Œdipe marque nettement cette distance :

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<sup>1</sup> Toutefois, ce monde mis en scène est finalement rejeté par Œdipe mais il s'agit, comme le remarquera Tirésias, d'un acte dicté par l'orgueil de celui qui s'est confondu avec l'idée du pouvoir, et non pas un acte de pénitence :

*Un bonheur fait d'erreur et d'ignorance, je n'en veux pas. Bon pour le peuple ! Pour moi, je n'ai pas besoin d'être heureux. C'en est fait ! Toute la nuée de cet enchantement doré se déchire. Tu peux venir, Tirésias.* (Gide, 1931 : 59)

*Me voici tout présent, complet en cet instant de la durée éternelle ; pareil à quelqu'un qui s'avancerait sur le devant d'un théâtre et qui dirait : Je suis Œdipe.* (Gide, 1931 :5)

*Allons, allons ! Œdipe, ne t'embarque pas dans de trop longues phrases dont tu risques de ne pouvoir sortir. Dis simplement ce que tu as à dire [...] Ceci me ramène à ce que je disais tout à l'heure.* (Gide, 1931 : 5-6)

Cela rappelle sans doute les propos de Philippe Lejeune qui s'interrogeait si « la première personne [...] c'était la personne psychologique (conçue naïvement comme extérieure au langage), qui s'exprimait en se servant de la personne grammaticale comme d'un instrument, ou si la personne psychologique n'était pas un effet de l'énonciation elle-même ». (Lejeune, 1975 : 34) Encore plus et dans la même idée du *jeu* qui cache / détourne / fausse le *je* va Jean Bollack qui note « *Œdipe* (1930) n'est pas un traité. [...] C'est une parodie. [...] Gide prend ses distances avec Œdipe. Ce héros hors du commun, il le fait se présenter lui-même comme une invention ». (Bollack, 2013 : 24)

Œdipe est un acteur farouche et l'antiphrase caractérise bien sa dualité : Tu sais que je méprise les masques et les arrière-pensées » (Gide, 1931 : 8) dit-il à son beau-frère Créon qui l'invite à lui faire part en privée des paroles de l'oracle. Or, ce même Œdipe qui se dit ennemi des masques les avait échangés – je/quelqu'un – quelques instants auparavant, en jouant le bonheur et le pouvoir.

Le discours d'Œdipe est souvent à double entente. Nous venons de mentionner la double entente du mot « gonflement ». Il en a de même pour le mot « mère », avec lequel Œdipe caractérise Jocaste : « Elle est parfaite, Jocaste. Quelle épouse ! Quelle mère ! Quant à moi qui n'ai jamais connu la mienne, j'ai pour elle un amour quasi filial et conjugal à la fois ». (Gide, 1931 : 18) Encore une fois, Œdipe se comporte en acteur : le fait qu'il mentionne tout d'abord l'amour filial relève le savoir qu'il a de sa consanguinité avec Jocaste : c'est Œdipe l'homme ; mais devant les autres il montre le masque de l'amour marital.

Encore plus, Œdipe est bien mal à l'aise lorsque la question de l'inceste surgit. Écoutant en cachette, avec Créon, les aveux incestueux de ses enfants, paroles et pensées qui dégoutent Créon, Œdipe ne s'en montre pas tout autant choqué, coupant court à l'exclamation de son beau-frère : « Tais-toi ! » (Gide, 1931 : 36)

Et plus tard, encore un aveu : « [...] je n'avais pas les mains pures » (Gide, 1931 : 51), devant Tirésias qui lui reproche s'être éloigné des autels. C'est encore la présence d'esprit d'un acteur qui sait que ce qu'il fait voir – bonheur, pouvoir – n'est qu'apparence et masque : « Et, j'ai soudain appris l'art de faire, de cette ignorance même, ma force ». (Gide, 1931 : 52)

Ensuite, lorsque Créon lui raconte l'interdiction de l'oracle quant à la naissance d'un fils de Jocaste avec Laïus, puis l'abandon de la progéniture aux mains d'un berger qui avait le « triste soin » de l'abandonner, Œdipe – bon acteur mais aussi metteur en scène – ne montre pas de surprise et se dévoile préoccupé par le sort du berger, notamment s'il est encore vivant, et non pas par la destinée du nouveau-né abandonné aux bêtes. Peu de temps après, la réplique d'Œdipe « Avec cette épine dans mon oreiller, je crains de ne plus bien dormir » (Gide, 1931 : 20) confirme l'inquiétude de savoir que le berger, toujours vivant, pouvait dévoiler la vérité.

Cette mise en scène du bonheur dont il soit le premier acteur est un projet de longue date d'Œdipe, un projet qui met à nu son ambition sans limites, son orgueil, voire sa bâtardise :

*Du temps que je me croyais fils de Polybe, je m'appliquais à singer ses vertus [...] Puis, soudain, le fil est rompu. Jailli de l'inconnu ; plus de passé, plus de modèle, sien sur quoi m'appuyer ; tout à créer, patrie, ancêtres... à inventer, à découvrir.* (Gide, 1931 : 31)

On y voit déjà le metteur en scène naissant et avec lui une vision de metteur en scène : le spectacle d'une famille parfaite, d'un encrage familial et aussi social qui nourrisse ses ambitions, son orgueil, sa soif du pouvoir politique.

Toutefois, l'acteur enlève finalement son masque : devant l'évidence de son crime – le parricide et l'inceste – son projet initial de mise en scène ne fonctionne plus et il ne peut plus continuer avec le jeu de masques : « à présent je ne me reconnais plus dans mes actes » (Gide, 1931 : 62). Pourtant, son geste final est celui du bâtard qui s'accroche au pouvoir, sans pouvoir le lâcher : il « s'empare du manteau royal, en arrache les agrafes d'or et les enfonce féroce dans les yeux ». (Gide, 1931 : 67)

Ce n'est pas le geste de repentance, mais, comme le dit Tirésias, l'ultime orgueil : « C'est donc l'orgueil encore qui te fit crever les yeux » (Gide, 1931 : 69). Et Œdipe qui le confirme<sup>1</sup> avec un ultime mot d'orgueil souverain qui met en scène aussi l'avenir dont il ne fera plus partie :

*C'est volontiers que je leur laisse, pour leur malheur, une royauté non conquise et non mérité.* (Gide, 1931 : 70)

### **Conclusions**

Œdipe est donc metteur en scène et acteur de sa propre vie : le projet avait mûri dans sa pensée depuis le moment où il avait appris sa bâtardise et s'est concrétisé dans l'union conjugale avec Jocaste. C'est, en effet, un exercice du pouvoir : Œdipe, qui se croyait prince royal à la cour de Polybe, avait la certitude de détenir un pouvoir qu'il allait hériter de son père. Aussi, se contentait-il de « singer » (Gide, 1931 : 31) les gestes de son père, il se contentait du rôle d'acteur dans un scénario qui assouvissait sa soif du pouvoir. Une fois cette illusion du pouvoir disparu, il commence à construire minutieusement sa mise en scène du spectacle du pouvoir, un spectacle où ce n'est que lui qui peut être l'acteur principal. Œdipe sait qui il est, mais il met en scène la perfection d'un bonheur conjugal et familial qui valident son pouvoir politique.

### **Corpus**

Gide, André, *Œdipe*, Paris, Pléiade, 1931

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<sup>1</sup> *C'est volontiers que je m'immole. J'étais parvenu à ce point que je ne pouvais plus dépasser qu'en prenant élan contre moi-même.* (Gide, 1931 : 69)

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## « ON NE BADINE PAS AVEC L'AMOUR » : LE DRAME DE LA COMÉDIE ROMANTIQUE

Liliana VOICULESCU\*

**Abstract:** *The poem is the favourite genre of the Romanticism. The other genres, less known, are also representative for the characteristic features of this artistic and intellectual movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous romantic poets also wrote novels and plays. This is the case for Alfred de Musset whose plays were performed during his lifetime or after his death. On ne badine pas avec l'amour is one of them and it shows the innovations of the Romantic theatre compared to the 17<sup>th</sup> century classic theatre and to the 18<sup>th</sup> century theatre in its intention to introduce the lyrism and the diversity, at all levels, in the literary creation.*

**Keywords:** *Romantic theatre, comedy, tragedy*

Publiée dans la *Revue des deux Mondes* en 1834, lorsque Alfred de Musset avait 24 ans, la comédie *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* est représentée pour la première fois à Paris, le 18 novembre 1861, quatre ans après sa mort, à la Comédie-Française.

Le thème principal, mentionné d'ailleurs dans le titre, est l'amour, sous tous ses aspects (passion, désir, trahison, etc), avec les tourments intérieurs éprouvés par les trois jeunes amoureux. L'intrigue sentimentale légère et mondaine tissée lors des deux premiers actes (ayant chacun cinq scènes) se tourne vers le drame romantique dans le dernier acte (huit scènes) par l'impossibilité d'atteindre le bonheur dans le présent, refus scellé par la mort d'une jeune fille simple et naïve.

Les personnages proviennent de milieux différents, le romantisme montrant de l'« intérêt pour les hommes dans leur diversité historique et locale, pour leurs mœurs différentes, pour leur vie matérielle déterminée par les circonstances extérieures » (Paul Van Tieghem, 1948 cité in Aubrit, Gendrel, 2019 : 131).

Le Baron, dont on ne connaît pas le nom, un vrai homme d'État, est le receveur du roi. Cette positionne l'oblige de vivre en solitude six mois par an dans son château où il fait des plans en cherchant à s'imposer devant tout le monde. Il appartient plutôt au passé, ses croyances sont traditionnelles, surtout celle concernant les femmes : « Je les connais, Bridaine, je connais ces êtres charmants et indéfinissables. Soyez persuadé qu'elles aiment à avoir de la poudre dans les yeux, et que plus on leur en jette, plus elles les écarquillent, afin d'en gober davantage. » (Musset : 19).

Perdican est son fils arrivé à la majorité, éduqué à Paris, ayant à 21 ans le titre de docteur à quatre boules blanches - littérature, philosophie, droit romain, droit canon (Musset : 12). Camille, la nièce du baron, élevée au monastère après la mort de sa mère, a dix-huit ans et elle espère pouvoir réprimer son amour pour Perdican et prendre le voile pour toujours.

Tous les trois sont des nobles entourés des paysans, des valets et des religieux. Le clergé est représenté par les deux prêtres, Maître Blazius qui est le gouverneur de Perdican et Maître Bridaine, le curé de la paroisse, des personnages qui se ressemblent beaucoup dans leur pauvreté d'esprit, malgré les attentes qui découlent de leur profession : « deux hommes à peu près pareils, également gros, également sots, ayant

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les mêmes vices et les mêmes passions, viennent par hasard à se rencontrer, il faut nécessairement qu'ils s'adorent ou qu'ils s'exècrent. » (Musset : 25).

Pour illustrer la sottise du Maître Blazius, Musset se sert du proverbe, genre dramatique mondain et mineur, utilisé au XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles et crée des scènes comiques, grotesques même, où le comique de langage dévoile les traits du personnage :

**MAÎTRE BLAZIUS**

Seigneur, j'ai une chose singulière à vous dire. Tout à l'heure, j'étais par hasard dans l'office, je veux dire dans la galerie : qu'aurais-je été faire dans l'office ? J'étais donc dans la galerie. J'avais trouvé par accident une bouteille, je veux dire une carafe d'eau : comment aurais-je trouvé une bouteille dans la galerie ? J'étais donc en train de boire un coup de vin, je veux dire un verre d'eau, pour passer le temps, et je regardais par la fenêtre (Musset : 57).

Si pour Blazius, le discours éclaircit sa pauvreté d'esprit, dans le cas du Maître Bridaine les vices sont plus représentatifs. Sa cupidité et sa jalousie apparaissent en premier plan. Fâché qu'il perd la chaise placée à la droite du baron aux dépenses du gouverneur, il le méprise : « Ô malheureux que je suis ! Un âne bête, un ivrogne sans pudeur, me relègue au bas bout de la table ! Le majordome lui versera le premier verre de malaga, et lorsque les plats arriveront à moi, ils seront à moitié froids, et les meilleurs morceaux déjà avalés ; il ne restera plus autour des perdreaux ni choux ni carottes. » (Musset : 52).

Dame Pluche, la gouvernante de Camille, est une femme très maigre, toujours mécontente et toujours en colère qui offense les autres par ses propos vulgaires : « canaille que vous êtes », « Sachez, manants », « vous êtes des butors et des malappris », « chère canaille », etc.

Rosette, la sœur de lait de Camille, est une fille simple et naïve qui est prête à croire les promesses du jeune noble. Employée par Perdican pour rendre Camille jalouse, et par Camille pour dévoiler la vengeance de Perdican, elle finit par donner la touche dramatique de cette comédie par le coup de théâtre de la fin.

Un personnage surprenant qui renvoie au théâtre antique est le Chœur qui assiste aux souffrances des trois personnages amoureux. Le Chœur apparaît plutôt dans les tragédies pour commenter, prévenir, avertir, dénoncer ou simplement jouer le rôle du public.

Parmi tous ces personnages, il y en a qui sont assez simples, qui sont le miroir de l'époque décrite et qui sont facile à reconnaître, grâce au proverbe. Cependant, certains personnages sont plus complexes dépassant les frontières de ce genre, ce qui est d'ailleurs une caractéristique du romantisme. Le théâtre romantique abandonne les règles classiques et brise leurs frontières en s'ouvrant à la diversité afin d'introduire celle-ci dans l'œuvre. La nouveauté atteint la forme de la pièce aussi : les trois actes déséquilibrés dans leur volume, l'alternance de décors (à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du château, un champ, une fontaine, un chemin, le petit bois, un oratoire). L'écriture se libère par le mélange des genres (la comédie, la farce et la tragédie), le mélange des styles et des tons (le beau, le laid, le sublime, le grotesque, le lyrisme) et par le mélange des registres de langues. Le théâtre romantique s'impose ainsi comme un genre renouvelé qui reflète les préoccupations sociales, morales, politiques et psychologiques de son temps.

L'amour, qui est un thème romantique par excellence, est celui qui complique la vie des personnages. Camille et Perdican sont des amis d'enfance, ils s'aiment et ils sont destinés l'un à l'autre pour se marier. Cependant, les deux ont un orgueil difficile à maîtriser et un désir de tout contrôler, désir qui s'avère à leur être fatal, car ils ne sont plus eux-mêmes et ils mettent des masques qui les empêchent de vivre leur amour.

Perdican est le personnage le plus complexe. Pour lui, l'amour signifie surtout de la passion et il est étroitement lié à la nature et à l'enfance, plutôt à leur enfance heureuse, protégée par cette nature pittoresque, donc au passé : « Tu me fends l'âme. Quoi ! pas un souvenir, Camille ? pas un battement de cœur pour notre enfance, pour tout ce pauvre temps passé, si bon, si doux, si plein de niaiseries délicieuses ? Tu ne veux pas venir voir le sentier par où nous allions à la ferme ? » (Musset : 29).

Cette nature est intégrée dans son être romantique, elle fait partie de son « moi » et le rend différent par rapport à son père et aux autres personnages : « Voilà donc ma chère vallée ! mes noyers, mes sentiers verts, ma petite fontaine ! voilà mes jours passés encore tout pleins de vie, voilà le monde mystérieux des rêves de mon enfance ! Ô patrie ! patrie, mot incompréhensible ! l'homme n'est-il donc né que pour un coin de terre, pour y bâtir son nid et pour y vivre un jour ? » (Musset : 35).

Le romantisme privilégie le cœur et le sentiment à la raison. Celle-ci devient moins importante et ne réussit pas à s'intégrer dans l'être de Perdican :

#### **LE CHŒUR**

On nous a dit que vous êtes un savant, monseigneur.

#### **PERDICAN**

Oui, on me l'a dit aussi. Les sciences sont une belle chose, mes enfants ; ces arbres et ces prairies enseignent à haute voix la plus belle de toutes, l'oubli de ce qu'on sait (Musset : 35-36).

Le réel se reflète dans le « moi » percevant, qui le « spiritualise ». Si le paysage, la nature, l'impression sont souvent premiers, l'essentiel est dans le sentiment auquel ils mènent, dans l'individualité particulière qu'ils permettent d'atteindre (Aubrit, Gendrel, 2019 : 131).

L'amour-passion, sincèrement avoué par Perdican, se heurte à la dualité de Camille qui préfère cacher ses sentiments et prendre un masque froid et insensible. Elle aspire à l'amour divin, elle veut prendre le voile, en renonçant aux plaisirs éphémères de l'amour humain. Le dédoublement (le pur et l'impur, le masque et l'être) est un thème central dans l'œuvre de Musset. Le double, étalé dans l'espace, commande tout le théâtre de Musset, qu'il affecte les héros hommes ou femmes, et quelquefois les deux en même temps. Ces comédies seraient alors des sortes de psychodrames, où Musset se soulagerait de sa hantise en lui accordant le droit de s'objectiver, peut-être de se sublimer dans le ton de la légèreté et sous la forme du dialogue (Richard, 1970 : 208). Les lèvres semblent résumer toute la dualité trouble du désir et de la parole. Si Musset les élit, de préférence à toute autre lieu charnel, c'est bien d'abord, parce qu'elles recueillent en elles, sous forme de dessèchement, ou de brûlure, l'exigence sensuelle la plus vraie (*ibidem* : 212).

Camille, comme elle l'avoue, veut aimer, mais elle ne veut pas souffrir, c'est pour cela qu'elle choisit volontairement, à dix-huit ans, l'amour éternel (Musset : 79). Elle a peu de confiance en hommes et dans l'amour en général, étant influencée par les histoires malheureuses des femmes retirées dans les monastères. Elle se construit, à partir de leurs expériences, une représentation de l'amour qui mène inévitablement à la souffrance. C'est exactement ce que Perdican lui reproche en essayant de la convaincre des bienfaits de la passion, tout en peignant un tableau critique de la vie religieuse de l'époque.

Les tourments qu'elle ressent relèvent de son côté romantique, dévoilant la forte lutte intérieure qui la rend faible et vulnérable :

#### **CAMILLE,**

*elle se jette au pied de l'autel.*



M'avez-vous abandonnée, ô mon Dieu ? Vous le savez, lorsque je suis venue, j'avais juré de vous être fidèle ; quand j'ai refusé de devenir l'épouse d'un autre que vous, j'ai cru parler sincèrement devant vous et ma conscience, vous le savez, mon père ; ne voulez-vous donc plus de moi ? Oh ! pourquoi faites-vous mentir la vérité elle-même ? Pourquoi suis-je si faible ? Ah ! malheureuse, je ne puis plus prier ! (Musset : 133).

La vraie victime reste, cependant, Rosette, qui croit les paroles de Perdican. C'est elle qui meurt, après avoir offert l'opportunité aux jeunes nobles d'effacer les conséquences de leur orgueil en leur demandant de la grâce :

**ROSETTE,**

*se mettant à genoux.*

Monseigneur, je viens vous demander une grâce. Tous les gens du village à qui j'ai parlé ce matin m'ont dit que vous aimiez votre cousine, et que vous ne m'avez fait la cour que pour vous divertir tous deux ; on se moque de moi quand je passe, et je ne pourrai plus trouver de mari dans le pays, après avoir servi de risée à tout le monde. Permettez-moi de vous rendre le collier que vous m'avez donné, et de vivre en paix chez ma mère (Musset : 130).

Sa mort fait de Perdican un meurtrier qui tue aussi l'âme amoureuse de Camille et sa propre âme, car le bonheur romantique n'est possible que dans le passé, le présent étant le temps de la souffrance, de l'angoisse et de l'inquiétude. Le dualisme du moi et du monde ne peut être surmonté, il est impossible à retrouver une unité qui mène à l'absolu. Musset, l'un des premiers poètes du mouvement romantique, transpose dans ses personnages son propre vécu. Sa relation avec George Sand, une relation passionnelle et chaotique, même destructrice, mettra une empreinte éternelle sur sa vie. Il écrit cette pièce lors de l'une de leurs séparations, empruntant ainsi à ses personnages la véridicité des sentiments et des tourments amoureux. Prenant du proverbe ce qui l'intéresse pour dévoiler une société insensible aux aspirations vers l'absolu, il construit un univers personnel qui brise les codes traditionnels par l'introduction du lyrisme qui mène, sans doute, vers une fin tragique.

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## **DA GIOVANE ANIMA CREDULA A MINNIE LA CANDIDA DI MASSIMO BONTEMPELLI ANALIDI STESTUALE**

**Nadjiba AOUDI\***

***Abstract:** This novella is taken from the collection “Woman of my dreams”. The story told in the novel is quite unique and one could even say paradoxical: two friends in a joking mood manage to convince a girl, Minnie, that the little fish swimming in an aquarium are actually mechanical fish. Not only that, but they manage to make her believe that there are also men and women around who are completely normal in appearance, but in reality also fake. Minnie; and herein lies her credulity and candor, she has no doubt of the veracity of the information that the two friends provide her. On the contrary, she convinces herself to the point of being deeply disturbed, to the point of risking believing that her own friends may be fake men, to the point of believing that she herself is a robot, and therefore to the point of going mad. The two friends treat her, try to dissuade her from her obsession, but in vain. The story that began with a naive but stupid joke ends instead in the drama: Minnie’s suicide.*

***Keywords:** candor, grotesque, fiction, reality*

### **Cenno biografico**

Massimo Bontempelli, è nato a Como nel 1878, morto a Roma nel 1960, è uno scrittore italiano che insegnò alle scuole medie, poi si dedicò al giornalismo e al teatro, collaborò al “Marzocco”, al “Nuovo Giornale”, alla “Nazione”, al “Corriere della sera”, e alla “Nuova Antologia”. Fondò con Curzio Malaparte la rivista “Novecento”. Nel 1930 fu nominato accademico d’Italia e nel 1948 senatore nella lista del Fronte popolare, ma l’elezione fu in seguito invalidata a causa delle sue compromissioni precedenti con il fascismo.

Partito da un gusto ottocentesco educato sul Carducci, simpatizzò in seguito per il futurismo. Negli anni venti sostenne la necessità di un superamento dell’avanguardismo novecentesco in favore di un ritorno all’ordine. Bontempelli, quindi, contribuì al rinnovamento della cultura italiana.

Contrariamente alla richiesta della “Ronda”, tenne presente la lezione dell’avanguardia filtrandola attraverso un rigore classico e razionale nell’ambizione di realizzare a una forma d’arte moderna, antiaristocratica ed europea. Da qui la teorizzazione della teorizzazione del “realismo magico”, procedimento in grado di evidenziare la magia che si nasconde dietro l’apparenza del quotidiano, per inserire l’uomo in una dimensione diversa da quella di cui ha esperienza. E un’arte capace di estrarre, attraverso il gioco dell’intelligenza e dell’ironia, il dato fantastico e irreali dalle vicende quotidiane. Racconti e novelle sono circondati di un alone allucinato e irreali che scardina le norme del racconto: luoghi, fatti e personaggi banali si caricano di inquietudini indefinibili che lasciano un senso di sgomento prima di concludersi con il ritorno alla situazione normale di partenza.

Attento agli influssi culturali di volta in volta diversi; Bontempelli non è uno scrittore lineare, né ideologicamente né poeticamente. Di qui le contraddizioni tra una ambigua adesione al fascismo e la successiva ritrattazione, le inquietudini avanguardistiche e il richiamo all’ordine. La sua produzione piuttosto abbondante, e le sue notazioni teoriche sono tuttavia uno dei punti di riferimento della cultura tra le due guerre.

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Bontempelli restò sostanzialmente fedele nelle sue opere di narrativa, al realismo magico. Ricordiamo i romanzi: *La scacchiera davanti allo specchio* (1922), *Il figlio di due madri* (1929), *Vita e morte di Adria e dei suoi figli* (1930), *Gente nel tempo* (1937), *L'amante fedele* (1953); il cui elemento artistico sul piano stilistico, è la lucidità della scrittura, capace di avvolgere oggetti nitidissimi in un'atmosfera "metafisica" che può ricordare la pittura del primo De Chirico.

Analoghi motivi offrono gli interessanti lavori teatrali, da *Nostra Dea* (1925) a *Minnie la candida* (1927), che si richiamano in parte a Pirandello, fino a *Gerentola e a Venezia salva* (1947). Ricchi d'illuminazioni critiche sono infine i saggi critici, specie quelli raccolti nel 1964 col titolo *Introduzioni e discorsi*, su Leopardi, Verga, D'Annunzio e Pirandello. Prima, nel 1938 aveva raccolto altri saggi nel volume *L'avventura novecentistica*.

#### **Riassunto della novella *Giovane anima credula*:**

Questa novella è tratta dalla raccolta "Donna dei miei sogni". La vicenda narrata nella novella è abbastanza singolare e si potrebbe dire anche paradossale: due amici in vena di scherzi riescono a convincere una ragazza, Minnie, che i pesciolini che nuotano in un acquario in realtà sono dei pesci meccanici. Non solo, ma riescono a farle credere che ci sono in circolazione anche uomini e donne all'apparenza del tutto normali, ma in realtà anche essi finti. Minnie; e qui sta la sua credulità e il suo candore, non ha alcun dubbio della veridicità delle informazioni che i due amici le forniscono. Anzi se ne convince fino a esserne profondamente turbata, fino a rischiare di ritenere che i suoi stessi amici possano essere uomini finti, fino a ritenere che lei stessa sia un robot, e fino, quindi, ad impazzirne. I due amici la curano, tentano di distoglierla dalla sua ossessione, ma in vano.

La novella che era cominciata con uno scherzo ingenuo quanto stupido, si conclude invece nel dramma: il suicidio di Minnie.

#### **L'elemento candore:**

Il termine *candido/a* è utilizzato dal Bontempelli nel suo valore di aggettivo nel testo della novella. Candido però anche un nome proprio che ci rimanda subito a una tradizione illustre, per esempio al *Candide* di Voltaire.

Ci troviamo naturalmente davanti a vicende e personaggi diversi, ma in entrambi i casi, Minnie di Bontempelli e il *Candide* di Voltaire, il carattere determinato dei due personaggi è uno sguardo di assoluta fiducia sulla realtà. La realtà per essi esiste così come la vediamo, nel caso del *Candide* di Voltaire quelle realtà di cui non si dubita mai, anzi è la migliore realtà esistente, la più perfetta manifestazione del mondo reale.

Sappiamo che l'interesse polemico del grande illuminista francese si indirizzava ad una confutazione dell'ottimismo del filosofo tedesco Leibnitz, i fatti, nel miglior dei mondi possibili *Candide* subisce le peggiori disgrazie che possano capitare ad un giovane; ma questo non lo induce a cambiare la propria opinione sul mondo perché questa vorrebbe dire assumere dentro di sé la realtà modificandola col proprio senso critico.

Invece la realtà non si può assumere criticamente; il mondo reale per *Candide* ha una sua oggettività che gli impedisce ogni soggettivismo critico.

Nel caso di Bontempelli siamo lontani da riferimenti polemici a una qualche filosofia. La nostra novella si inserisce piuttosto in un'altra tradizione anche essa ormai illustrata: il pessimismo pirandelliano.

I prestiti pirandelliani sono numerosi ed evidenti: la vicenda paradossale, l'assurdità delle conseguenze, la precarietà dell'identità, la sovrapposizione inesorabile di nuove identità, il tema dello specchio come rifrazione quasi inafferrabile di luce e d'acqua, del doppio. D'atra parte conosciamo bene il grande interesse mostrato da Pirandello per la novella di Bontempelli. Sappiamo bene che fu il drammaturgo siciliano a consigliare a Bontempelli di ricavare un testo teatrale dalla novella.

Pirandello aveva visto bene i possibili effetti drammatici che la vicenda poteva assumere sul palcoscenico per un pubblico che già si era familiarizzato a teatro con i temi dell'assurdo, della spersonalizzazione ecc, temi che avevano largamente contribuito a rinnovarla, ormai, tronca ripetizione del cosiddetto dramma borghese "interno borghese con vista sul giardino".

#### **Insistenze del testo novellistico:**

Ci sono alcune parole che si ripetono nella novella: "ben fatti", "non veri", "veri", "finti", uomini veri e donne vere", "l'ossessione", "cosa spaventosa". Possiamo benissimo notare che alcuni di questi termini ruotano sullo stesso asse quello del concetto "finto/a", "vero/a" parole chiavi nella novella. Le altre parole "cosa spaventosa" e "l'ossessione" si riferiscono alla storiella fantastica e alle sue conseguenze.

Questo racconto non contiene paragoni. Le parole "limpida", "ignari", "semplici" e la frase "la sua anima era incapace d'incredulità" ci rinviano all'elemento candore e alla credulità che specificano il personaggio di Minnie. Solo una volta l'autore usa la parola "candida" in forma aggettivale: "l'attenzione candida di Minnie".

Si nota anche l'uso del tricolon, tre aggettivi successivi: "infernale stupida feroce idea".

Questa novella è animata da un nucleo straniante, lo spunto straniante è quello relativo all'esistenza di uomini finti indistinguibili da quelli veri. La follia della protagonista è conseguenza di una fragilità psicologica che la formula del titolo sottolinea. Tutte le vicende borghesi del quadro iniziale e quella relativa alla follia di Minnie sono uno straniamento della realtà, legato ad una immaginosa bugia, uno scherzo che viene a determinare tutto il susseguente sviluppo dei fatti.

Fra i prestiti pirandelliani citiamo quello del tema dello specchio, un tema tipicamente pirandelliano, Minnie convinta di essere finta si cerca nello specchio.

#### **Il testo teatrale:**

Fra tutti i drammi bontempelliani è il lavoro più ricco d'intenti psicologici, il dramma di Minnie, il cui intimo e universale candore le fa sempre chiedere a tutti "che cosa è questo e che cosa è quello", convinta che a non sapere non si è mai felici, non consiste nell'ingenua credulità con la quale essa accetta la storiella degli uomini finti o artificiali, narratele in un momento di gaiezza da due allegri amici, e che la conduce attraverso una lucida follia al suicidio, ma consiste appunto in un più profondo motivo umano, nella patetica impossibilità di Minnie a vivere in un mondo corrotto, rigido e disumano che ormai non sa e non può più intendere la natura di un essere che sfugge al grigio e arido meccanismo degli uomini.

Il senso di questo dramma ricco di suggestioni ma come rallentato dal paradosso logico poggia sul valore che l'autore attribuisce al candore. Per lui: "è una qualità elementare molto rara, la più rara, che significa prodigiosa purezza schietta e naturale semplicità, un atteggiamento dello spirito divinamente incanto pieno di senso del mistero, che essa accoglie con letizia umile, faccendone custode per gli altri".

Come lo stesso Bontempelli dichiara, fu Pirandello a sollecitarlo a scrivere per il teatro dopo il successo di *Nostra Dea*, ed a indicargli il racconto da cui trarre il dramma. Ci si trova infatti davanti a quelli che possiamo chiamare gli “adattamenti bontempelliani”, perché da questo momento in poi, spesso Bontempelli farà ricorso a testi suoi o altrui.

Minnie la candida è stata scritta nel 1926, era l’anno per chi se lo ricorda della crisi del petrolio, del boom dell’oro, degli attentati a ripetizione, del riaffiorare della guerra fredda, ma in Italia la gente non sembrava ritenere che tutto quello fosse poi tanto grave: viveva tutto sommato abbastanza allegramente, chiudendo gli occhi per l’appunto alla crisi del petrolio, agli attentati, alla guerra fredda ecc. Ma se a qualcuno fosse capitato di aprirli quegli occhi?

Ed ecco, infatti, che nella commedia di Bontempelli una candida Minnie apre gli occhi. Poco importa che li apra per uno scherzo, innocente o idiota che sia, poco importa che li apra anche troppo, e che le conclusioni in cui viene condotta siano contrari al buon senso, alla religione cristiana, ai dettami della religione e alla morale progressista del materialismo storico.

È la storia di un essere umano che in un mondo di persone con gli occhi chiusi, apre i suoi, e vede cose molto strane, profondamente preoccupanti.

Minnie la candida è stata scritta negli anni in cui l’uomo Bontempelli aveva gli occhi chiusi. Diciamo l’uomo per distinguere la persona anagrafica, con tutte le sue insufficienze e le sue debolezze, dallo scrittore più attento di lui: l’uomo che vive nella cronaca, legge i giornali, segue gli eventi, sperando o disperando sulla base delle sue quotidiane ragioni, dal Poeta che intuisce ragioni più alte, più durature, più profonde.

Ecco dunque un uomo con gli occhi chiusi, che scrive una commedia su un essere umano che apre gli occhi.

#### **Le insistenze del testo:**

Ci sono alcune parole e certe frasi che si ripetono nel testo teatrale: “ogni tanto si riposano, poi ricominciano” “che cosa è?”, “che cosa vuol dire?”? “a non sapere no si è mai felici”, “ben fatti”, “finti”, “veri”. Le frasi interrogative dimostrano l’ignoranza di Minnie, “ogni tanto si riposano, poi ricominciano” “finti”, “ben fatti” rendono l’idea del finto e del meccanico.

La parola “candida”, la troviamo in forma sinonimica nel titolo *Minnie la candida*. Si nota anche l’uso del tricolon, tre aggettivi “questa infernale, ebete irrimediabile”. Il chiasmo viene usato due volte: “medesimi nomi medesima fortuna” aggettivo+ nome+ aggettivo+ nome, “perfettamente cosciente e coscientemente perfetto” avverbio+ aggettivo+avverbio+ aggettivo.

#### **Convergenze e divergenze:**

La prima osservazione che si può fare confrontando la novella e il testo teatrale riguarda la differenza notevole delle dimensioni: poche pagine la novella, molto più lunga la commedia. Il testo teatrale si articola in tre lunghi atti, ciascuno preceduto da una serie molto ampia d’indicazioni per la messa in scena. Altre indicazioni sono poi frequentemente fornite nel corso dello svolgimento della commedia: spostamenti dei personaggi, entrate in scena ed uscite, gestualità e atteggiamenti emotivi, arredamento, luci ecc. va rilevata la differenza del titolo rispetto alla novella. Quello che era una generica “Giovane anima credula” attraverso l’adozione della sinonimia diventa “Minnie la candida”.

La commedia prevede dei personaggi nuovi rispetto alla novella ma l'ambientazione è la stessa; soltanto nella commedia non si tratta più di Parigi ma di una città imprecisata, che potrebbe benissimo essere Parigi, oppure un'altra città, questa imprecisione gioca a favore di una potenziale "universalizzazione" della vicenda.

Va rilevata un'altra differenza per quello che concerne il quadro temporale, la novella si svolge in primavera, mentre la commedia si svolge d'estate. Nella novella il narratore – omonimo - coincide con l'autore che osserva dall'interno la vicenda e i protagonisti. Nel testo teatrale invece abbiamo un vero e proprio personaggio, Tirreno che ha l'incarico di riavviare e condurre lo svolgimento, riveste cioè la funzione che nella novella è ricoperta dall'autore.

Il personaggio che era chiamato nella novella René Clamart, diventa nella commedia Skagerrak e ha una presenza molto più importante rispetto a quella della novella. Nella commedia il cameriere ha una funzione limitata, il suo si direbbe un ruolo di spalla, ma nella commedia è un peonaggio. Anche l'Adelaide della commedia è un personaggio del tutto nuovo, è la fidanzata di Tirreno; come pure è nuovo nella commedia lo zio di Skagerrak. Altri personaggi secondari fanno da contorno alla vicenda teatrale.

Il passaggio dalla novella al testo teatrale fu un semplice travasamento, rimanendo immutata la serie degli eventi dando sostanza fonda a quanto nel racconto era rimasta patetica cronaca. Di qui nacque spontaneo il mutamento del titolo, la trama esteriore identica ma nuova tutta l'atmosfera.

Nella commedia troviamo la stessa vicenda della novella no vi troviamo vicende parallele a questa né storie interne alla storia principale.

Nella novella la protagonista è solamente "Minnie" nel dramma la troviamo diventata "candida", quella che nel racconto era credulità nel dramma è candore.

La Minnie del racconto può anche essere sciocca, la Minnie del dramma con la sua intelligenza elementare soverchia e semplifica tutto il mondo che le sta attorno, la sua interpretazione candida della realtà sale in quella zona in cui pensiero e immagine sono fatti della stessa sostanza e lo stesso dolore umano assume il colore di un pianto di stelle.

Il reale si può vestire di apparenze magiche, la magia può diventare realtà. Naturalmente questo candore delle varie Minnie di turno, è il candore dell'autore stesso opera è il modo più ovvio per avviare sviluppo un tale genere di narrazione.

L'apparire del termine in forma propria o sinonimica a qualificare i personaggi candidi un po' in tutte le sue opere, rappresenta così un modo ulteriore di fornire l'ottica narrativa o drammatica in cui il testo viene letto.

### **La lingua di Minnie:**

Il dramma vive tutto intorno alla protagonista che deve dare un saggio di sapienza interpretativa. Infatti, mentre deve rendere da una parte la credulità di Minnie, deve farlo senza cadere in un grottesco caricaturale, come può essere dato il suo modo di esprimersi del personaggio, che in rapporto alle sue non chiare origini, parla una lingua sui generis, del tutto stravolta rispetto ai modi normali: per esempio:

Minnie: "Prego non ero nata io qua e là, io ero nata tutta insieme in un luogo solo, che è in una città di Siberia. Ma se ho detto sono io di Siberia, qualcuno comincia a parlare lingua siberiana, e poi domanda ha veduto questo, ha veduto quello, è io invece niente sapevo perché ero venuta via piccolina. Perché mio padre era stato della India, giù, e contrario mia madre era stata dalle parti della Norvegia, su, ma quasi sempre abitava in Italia, lei prima, io no, e io con mia madre insieme siamo sempre

cambiate di paese finché ella era viva, e Skager conoscevo a Costantinopoli e insieme siamo partiti, ma io parlo solamente bene il linguaggio italiano come mia madre”.

Il pericolo che il pubblico senta la caricatura è molto forte, ma l’espedito espressivo è molto utile sia sul piano della costituzione di un’isotopia magica, fantastica sia come elemento volto a rendere più credibile la follia di Minnie, iscrivendola in una certa labilità psicologica. Questo modo di parlare ne diventa, infatti, agli occhi dello spettatore il significato più evidente.

### **Conclusione**

A proposito del testo teatrale la Namer Airoldi sottolinea come a parer suo Minnie la candida costituisca il crollo del mito del novecento, anticipando quindi negli anni la fine di un’esperienza che invece, stando ai fatti, andrebbe datata dopo gli anni trenta e, in ogni modo, al momento della pubblicazione della *Avventura novecentesca* (1938).

In questo dramma l’autore, anche se sfrutta il quadro borghese dell’amicizia tra Minnie, Skagerrak e Tirreno, in realtà racconta una vicenda che presenta la caratteristica cifra dell’autore, rinviando a tutti gli altri aspetti della sua produzione. Pur facendo riferimento al suo realismo magico, ci colpisce tanto più; in quanto ancora oggi una storia come questa conserva tutta la sua plausibilità di testo fantastico, mostrando quindi quanto questo potesse e dovesse apparire opera anticipatrice quando lo spettacolo andò in scena il 29 ottobre 1928.

Minnie può essere letta come l’effetto dello straniamento dell’alienazione prodotta dalla macchina e dal suo perfezionamento. L’immagine della città tentacolare e riccamente illuminata costituisce non solo un’idea per la rappresentazione ma un elemento portante del messaggio ideologico del testo.

Essa ci appare come la straordinaria indicazione di pericoli presenti, o futuri o futuribili, che ancora sentano a farsi prendere sul serio, tanti ancora essendo gli uomini con gli occhi chiusi. Mercificazione, alienazione, massificazione, robotizzazione sono termini i cui concetti sono presenti nel racconto e nella commedia che si direbbe secondo un’espressione banale ma non priva di senso, scritti proprio oggi.

Intesa come simbolo Minnie rappresenta l’exasperarsi di una situazione esistenziale l’insofferenza per la “maschera” e gli “artefici” che la vita impone a tutti. Minnie la candida rispecchia il momento storico in cui è stata scritta con tutte le sue implicazioni e complicazioni, Minnie si toglie la vita, adotta cioè la soluzione più disperata tra le tante possibili, rinuncia, si ritira, sottoscrive la propria sconfitta: la corruzione degli uomini, la loro alienazione, la loro incapacità a comprendere, schiacciano il candore di Minnie, il suicidio sottolinea la mancanza di ogni possibile speranza, e dovrebbe indurre lo spettatore ad amarissime riflessioni sulla società che lo circonda. Il suo suicidio e anche lo sbocco di una psicosi scatenata per giunta da un scherzo. L’ambiguità dell’opera è anche il suo fascino. Bontempelli avverte bene i pericoli di una società disumanizzante, e li avverte con una notevole preveggenza, come un pericolo del nostro tempo.

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## **L'UMORISMO E LA COMICITÀ NEL TEATRO DI LUIGI PIRANDELLO, CASO DI: "I SEI PERSONAGGI IN CERCA D'AUTORE" e "ENRICO IV"**

**Abdellah MAASSOUM\***

**Abstract:** *In Pirandello's world reality does not exist, the life we live is a theatrical staging, everyone wears a mask and plays a part that does not belong to them, the self does not exist, each is locked up in a shell like a prison and cannot communicate with the others. Illusoriness and absurdity of reality, dissolution of the ego, loneliness and incommunicability, and humour are the dominant themes of Pirandello's work. Pirandello defines the "warning of the contrary" as "comic": warning of the dissonance between the substance of life and the forms, it provokes laughter. But if we manage to move from the warning of the opposite to the "feeling of the opposite", that is, if we manage to reflect beyond appearances to look into the interiority of the person, which produces the humorous situation, then laughter turns into pity. In this article, I will try to reveal the sense and meaning of humour and comedy in the plays of Luigi Pirandello and I will analyze what it is for the author, examining the different aspects and, trying to understand the deepest meanings and reveal the mysteries of comedy and humour. The questions that arise immediately are the following: What is the meaning of humour and comedy in Luigi Pirandello's plays? Why did Pirandello choose humour and comedy as a language and theatrical tool? What do humour and laughter represent for Pirandello? Are humour and comedy only used to make people laugh or are they a reflection? What does Pirandello mean by humour? What is the difference with comedy? I try to answer these questions.*

**Keywords:** *humor, comedy, theatre, theatrical play, the meaning*

### **II. Introduzione**

Nel mondo di Pirandello la realtà non esiste, la vita che viviamo è una messa in scena teatrale, ognuno indossa una maschera e recita una parte che non gli appartiene, l'io non esiste, ciascuno è rinchiuso in un guscio come in una prigione e non può comunicare con gli altri. Illusorietà e absurdità della realtà, dissolvimento dell'io, solitudine e incommunicabilità, l'umorismo sono i temi dominanti dell'opera pirandelliana. Pirandello definisce "comico" "l'avvertimento del contrario": l'avvertimento della dissonanza tra la sostanza di vita e le forme, provoca il riso. Ma se riusciamo a passare dall'avvertimento del contrario al "sentimento del contrario", se riusciamo cioè a riflettere oltre l'apparenza per guardare nell'interiorità della persona, che produce la situazione umoristica, allora il riso si trasforma in pietà.

In questo articolo cercherò di rivelare il senso e il significato dell'umorismo e della comicità nelle opere teatrali di Luigi Pirandello e analizzerò cosa esso sia per l'autore, esaminandone i diversi aspetti e, provando a comprenderne i più profondi significati e a svelarne i misteri della comicità e dell'umorismo.

**Le domande** che si pongono nell'immediato sono le seguenti:

- Che significato hanno l'umorismo e la comicità nelle opere teatrali di Luigi Pirandello?
- Perché Pirandello ha scelto l'umorismo e la comicità come linguaggio e strumento teatrale?

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- Cosa rappresentano l'umorismo e il riso per Pirandello?
- L'umorismo e la comicità sono usati solo per fare ridere oppure sono una riflessione?
- Cosa intende Pirandello per umorismo?
- Qual è la differenza con la comicità? A queste domande provo a dare una risposta

### III. Luigi Pirandello; vita e opere

*« Io dunque sono figlio del Caos »*

Luigi Pirandello è tra i più grandi drammaturghi e narratori di sempre, un autore che non solo è scrittore, ma anche filosofo, è un uomo dalla personalità complessa, difficile da interpretare, le cui emozioni sono spesso imperscrutabili e si nascondono nel silenzio.

Pirandello nasce nel 1867 nei pressi di Girgenti (poi Agrigento) da Stefano, già combattente garibaldino e poi amministratore di zolfatare, e da Caterina Ricci-Gramitto ( di famiglia antiborbonica). La sua fase di formazione oscilla tra la necessità di acquisire competenze professionali (in particolare in giurisprudenza) e l'interesse per le lettere, che asseconderà seguendo corsi all'Università di Palermo e poi di Roma, dove tra il 1887 e l'89, conosce Luigi Capuana, che incide notevolmente sulla sua prima formazione. La pubblicazione del primo libro di poesie, *« Mal giocando »* (1889), sancisce la vocazione letteraria del giovane, ormai da tempo in contrasto col padre : Pirandello decide di andare a laurearsi a Bonn, e in effetti lo fa nel 1891 con una tesi sul dialetto di Grigenti, nella quale già si coglie l'interesse per gli usi linguistici del parlato.

Il suo primo romanzo è *« L'esclusa »*, pubblicato nel 1901. Comincia anche a scrivere novelle. Nel 1894 sposa Maria Antonietta Portulano. Dal matrimonio nasceranno tre figli, collabora a numerose riviste letterarie e pubblica, nel 1894, la prima delle molte raccolte di novelle che scandiranno la sua carriera letteraria; nel 1902 esce il suo secondo romanzo, *« Il Turno »*.

Nel 1924 Pirandello entrò nel partito fascista. Nel 1934, ha vinto il premio Nobel per la letteratura. Pirandello morì il 10 dicembre 1936.

#### **Romanzi, novelle, teatro**

*Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, desta grande interesse e viene subito tradotto in francese e in tedesco. Pirandello continua a scrivere: novelle; il romanzo *I vecchi e i giovani*, pubblicato nel 1909. dal 1916 in poi, appaiono sulle scene *“Pensaci Giacomino”*, *“Liola”*, *“Così è (se vi pare)”*, *“Ma non è una cosa seria”*, *“Il Piacere dell'onestà”*, *“Il gioco delle parti”*, *“Tutto per bene”*, *“L'uomo la bestia la virtù”* per poi arrivare ai *“Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore”* del 1921

1923 *« Ciascuno a suo modo »*, *« Questa sera si recita a soggetto »* e *«l' Enrico IV »*.

L'attività teatrale di Pirandello comincia, salvo sporadiche anticipazioni, nel 1910, ma l'impegno maggiore inizia dal 1915-16. Come si è visto, la poetica pirandelliana si fondava essenzialmente sull'elaborazione del concetto di umorismo e sulla sua applicazione in ambito narrativo. Soprattutto la funzione del personaggio risultava ben adeguata al romanzo e alle novelle, mentre nel genere drammatico

Pirandello si sentiva più legato a convenzioni, come quella dell'oggettività e dell'autonomia della scena rappresentata, che in effetti pesano sensibilmente sui testi del 1910, *La morsa* e *Lumié di Sicilia*. Ma a partire dal 1915-16 vengono attuati vari tentativi di portare sulla scena i temi propri della narrativa umoristica; dopo l'atto unico *All'uscita*, sono proposti, in dialetto siciliano, la *commedia Pensaci, Giacomino!* e soprattutto il dramma *Liolà*. Dal 1917 comincia la fase più importante del teatro pirandelliano: dopo *Il berretto a sonagli* e *La giara*, ancora di ambientazione siciliana, vengono rappresentati *Così è (se vi pare)*, *Il piacere dell'onestà* e, nel 1918, *Ma non è una cosa seria* e *Il giuoco delle parti*.

Sullo statuto dei personaggi teatrali e sulle regole della rappresentazione Pirandello torna a meditare nel 1921, dando il via alla stagione più alta della sua produzione drammaturgica. Dopo che nel 1920 erano stati proposti altri due drammi di successo (*Tutto per bene* e *Come prima, meglio di prima*), nel maggio del 1921 va in scena a Roma *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, un'opera rivoluzionaria, e infatti accolta con molte titubanze alla prima (ma nel settembre dello stesso anno, a Milano, il successo fu notevole). Con quest'opera, Pirandello ha ripreso temi a lui cari, ma la novità viene dalla scelta di svelare i presupposti di un testo teatrale: per fare questo egli utilizza la tecnica del teatro nel teatro che, proponendo un dramma secondario all'interno del dramma principale, svela i meccanismi della costruzione drammaturgica stessa. I successivi drammi inseribili nel filone del « teatro nel teatro » sono *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924) e *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930).

#### **IV.L'umorismo e la comicità nel teatro di Luigi Pirandello**

##### ***I SEI PERSONAGGI IN CERCA D'AUTORE***

Il 1921 è senza dubbio un anno capitale nella produzione pirandelliana. È ormai da cinque anni che scrive con continuità per il teatro, ma è in questo 1921 che Pirandello mette a segno contemporaneamente due testi destinati a restare, a ragione, fra gli esiti massimi della sua capacità creativa. Primo in ordine cronologico è « *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* », composto a partire dall'ottobre del 1921. Si tratta in ogni caso di un tema caro a Pirandello, che riporta a un nodo centrale della sua riflessione estetica, a quella che possiamo chiamare « la teoria del personaggio ». Per Pirandello l'elemento significativo di un'opera è dato essenzialmente dal personaggio, che è visto come entità trascendente e come tale, in grado di essere accolto in personalità diverse.

Nei *Sei personaggi* abbiamo una semplice variante della situazione: personaggi che sono stati rifiutati, no portati a termine, da un attore, chiedono di poter nascere compiutamente a un capocomico. *I Sei personaggi* non sono però soltanto un documento di poetica (teatrale o non teatrale). Essi arrivano al termine di una ricca stagione fra 1916 e il 1920 tutto fondata sulla contrapposizione.

Sul palcoscenico emergono i caratteri e le emozioni di un Padre, una Madre, il Figlio, la Figliastro, il Giovinetto e la Bambina, i personaggi rifiutati dallo scrittore che li ha concepiti, nonché il dramma da loro vissuto. Il dramma è l'omissione delle loro vicende, che termina con la liberazione dagli eventi passati: pongono fine al dramma e lo trasmettono agli attori. Ciò corrisponde alla rottura del silenzio e di quell'alone di mistero che li avvolgeva. I sei in cerca di un autore venne rappresentata per la prima volta il 10 maggio 1921 da Dario Niccodemi al teatro Valle di Roma ; l'autore dovette allontanarsi da un'uscita laterale e venti minuti dopo la fine dello spettacolo buona parte del pubblico era ancora in teatro a discussione animatamente. La stessa compagnia la

mise mise in scena a Milano al teatro Manzoni il successivo 27 settembre, ottenendo questa volta un successo indiscusso. Tra il 1922 e il 1927 il dramma venne messo in scena nei teatri di tutta Europa, e anche a New York, Buenos Aires, Tokio.

I sei personaggi sono protagonisti di una storia dolorosa che finisce per emergere gradualmente dalla rappresentazione, ma il vero oggetto del testo è il conflitto tra loro (abbandonati dall'autore che li aveva immaginati) e la compagnia teatrale che, nel tentativo di costruire la struttura drammatica in cui inserirli, li vorrebbe costringere negli schermi di una recitazione convenzionale.

Pirandello scrisse altri due drammi in cui l'oggetto della rappresentazione era non la vita, ma il teatro stesso: *Ciascuno a suo modo* (1924), in cui il conflitto si verifica tra gli Spettatori, l'Autore e gli Attori, *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* (1930), in cui il conflitto è tra gli Attori e il Regista.

« *Ma se è tutto qui il male! Nelle parole! Abbiamo tutti dentro un mondo di cose; ciascuno un suo mondo di cose! E come possiamo intenderci, signore, se nelle parole ch'io dico metto il senso e il valore delle cose che sono dentro di me; mentre chi le ascolta, inevitabilmente le assume col senso e col valore che hanno per sé, del mondo com'egli l'ha dentro? Crediamo d'intenderci; non c'intendiamo mai! (...) Il dramma per me è tutto qui, signore: nella coscienza che ho, che ciascuno di noi- veda- si crede « uno » ma non è vero : è « tanti », signore, « tanti », secondo tutte le possibilità d'essere che sono in noi (...)* »

#### **ENRICO IV**

Essendo nato quasi contemporaneamente ai *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1922), questo dramma non presenta la tecnica del « teatro nel teatro », se non come pretesto: l'azione infatti riguarda un modesto borghese che, durante una rappresentazione storica, è caduto da cavallo ed è impazzito, credendo di essere davvero *Enrico IV* di Germania. Ma da alcuni anni in realtà il presunto Enrico (del quale, si noti, non viene indicato un nome proprio) finge soltanto di essere ancora pazzo, per cogliere l'occasione di vendicarsi di Belcredi, il rivale che ha provocato la sua caduta per conquistare donna Matilde, amata da entrambi. Il testo quindi imita i modi dei drammi storici ottocenteschi, ma rivela subito la sua valenza ironica.

L'altro capolavoro del teatro di Pirandello è *Enrico IV* (1922), in cui viene portato alle estreme conseguenze il problema della « forma », questo dramma non presenta la tecnica del « teatro nel teatro », se non come pretesto: l'azione infatti riguarda un modesto borghese che, durante una rappresentazione storica, è caduto da cavallo ed è impazzito, credendo di essere davvero *Enrico IV* di Germania.

Il protagonista, al quale la follia ha negato la « forma » di una vita normale, quando rinsavisce adotta consapevolmente come « forma » proprio la follia. Ma da alcuni anni in realtà il presunto Enrico (del quale, si noti, non viene indicato un nome proprio) finge soltanto di essere ancora pazzo, per cogliere l'occasione di vendicarsi di Belcredi, il rivale che ha provocato la sua caduta per conquistare donna Matilde, amata da entrambi. Il testo quindi imita i modi dei drammi storici ottocenteschi, ma rivela subito la sua valenza ironica: la storia del triangolo amoroso è solo un cannovaccio ( concluso, in maniera quasi melodrammatica, con l'uccisione di Belcredi da parte del finto-pazzo Enrico), mentre l'attenzione si concentra progressivamente sui monologhi del protagonista.

## **V. Il significato dell'umorismo**

La definizione che l'autore propone dell'umorismo è sempre contraddittoria ed è soprattutto la rivelazione della sua poetica: nei testi umoristici, tragico e comico, riso e serietà sono indissolubilmente mescolati e da essi non emerge una visione ordinata e armonica della realtà, ma un mondo frantumato, pieno di situazioni strane, assurde e paradossali.

L'umorismo rappresenta infatti un modo per smascherare le convenzioni e le finzioni della vita sociale: esso fa venire alla luce "la vita nuda", quella autentica, con le sue contraddizioni, debolezze, assurdità, ipocrisie e sofferenze. Nell'opera narrativa e teatrale di Pirandello, le finzioni e le ipocrisie (la forma in antitesi alla vita vera) vengono derise e disgregate.

### **Cosa intende Pirandello per umorismo e qual è la differenza con la comicità?**

L'umorismo di Pirandello si apre con la discussione sul significato da attribuire al termine "umorismo", la cui etimologia fa subito risaltare il collegamento con un sentimento apparentemente opposto: la malinconia. Pirandello respinge l'accezione comune del termine (qualcosa da ridere) e contrappone l'umorismo all'ironia retorica. L'umorismo va distinto nettamente dal comico (altro genere di cui ridiscuteva lo statuto in quegli anni) l'autore comico, infatti, vuole soltanto rappresentare i fatti incongrui e lontani dalle norme, che suscitano il riso; l'umorista, invece, coglie anche gli aspetti più profondi e contraddittori di una situazione comica, mettendo in luce il dramma dietro l'apparente semplicità di una situazione buffa, passando così dal puro « avvertimento del contrario », tipico del comico, al « sentimento del contrario », che caratterizza il riso amaro di tipo umoristico. L'umorismo quindi è un modo per rompere gli schermi e le forme sclerotizzate; è una forma di conoscenza mai circoscrivibile in un'unica formula, e da ricercare in tutti i testi nei quali vengono poste in discussione verità costituite.

### **ESEMPI DI PERSONAGGI CHE SUSCITAVANO IL RISO E L'UMORISMO**

Celebre è l'esempio della "vecchia signora", goffamente imbellettata e vestita di abiti giovanili, che suscita il riso del lettore, il quale avverte in lei "il contrario" di come si dovrebbe acconciare una vecchia signora. Ma se egli riflette sul perché ella inganni così pietosamente se stessa, nel tentativo magari di trattenere un marito più giovane di lei, ecco che perverrà al "sentimento del contrario" ed il riso cederà il posto alla pietà. Di qui la sua "poetica dell'umorismo":

l'umorista scava più in profondità dello scrittore comico e di quello tragico perché, intervenendo con la riflessione, smaschera le menzogne delle convenzioni sociali e gli autoinganni della nostra coscienza.

## **VI. Conclusione**

Con l'analisi delle opere teatrali di Pirandello, abbiamo una migliore comprensione dei *diversi significati che l'umorismo assume nella produzione pirandelliana*. Abbiamo perciò qualche elemento per risolverne l'enigma. Infatti, possiamo sostenere di aver individuato diversi modi in cui l'umorismo si qualifica. Esso consiste nell'opposizione « sentimento del contrario »: tragico e comico, riso e serietà mescolate. Mondo pieno di situazioni strane, assurde e paradossali. L'umorismo è un modo per smascherare le convenzioni, le ipocrisie e sofferenze, l'umorismo è

« l'avvertimento del contrario », l'avvertimento della dissonanza tra la sostanza di vita e le forme, provoca il riso.

Attraverso l'umorismo, quindi, Pirandello ci aiuta a *comprendere la verità*. Grazie a ciò, abbiamo scoperto che l'umorismo interviene con la riflessione, smaschera le menzogne delle convenzioni sociali e gli autoinganni della nostra coscienza e *una fetta rilevante della vita di ognuno*.

L'uomo pirandelliano è un attore teatrale che compie ciò che il copione gli impone di dire o fare e non ciò che vorrebbe davvero. Perciò l'autore decide di circondare di umorismo i suoi personaggi. Essi vivono tutti i diversi significati dell'umorismo.

attraverso gli indizi lasciati dall'autore, le vicende dei personaggi, i monologhi dei protagonisti, abbiamo compreso più a fondo cosa sia l'umorismo.

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## UMORISMO COME “SENTIMENTO DEL CONTRARIO” IN LUIGI PIRANDELLO: ANALISI LINGUISTICA

Nabila KADIR\*

**Abstract:** Pirandello was one of the most prolific writers, writing not only novels, but also numerous plays and even at the beginning of his training he published some poetic collections. His literary work is not divided into various creative periods, but he simultaneously writes verse, novels, novels, critical essays and theater. In his essay on humor Pirandello distinguishes the warning of the contrary that causes rice in the face of a comic-paradoxical situation from the feeling of the contrary that leads to metacognitive reflection in the same situation. A new conception of feeling that calls into question our instinct for common action in society. But this humorous attitude fully reflects a cultural background that goes back several centuries of literature history. Pirandello then tackles the problem of the alleged national difference between humorous expressions of different countries, starting from a quote by Thackeray and focusing on the work of Aristofane Per Pirandello, Aristofane is humorous in a broad sense, that is, comic or satirical, because “it is never held between the yes and the no” and “has a moral purpose” that Pirandello opposes here to the “world of pure fantasy” and that then, contradicting Lipps, will exclude from humor. Socrates, on the other hand, is a true humorist because he possesses the “feeling of the contrary” that the author is dealing with here for the first time. “One of the greatest humorists without knowing it was Copernico,” Pirandello tells us, and this is because the humorist captures the contradictions and lays bare the illusion that every individual feels at the center of reality. In this sense, the self-deprecation for a sapiens leader is an excellent vaccination against the risks of pathological narcissism that can result from holding positions of power. In the second part of the essay, Pirandello proposes his definition of humor: “In the conception of every humorous work, reflection does not hide, it does not remain invisible. Almost a mirror in which the feeling is re-aimed, is placed before him as a judge; however, from this analysis, from this decomposition, another feeling arises and spirals: what could be called and which I in fact call, the feeling of the contrary”. The feeling of the contrary is committed to drawing from the situations a “universal sense”. It is therefore not the warning of the contrary: this is the comic, that is the humorous.

**Keywords:** humor, feeling of the contrary, comic, humorous attitude

### Premessa

Nel suo saggio “L’umorismo” Pirandello spiega la differenza tra “comicità”, ironia e umorismo”. Il comico, definito come “avvertimento del contrario”, nasce dal contrasto tra l’apparenza e la realtà. L’umorismo è definito come “sentimento del contrario”, spiegando che in esso implica la comprensione di sentimento e riflessione. Pertanto, l’umorismo implica un processo di riflessione critica, quale consente di analizzare e di comprendere ciò che si nasconde dietro un fatto o un atteggiamento a prima vista comico.

### 1. “Umorismo” e “Comico”, secondo Luigi Pirandello

Luigi Pirandello elabora la sua concezione dell’umorismo confrontandosi attraverso autori da lui prediletti quali Cervantes e Manzoni e in consonanza con alcuni pensatori (da Lipps a Richter) e ma a volte anche in polemica con altri in particolare Benedetto Croce. Nel saggio Pirandello espone appunto la sua poetica dell’umorismo, la

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cui originalità risiede sostanzialmente nella distinzione tra “comico” ed “umoristico”. La comicità viene intesa da Pirandello come “avvertimento del contrario” (Pirandello, 1938: 32), quindi, come pura intuizione di una contraddizione, ad es. quando con superficialità notiamo qualcosa che va contro la norma (e quindi fa ridere). L’umorismo invece nasce da situazioni di dolore e sofferenza ed è determinato dal “sentimento del contrario” (Pirandello, op.cit.: 35), in altri termini l’elaborazione razionale e successiva del comico, che si determina quando adottiamo un atteggiamento meno frettoloso e nasce in noi un riflesso che ci fa scoprire le origini di ciò che ci faceva ridere (fa sorridere) e porta ad un sentimento di identificazione e compassione nei confronti della persona presa in gioco. Anche in questo caso siamo di fronte ad un conflitto tra la forza profonda della vita e maschere che contrassegnano la nostra esistenza quotidiana e le relazioni interpersonali, tuttavia la vita appare soffocata dalla forma e incarnata dall’ideologia, dalle leggi civili e dal meccanismo stesso della vita associata. Pirandello lo esemplifica come segue:

Vedo una vecchia signora, coi capelli ritinti, tutti unti non si sa di quale orribile manteca, e poi tutta goffamente imbellettata e parata d’abiti giovanili. Mi metto a ridere. Avverto che quella vecchia signora è il contrario di ciò che una vecchia rispettabile signora dovrebbe essere. Posso così, a prima giunta e superficialmente, arrestarmi a questa impressione comica. Il comico è appunto un avvertimento del contrario. Ma se ora interviene in me la riflessione, e mi suggerisce che quella vecchia signora non prova forse nessun piacere a pararsi così come un pappagallo, ma che forse ne soffre e lo fa soltanto perché pietosamente s’inganna che parata così, nascondendo così le rughe e la canizie, riesca a trattenere a sé l’amore del marito molto più giovane di lei, ecco che io non posso più riderne come prima, perché appunto la riflessione, lavorando in me, mi ha fatto andar oltre a quel primo avvertimento, o piuttosto, più addentro: da quel primo avvertimento del contrario mi ha fatto passare a questo sentimento del contrario. Ed è tutta qui la differenza tra il comico e l’umoristico, (ibidem: 38).

La vecchia signora vestita e truccata da giovane, provoca il riso, è il momento dell’ “avvertimento del contrario” ovvero del comico. Se però rifletto e penso che quella vecchia signora si acconci, in quel modo, per non perdere l’amore del marito più giovane, non posso più ridere come prima e passo dall’avvertimento del contrario al “sentimento del contrario” ovvero all’umorismo. L’arte umoristica analizza, scompone, smonta la realtà che rappresenta, “l’arte umoristica è un’erma bifronte che ride per una faccia del pianto della faccia opposta”. Questo testo offre un esempio molto chiaro di quello che Pirandello ci vuole trasmettere: Avvertimenti del contrario: lo spettacolo delle mille assurdità della vita quotidiana, che suscita il riso; Sentimento del contrario: qui interviene la riflessione, che aggiunge ulteriori elementi al riso di prima; in tal modo si giunge a una consapevolezza maggiore.

Quasi al termine del lungo saggio, Pirandello ricapitola le sue tesi principali e ci offre in sostanza la sintesi delle sue convinzioni. L’arte umoristica, dice, è un’arte del tutto diversa da quella tradizionale: rifiuta, infatti, le costruzioni ideali, scompone anziché abbellire, vede il mondo com’è e non come dovrebbe essere, infine, lo ritrae nella maniera più diretta e sincera, senza paura di quanto può sembrare sconveniente.



## **2. Le caratteristiche dell'Arte umoristica di Pirandello**

Il testo spiega chiaramente i motivi caratteristici dell'arte umoristica in genere, e pirandelliana più in particolare. L'arte umoristica rifiuta le procedure dell'arte tradizionale: quest'ultima, infatti, astrae e concentra e, idealizzando la realtà, finisce per tradire l'autenticità della vita. L'umorista sa invece che la realtà (del mondo degli individui singoli) è molto più ricca, imprevedibile, contraddittoria.

Per rivelare tale ricchezza, l'umorista va in cerca del contrario: è soprattutto attento ai particolari più intimi e minuti, che possono anche parere volgari e triviali, guarda ai contrasti e alle contraddizioni. I suoi personaggi non sono perciò eroi disegnati tavolino, sono personaggi veri e vivi, colti talora in camicia cioè negli aspetti più quotidiani e a volte ripugnanti.

Dunque, l'umorista, quando fa arte, evita di comporre cioè di dare un'immagine idealizzata del mondo e degli uomini, al contrario, scompone, disarticola: di quel che di scomposto, di slegato, di capriccioso si può riscontrare nell'opera umoristica.

Pirandello non si accontenta, nell'Umorismo, di esporre teoricamente i caratteri dell'arte umoristica. Con il suo modo di scrivere e di esporre ci offre una diretta esemplificazione di umorismo in atto.

Mentre l'arte tradizionale tende alla coerenza e alla compostezza e, mirando a comunicare una presunta verità o essenza delle cose, scarta gli elementi casuali e accessori, l'arte umoristica di Pirandello ama la discordanza, la disarmonia, la contraddizione, indugia in divagazioni e in particolari gratuiti, distrugge le gerarchie e i sistemi di valore del passato, predilige il difforme, il grottesco, l'incongruente, il ridicolo, il dissonante. Nella consapevolezza che la vita "non conclude" - non ha un ordine, un senso, un inizio o una fine -, anche Pirandello nelle sue opere umoristiche punta a strutture aperte e in concluse.

L'arte umoristica respinge le leggi esteriori della retorica classica e le "veneri dello stile" (come dice Pirandello) per adeguarsi al movimento libero e spontaneo della riflessione: mentre sia gli autori classici che quelli romantici tendono al Sublime, Pirandello sceglie il linguaggio quotidiano, l'unico adatto a comunicare una concezione della vita che non rivela nulla di essenziale ma solo le storture di un'esistenza insensata.

La poetica umoristica rifiuta la concezione sia classica, sia romantica, sia, infine, decadente dell'arte: l'arte umoristica non nasce dal rispetto di regole estranee al momento dell'elaborazione (come pensavano i classici), né è espressione immediata dell'autenticità della passione o del sentimento o della natura (come ritenevano i romantici).

## **3. Lingua e stile**

Il saggio di Pirandello è caratterizzato da un'ambivalente duplicità: sia in termini di analisi, che di atteggiamento adottato da Pirandello nei confronti del suo essere scrittore. Se è pur vero che egli è il critico delle finzioni e delle illusioni della società del suo tempo, e l'artefice di una scomposizione delle forme artistiche che s'identificano con la sua radicale modernità novecentesca, è altresì vero che la scomposizione da lui operata convive paradossalmente con un atteggiamento opposto: è questo, uno dei paradossi dell'umorismo pirandelliano; dell'umorismo in senso stretto, come ripetutamente, l'autore ribadisce nel saggio, da non confondere con l'umorismo in senso lato, satirico, intellettualistico, moralistico, allegorico, ironico, comico, o semplicemente burlesco.

Il problema dell'ambivalenza ha nel saggio uno svolgimento psicologico e uno svolgimento estetico. Il primo segue un percorso chiaro che giunge a compiuta espressione nel penultimo capitolo. Il secondo svolgimento resta invece ma solo sul piano teorico strozzato e irrisolto. Nel definire il suo umorismo, attraverso l'esempio della "signora ritinta", Pirandello osserva che la riflessione "non si nasconde" e "ne scompone l'immagine e da questa scomposizione sorge un altro sentimento: il sentimento del contrario." (L. Pirandello, 1908: 126)

Nel passo successivo alla riflessione, Pirandello esclude un'interpretazione in chiave prevalentemente storica. Il brano contiene l'indicazione di una situazione psicologico-esistenziale di partenza e, poi, la sottolineatura della forte autonomia e specificità artistica. Da qui l'umorismo pirandelliano può essere perciò interpretato come una biologica. L'uomo "fuori di chiave" è il moderno Amleto. L'Amleto umorista – secondo un topos che Pirandello poteva trarre dalle sue fonti – aprirebbe uno spazio immenso di analisi.

Nasce come scrittore legato al Verismo, perché spinto dall'esigenza di rappresentare la realtà così com'era, ma si distaccò quasi subito da questo movimento. Caratteristica dominante dei Veristi e, invece, non adottata da Pirandello era, infatti, il regionalismo, ovvero il descrivere le classi meno abbienti di una specifica regione. Egli analizza la crisi dell'uomo moderno del suo tempo (vive, infatti, nel periodo della crisi della società, senso del mistero e crisi dei valori) venendo identificato per l'appunto scrittore decadente.

Dalla sua poetica, dal suo bisogno di rappresentare senza veli la tragicità del reale nasce una lingua cruda, che rifugge dalle finezze stilistiche e manda all'aria la sintassi e il lessico tradizionali. Il suo stile si distingue così per la sua violenza espressiva, libero da ogni convenzione letteraria, sia nella narrativa che nel teatro.

Concetto filosofico molto importante per conoscere Pirandello ha, infatti, una concezione relativistica dell'uomo, che ne esclude una conoscenza scientifica. L'uomo è troppo assurdo perché sia capito (mentre la natura è più semplice, inconsapevole, felice, anche se resta un paradiso perduto e rimpianto). Il borghese si dibatte fra ciò che sente dentro (sempre mutevole) e il rispetto che deve alle convenzioni sociali (sempre fisse e stereotipate). La 'forma' o 'apparenza' è l'involucro esteriore che noi ci siamo dati o in cui gli altri ci identificano; la 'vita' invece è un flusso di continue sensazioni che spezza ogni forma. Noi crediamo di essere 'forme stabili' (personalità definite): in realtà tutto ciò è solo una maschera dietro di cui sta la nostra vera vita, fondata sull'inconscio, cioè sull'istinto e sugli impulsi contraddittori. Parafrasando un titolo di un suo romanzo, si potrebbe dire che noi siamo 'uno' (perché pretendiamo di avere una forma), 'nessuno' (perché non abbiamo una personalità definita) e 'centomila' (perché a seconda di chi ci guarda abbiamo un aspetto diverso).

#### **4. Analisi linguistica**

La lingua di Pirandello è la lingua del reale, della complessità, della modernità, della frammentazione dell'uomo. Una lingua che cattura ogni minimo particolare presente nella scena, tanto da farcela immaginare come se fosse davanti a noi. È una lingua scorrevole, dialogata, semplice, viva, piena di espressioni del parlato; una lingua che serve a comunicare emozioni, sentimenti, riflessioni; una lingua che riesce a dare anche il senso della concretezza.

L'umorismo pirandelliano descrive il momento importante di riconsiderazione e sistemazione del pensiero dell'autore; lo scrittore scopre una realtà immaginaria radicata su contrasti e relatività, in cui le immagini "anziché associate per simulazione o

per contiguità, si presentano in contrasto: ogni immagine, ogni gruppo di immagini desta e richiama le contrarie, che naturalmente dividono lo spirito, il quale, irrequieto, s'ostina a trovare o a stabilir tra loro le relazioni più impensate" (G. Nencioni, 1983 : 216). L'arte pirandelliana si unisce in direzioni contrapposte: al primo sentimento di disapprovazione che si prova guardando una vecchietta vestita con abiti troppo giovanili, ne fa seguito subito un altro contrario, di compatimento, se si considera che lei lo fa soltanto per tenersi stretto il marito più giovane. È questo l'umorismo in tutta la sua essenza, quello che lo scrittore chiama il sentimento del contrario, che nasce da una riflessione certamente proveniente dalla ragione, ma non sganciata dalla fantasia e fusa con l'intuizione, che gira intorno a quella sensazione iniziale la materializziamo.

### **Conclusioni**

Due emozioni e dunque due toni del discorso che si oppongono e si implicano a vicenda e di conseguenza due toni del linguaggio, che insieme si richiamano e si respingono insieme creando una forma linguistica eccezionale, complessa, vivace, fuori dagli modelli astratti della stilistica, ma dentro le esigenze, tutt'altro che lineari, della vita. Una poetica di questo genere non può che manifestarsi nello scontro di tonalità varie e servirsi del più vivace, spontaneo e immediato movimento della lingua in cui la forma si crea volta per volta, avvalendosi di bizzarre tessiture della pagina, meta narratività e delle più svariate digressioni (A. R. Pupino, 2013 :143); negando l'arte tradizionale, ancora troppo legata a norme linguistiche ormai superate.

Vogliono scrivere bello coloro che non sanno scrivere bene Si innamorano, costoro, della parola rilucente, agghindata, come fanno nel mondo di Platone gli spiriti volgari che si scelgono, prima di tornare sulla terra, le vite più appariscenti, più chiassose; solo Ulisse, racconta il filosofo ateniese nel mito di Er, si va a prendere la vita di un uomo comune, quella che tutti gli altri avevano appositamente lasciato in disparte. (L. Pirandello, 1952: 222)

Per Pirandello non sono le nuove parole che lo interessano, ma le parole più precise che cerca per creare il sentimento, cercandola dovunque, anche tra quelle inusitate e fuori moda, rimodernandole, aggiustandole al punto anche da fargli assumere un significato diverso, magari nuovo. C'è, allo stesso tempo, oggettività e soggettività nella sua lingua; la prima nasce dal sostrato della sua formazione, dei suoi studi intorno ai classici antichi e a quelli moderni, Foscolo, Carducci, Pascoli, D'Annunzio, Verga, Capuana; dalle sue origini e dalla moda del tempo che lo portano a guardare alla sua terra, arricchendo le sue opere di idiotismi siciliani; la seconda che si manifesta proprio nella ricerca spropositata della parola più appropriata, nella frase svelta, concitata, nel periodo breve che dia la sensazione del movimento con le sue interruzioni e le sue riprese, nella tendenza al discorso diretto. Lo stile dello scrittore si basa su alcuni elementi cruciali per la sua visione della lingua intesa come strumento dell'espressione artistica, che sono: la scelta stilistica, la spontaneità, la lingua parlata, la dialettalità e la questione della lingua. Prima di tutto bisogna constatare che Pirandello non si è mai impegnato in considerazioni o discussioni astratte e puramente teoriche sulla nozione della stilistica e dello stile, anzi, se ne è sempre allontanato senza indugio, dirigendosi, invece, verso lo stile individuale dello scrittore, verso il lato pragmatico del lavoro artistico; anche quando parla di concetti generali, egli li avvicina di solito ai problemi concreti, proponendo delle soluzioni di ordine più pratico che teorico. Così, per esempio, il problema della scelta spontanea, fondamentale per la stilistica.

Dalla comicità all'umorismo il passo è breve: basta rendersi conto che l'irrigidimento della vita che ci spinge a ridere di un qualche personaggio è in realtà un

tratto caratteristico della natura umana. Il riso ingenuo e aperto che sorge non appena cogliamo nei gesti di un uomo la meccanica rigidità del burattino, si vena di tristezza e di amarezza non appena impariamo a ritrovare nel burattino l'uomo. L'atteggiamento umoristico si pone così, in Pirandello, come il frutto cui conduce un'amara filosofia dell'esistenza.

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**DE ALI NADIM A MORITO JUAN:  
EL ESTEREOTIPO ÉTNICO Y EL HUMOR AUDIOVISUAL**

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***Abstract:** The present paper proposes a qualitative analysis of the stereotype of the Muslim immigrant as a source of humor in two television series from two relatively different socio-cultural spaces, Great Britain (*Mind Your Language*) and Spain (*Cruz y Raya.com*). Specifically, the aim is to examine the discrete stereotypical trait of vulnerability exploited as a source of humor at different levels, in order to reveal similarities and specific differences between the two series based on a relevant and homogeneous selection of episodes, within the theoretical frame of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo & Raskin 1991), with the enhancements proposed by Ruiz Gurillo (2012).*

***Keywords:** ethnic stereotype, audio-visual genre, humor*

### **1. Introducción**

La presente investigación se propone examinar el estereotipo étnico del inmigrante como fuente del humor en dos series televisivas procedentes de espacios socio-culturales relativamente distintos, Gran Bretaña (*Mind Your Language*) y España (*Cruz y Raya.com*), destinos de olas migratorias sucesivas durante los siglos 20 y 21. Se parte desde la hipótesis de que el estereotipo étnico se pone en escena y en uso de manera perceptiblemente distinta, razón por la cual generará a través de sendos prismas socioculturales del humor efectos hilarantes caleidoscópicos, viéndose reforzado o debilitado retóricamente en la caracterización, en clave cómica y paródica, tanto del inmigrante y de su cultura de origen como también del individuo y de la cultura y sociedad de acogida.

A fin de comprobar la validez de la hipótesis, la presente investigación persigue desvelar cómo y a qué nivel se explota este estereotipo humorística y/o paródicamente en el marco de la comedia de situación o del sketch (Ruiz Gurillo 2012), con particular enfoque en la dimensión lingüística, a la luz de la Teoría General del Humor Verbal (TGHV) formulada por Attardo y Raskin (1991), con las enmiendas de Ruiz Gurillo (2012), así como del principio de Cooperación de Grice (1989).

### **2. El marco teórico**

El formato televisivo ofrece intrínsecamente varios recursos que se pueden aprovechar para generar humor, entre los que destacan la imagen, la situación, la banda sonora y el lenguaje. En vista del análisis humorístico del formato audiovisual propuesto se recurre a la Teoría General del Humor Verbal (Attardo y Raskin 1991, Attardo 2014, 2017), que plantea la oposición de guiones como elemento responsable del humor. En concreto, el texto humorístico se identifica como tal en virtud de su compatibilidad con dos guiones parcial o totalmente opuestos, que introducen una incongruencia. Dicha incompatibilidad necesita resolución, fase en que se activa el mecanismo lógico (basado en razonamientos o en relaciones sintagmáticas). Este modelo explicativo también abarca la situación, necesaria para entender el humor, la

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estrategia narrativa, o sea, el género del texto humorístico, la meta o el blanco del humor y el lenguaje (a través de marcas e indicadores lingüísticos). Ruiz Gurillo (2012) amplía esta teoría y la adapta al estudio del humor en español basándose en los conceptos de negociabilidad, versatilidad y adaptabilidad (Verschueren 2002, 2009 *apud* Ruiz Gurillo 2012: 39), en el sentido de que la creación del humor supone que el autor elija entre varias opciones, las negocie en el contexto y finalmente adapte las variantes posibles para conseguir determinado fin humorístico. Aliaga Aguza (2020, 2021) aplica y afina la propuesta de Ruiz Gurillo (2012) al análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo de la comedia de situación y del sketch humorístico. La interpretación del humor a nivel del lenguaje se vale, además, del principio de Cooperación de Grice (1989).

### 3. El corpus

El corpus consta de una selección de capítulos a partir de dos series televisivas, *Mind Your Language* (MYL) en el Reino Unido y *Cruz y raya.com* (CyR) en España. MYL se difundió a través de la London Weekend Television entre 1977 y 1979 (29 capítulos agrupados en 3 temporadas), con un breve resurgimiento en 1985<sup>1</sup>. La serie pone en escena una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera en la que participan alumnos de trasfondos culturales y religiosos variados (alemán, chino, español, francesa, griego, húngaro, india, italianos, japonés, pakistaní, sueco) en episodios con una duración de 25 minutos.

CyR, una producción del dúo cómico español José Mota y Juan Muñoz, se difundió en España entre 2000 y 2004 (64 croquis agrupados en 4 temporadas<sup>2</sup>). El programa adopta el formato del sketch o croquis humorístico con una duración de 3 a 5 minutos que trata en clave paródica temas de amplia relevancia socio-cultural (los inmigrantes, los españoles, los servicios públicos, las películas taquilleras de allende, etc.).

El formato audiovisual<sup>3</sup> del corpus viene representado por la comedia de situación (Ruiz Gurillo 2012; Aliaga Aguza 2020, 2021) y el sketch o croquis, puesto que en ambos casos se ponen en escena situaciones inspiradas de la realidad en clave humorística, paródica o caricaturesca, se transmiten por televisión y marcan el humor a través de risas enlatadas (entre otras características).

Para el corpus se han seleccionado exclusivamente las secuencias que escenifican el estereotipo del inmigrante musulmán, en concreto, un total de cinco capítulos de la serie MYL (1, 8 y 13 de la primera temporada; 1 de la segunda temporada; 1 de la tercera temporada) y veinticinco croquis de la serie CyR. El corpus presenta la homogeneidad requerida (Briz *et alii* 2002) puesto que se trata en ambas series de un formato televisivo similar, caracterizado por la oralidad fingida o secundaria (Brumme 2008) con cierto grado de improvisación. No representa, por tanto, un corpus de lengua hablada propiamente dicha, sino más bien de lengua simulada. Para la transcripción se ha recurrido a una adaptación del sistema ValEsCo (Briz *et alii* 2002).

### 4. El estereotipo del inmigrante musulmán

La definición del estereotipo empleada se basa en Yueh-Ting / Jussim / Clark (1995), según los cuales el estereotipo representa una imagen genérica a menudo

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<sup>1</sup> La serie se suspendió por considerarse demasiado racista, recurriendo a estereotipos ofensivos.

<sup>2</sup> Datos comprobados en IMDB.

<sup>3</sup> Para la distinción *género vs formato*, véase Aliaga Aguza (2020, 110 *et ss*).

incompleta, sesgada y generalmente negativa (Lipmann 1922 *apud* Yueh-Ting / Jussim / Clark 1995: 31) de un segmento social que se construye mediante la adscripción de propiedades como ciertos rasgos físicos o de carácter, determinados papeles sociales e incluso patrones de comportamiento. Pese a que el término se emplee frecuentemente con connotaciones negativas, el estereotipo puede ser negativo, neutro o positivo.

A partir de esta definición del término, se constata que los personajes seleccionados comparten en ambas series rasgos estereotipados asociados generalmente a una insuficiente adaptación a la cultura de acogida. Los datos que ofrece el corpus permiten proponer un repertorio de *culturemas* (Poyatos 1972 *apud* Luque Nadal 2009) estereotipos a los que recurren los guionistas en las dos series, agrupados en su mayoría bajo el estereotipo negativo del intruso (más o menos) inadaptado al país y a la cultura de acogida. Entre ellos, se ha seleccionado para el presente análisis el estereotipo negativo de la vulnerabilidad, concretado en el bajo estatus social (falta de educación y situación laboral precaria) y el insuficiente dominio de la lengua del país de acogida, entre otros, rasgos que exponen al inmigrante al abuso o al engaño.

## 5. El análisis del humor

A continuación, se propone un análisis cualitativo de la imbricación del estereotipo seleccionado en los diferentes niveles del modelo teórico del humor. La sección se ha estructurado en función de los *culturemas* específicos que se han identificado en la composición del estereotipo.

### 5.1. La interlengua

El inglés o el español que hablan los dos personajes inmigrantes se aprecia en diálogos más o menos prefabricados (Brumme 2008, Aliaga Aguza 2017: 13) que simulan la supuesta interlengua de un inmigrante y admiten improvisación en el plató. Sin embargo, mientras que el inglés de Ali Nadim resulta, pese a los errores, inteligible y auténtico (una versión de *Indian English*, cf. Pingali 2009: 17), el español de Morito Juan padece una distorsión caricaturesca algo hiperbólica por culpa de la ininteligibilidad que marca varias escenas y de la constante infusión variopinta de rasgos lingüísticos de diferentes lenguas (árabe, italiano, español), sobre todo a nivel fonético, potencialmente resultantes de su historia migratoria que debe de haber supuesto contactos plurilingüísticos.

Por ejemplo, en el primer capítulo de la segunda temporada de MYL, Ali Nadim llega tarde a clase porque, al parecer, su nuevo reloj le indica la hora equivocada:

Mr. Brown: Has it occurred to you that it might be your watch that is wrong?

Ali: Oh, blimey, this watch is guaranteed never to be wrong. It is twenty-one julies. (RISAS)

Mr. Brown: Je-WELS.

Ali: Yes, please. I'm buying it today from the marketplace. (T2, C1)

Se introduce aquí una primera oposición de guiones entre “término que designa un mes del año” y “joyas del reloj” a base del indicador lingüístico paronimia, relación fonética establecida entre el ing. *jewels* ‘joyas’ y *julies* (‘julios’). Luego, se contrastan los guiones “término que designa una legumbre” y “término que designa el valor” a partir de la paronimia entre el ing. *carat* ‘quilate’ y el ing. *carrot* ‘zanahoria’

completada por la co-hiponimia entre el ing. *carrot* ‘zanahoria’ y el ing. *turnip* ‘nabo’, que evoca subrepticamente el posible origen rural de Ali:

Mr. Brown: You bought that watch from a stall at the market?  
Ali: Most definitely! The man is telling me it is jelly good bargain. Twenty-one julies and real gold case! Eighteen turnips! (RISAS)  
Mr. Brown: Eighteen CARATS.  
Ali: Sorry, please. (T2, C1)

Cosecuentemente, se activa la oposición de guiones “sentido literal” y “sentido figurado” fundada en la desautomatización del fraseologismo ing. *to see someone coming* ‘ser una persona fácil de engañar’ hacia el significado literal ‘ver a alguien venir, acercarse o llegar’, que Ali reformula además como *he was seeing me coming before I was seeing him* ‘me vio venir antes de que yo le viera’:

Mr. Brown: Well, how much did you pay for this twenty-one jeweled eighteen carat gold timepiece?  
Ali: Two pound, fifty pence. (RISAS)  
Mr. Brown: I think he saw you coming, Ali.  
Ali: Most definitely! He was seeing me coming before I was seeing him! (RISAS)  
Mr. Brown: What I mean is you were swindled. (T2, C1)

La secuencia de oposiciones de guiones va sugiriendo, además, que la competencia lingüística limitada de Ali se corresponde a una similar ingenuidad ante situaciones comunes.

En *No toque li botone* de CyR, Morito Juan trabaja de electricista y se presenta en una oficina de empleo para avisar al funcionario de un fallo técnico. Sin embargo, sus explicaciones resultan ininteligibles, desde el nombre (“Fufaifo(())liajñ”), marcado por risas enlatadas, hasta la exposición del problema que quiere señalar. La oposición de guiones se da entre “el inmigrante electricista se presenta en la oficina de empleo para avisar de un fallo” y “el inmigrante se presenta en la oficina de empleo para buscar trabajo”, este último correspondiendo a una actuación del funcionario inmovilizada dentro de determinado patrón de comunicación (petición de datos para rellenar una ficha):

Morito Juan: Mire, li vengo porque soy leelectricista, e vengo porque le me ha [dicho (())  
Funcionario: Sí], vamos a ver, tengo que abrirle una ficha y me tiene que dar el nombre, lo primero. (RISAS)  
Morito Juan: No, joder, yo cuando le di...  
Funcionario: Es que si no me da esa información, yo no puedo atenderle.

Luego se enfoca la oposición de guiones entre “empleo que se tiene” y “empleo que se busca” a partir del indicador lingüístico “electricista”:

Morito Juan: ¡Que no toqui li botone, joder! (RISAS) Eh, no. ¡Qui si soma qui mi cuchas! ¡Si ti soma mi cuchas! E yo le dego, yo soy lelectrecista, yo no estoy gelepollas... (RISAS)  
Funcionario: Que en este momento no tenemos ningún puesto de trabajo de electricista. Le puedo ofrecer algo de antenista. (RISAS)



Se enlazan de esta manera turnos que rozan lo absurdo porque Morito Juan infringe constantemente el principio de Manera, ya que su interlengua no le permite comunicar claramente lo que quiere. El remate se construye a través de una combinación entre los componentes visual y lingüístico: al tocar el botón de turno, el funcionario se electrocuta, se le atraviesa un rayo que le sacude y le ilumina el esqueleto, mientras que Morito Juan exclama:

Morito Juan: Lo que vengo a decirle eh que mi jefe ilectricista ¡que no toqui li botonas! (RISAS) ¡No toque li botone porque te da la dicarga / iléctricas (RISAS) y ti cae y ya no ti soma!

Por lo general, las dos series escenifican relaciones de poder distintas: mientras que en MYL Ali Nadim suele ser víctima constante a causa de su competencia lingüística limitada, en CyR Morito Juan sale muchas veces aventajado y la persona perjudicada por su propio descuido, rutina, sentimiento de superioridad o por las imperfecciones del sistema resulta ser el funcionario, director, presentador, etc. español.

## 5.2. La condición social

Las series caracterizan al personaje inmigrante por una posición social baja y vulnerable, de precariedad laboral (está en paro o encuentra trabajos menudos o de poca importancia) y falta de recursos financieros. Así, en MYL Ali Nadim está desocupado, mientras que en CyR Morito Juan se desempeña como fontanero, electricista, camarero, jardinero, personal de limpieza, técnico, obrero en construcciones, etc. Este estereotipo se explota exigüamente a nivel situacional (por ejemplo, no se le hace caso al inmigrante cuando se le identifica como tal a partir de detalles visuales), mientras que la base fundamental del humor sigue siendo lingüística (por lo general, juegos de palabras que ocasiona la situación).

Por ejemplo, en MYL desata la risa la manera en que Ali Nadim ofrece información. El primer día de clase, los alumnos se presentan:

Mr. Brown: And your name?

Ali: I am Ali Nadim, from Lahor. I am working at the moment not anywhere at all. (RISAS) (T1, C1)

En el segundo turno se infringen los principios de Manera y de Cantidad, puesto que la idea de estar desocupado se suele expresar en inglés con más brevedad y claridad (“I’m unemployed”). Nótese, además, que Ali recurre a estructuras que se emplean de costumbre cuando se tiene trabajo, por lo que la posición final de la negación, la entonación y la expresión facial contribuyen a crear falsas expectativas en cuanto al contenido del mensaje. A continuación, se acumulan otras oposiciones de guiones: “ir a trabajar” e “ir a cobrar el paro” (turnos 2 y 4), así como “cobrar trabajando” y “cobrar sin trabajar” (turno 4):

Mr. Brown: You’re unemployed.

Ali: Yes, please. (RISAS) Only one day a week I am working.

Mr. Brown: And what do you do then?

Ali: I am going to the unemployment exchange (RISAS) for to be collecting my money. Cor blimey! I get more money for not be working than when I’m working.

Mr. Brown: And before you discovered this secret of eternal wealth, what did you do?

Ali: Blimey, I worked. (RISAS) At Taj Mahal. (T1, C1)

Por su parte, CyR ofrece toda una serie de croquis que explota la vulnerabilidad del inmigrante ante empleadores que se permiten ignorar sus derechos salariales. En *Limpieza en el plató* Morito Juan se presenta en el plató del programa vestido de chándal y dando voces, todas idiosincrasias del personaje, con efectos hilarantes que suelen venir marcados por risas enlatadas:

Morito Juan: Vengo a cobrar, eh, vengo a cobrar lo que he hecho yo todo, claro, porque como trabajo li cruz y raya con los sketch (RISAS), joder, entonch digo vengo a que me a limpiar mi dinero y ya me li llevo que me voy a Marruecos unos meses. (RISAS)

Este turno introduce la oposición de guiones entre “realidad” y “ficción”. Puesto que Morito Juan representa un personaje ficticio de CyR, resulta sorprendente, enternecedor y cómico verle en el plató. Enseguida se aprecia otra oposición de guiones entre “el inmigrante viene a trabajar” y el insólito “el inmigrante viene a cobrar”:

El empleado del plató: O sea, si te he entendido, tú vienes al programa de Cruz y Raya a limpiar el programa, ¿no?

Morito Juan: No, no, ¿de qué limpiar?

El empleado del plató: Mira, aquí tienes [una fregona...]

Morito Juan: este qué hace hombre...]

... y un cubo.

El indicador lingüístico que posibilita tal oposición es el verbo polisémico *limpiar* (*limpiar el suelo vs limpiar el dinero*). En un primer momento, Morito Juan declara que viene a cobrar para luego referirse a limpiar su dinero, lo que bien podría representar una simple equivocación, aunque también evoca subrepticamente actividades ilícitas comúnmente asociadas a la imagen de los inmigrantes. Pero como la apariencia de Morito Juan le delata como inmigrante, el funcionario piensa que está ahí para trabajar, le dispensa un tratamiento informal con una actitud un pelín superior y le pide que se ponga a limpiar las escaleras:

El empleado del plató: Ya me está dejando... ¡Silencio, que tenemos mucha prisa!... me deja estos escalones ¡como una patena!

Morito Juan: Pero ¿cómo quiere que le voy a dejar los escalones como una patera? ¿Qué quiere que me ponga a remar con la fregona?

Se presenta aquí otra oposición de guiones entre “limpieza” e “inmigración ilegal” basada en el indicador lingüístico de la relación paronímica que se da entre las palabras *patena* y *patera*. Así, la incongruencia desata la risa por la imagen absurda e hilarante que evoca la respuesta de Morito Juan, es decir, remar con una fregona por las escaleras. El estereotipo activo en esta instancia alude a una realidad durísima de la vida de los inmigrantes, el arriesgado viaje en pateras hacia una vida mejor.

A pesar de ello, el sketch acaba con un vuelco sorprendente, puesto que Morito Juan coge la cesta de la basura y se la vacía en la cabeza al director del programa:

Morito Juan: Yo no cobro, pero me voy de gusto a mi casa, ahora que jode li productore. No mi paga, ¡pero ti come las merdas! (RISAS)

En este caso, el guionista pone en escena tanto el humor situacional (la reacción de Morito Juan) como el humor lingüístico (el recurso a expresiones vulgares como *joder a los productores o comerse la mierda*).

## 6. Conclusiones

El análisis de las fuentes del humor revela que se trata generalmente de una combinación entre imagen, situación y lenguaje, con particular y destacado enfoque en el último elemento. MYL aprovecha extensivamente indicadores lingüísticos como la homonimia, la paronimia, la ambigüedad y la desautomatización de fraseologismos, mientras que CyR se vale más bien de la inteligibilidad del discurso del inmigrante. Por otra parte, ambas series aprovechan el lenguaje violando las máximas de Cantidad y Manera para generar implicaturas (origen pobre del inmigrante, implicación en actividades ilícitas, entre otras). En lo que respecta al estereotipo negativo de la vulnerabilidad como recurso humorístico, se ha identificado su presencia a nivel de situación, oposición de guiones y, sobre todo, lenguaje, con efectos distintos. En MYL, Ali Nadim se encuentra directamente afectado por sus limitaciones expresivas, mientras que en CyR se aprecia una constante inversión de las relaciones de poder, ya que la víctima de la incomprensión suele ser el funcionario español. En suma, en MYL la imagen del inmigrante y, en consecuencia, el estereotipo, resulta más vulnerable y cercana a la realidad, a la vez que en CyR se presenta más artificial y caricaturizada sin que ello afecte el efecto hilarante, como pretexto para enfocar realidades que, en definitiva, afectan a categorías sociales amplias.

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## Siglas

CyR = Cruz y Raya.com

MYL = Mind Your Language

## **ELEMENTOS DE COMEDIA EN LA OBRA DE ALEJO CARPENTIER**

**Constantin-Valeriu BARBU\***

***Abstract:** Carpentier's work has created a universe in which the same problems are repeated with insistence, always within different situations, always in different times, always in changing scenarios. His novels have created the concept of man which is always the same for the novelist and time is a mere illusion in a universe in which men live in a timeless time. The characters that Carpentier creates are characters of today but also of yesterday and surely of tomorrow" who participate in yesterday's revolutions that could also be tomorrow's revolutions, and in his works, we can see the presentation of more varied historical and personal themes through the parallels of both society and individual. This view of time and history is one of the most key influences Carpentier has had on Latin American literature.*

***Keywords:** revolutions, changing, creates*

### **Contexto histórico**

A principios del siglo XX, varios movimientos de vanguardia, incluyendo los dadaístas, surrealistas y futuristas, comenzaron a argumentar por un arte que era aleatorio, discordante e ilógico. Los objetivos de estos movimientos eran en cierto sentido serios, y estaban comprometidos a socavar la solemnidad y la autosatisfacción del establecimiento artístico contemporáneo. Como resultado, gran parte de su arte fue intencionalmente divertido.

Alejo Carpentier un escritor cubano y francés que influyó notablemente en la literatura latinoamericana durante su período de auge. La crítica lo consideró uno de los escritores fundamentales del siglo XX en lengua española, y uno de los artífices de la renovación literaria latinoamericana, en particular a través de un estilo que incorpora varias dimensiones y aspectos de la imaginación para recrear la realidad, elementos que contribuyeron a su formación y uso de *lo Real Maravilloso*.

Durante su visita a Francia a principios de su vida, Carpentier conoció y colaboró con muchas figuras del movimiento surrealista francés. Carpentier absorbió gran parte de la llamada teoría surrealista de sus contemporáneos, principalmente su amigo y colega, el periodista parisino Robert Desnos. Esforzándose por retratar la belleza improbable, llamada "la tercera belleza", la teoría surrealista abrazó perspectivas únicas del mundo. Dentro de la teoría surrealista estaba el concepto de primitivismo o una reverencia por presidir la tradición folclórica. Carpentier, inspirado por los surrealistas franceses, aprendió a ver su hogar cubano bajo esta nueva luz. Salió de Francia con un sentimiento de orgullo cubano y latinoamericano y el objetivo artístico de capturar lo que significaba ser ambos.

Muchos de los temas en las obras de Carpentier se ubican alrededor del mestizaje cultural, lo que es un aspecto esencial en su representación del ser latinoamericano. En sus obras tempranas, Carpentier escribió mucho sobre los negros y la experiencia del hombre en relación con el cosmos. Tuvo un gran interés en la cultura y la música afro-cubanas, lo que se advierte con claridad en sus obras. Incluso en su cuento *Histoire de Lunes*, que fue escrito en francés, aparece el tema de la cultura afro-cubana. El hombre blanco, aunque aparece en las obras de Carpentier con poca frecuencia, representa cuatro instituciones opresivas en América latina: la cárcel, la

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iglesia, la esclavitud y el imperialismo extranjero. A través de este estilo se explican los ritmos africanos en la poesía de Carpentier. El viaje también es muy importante en las obras de Carpentier. En todas sus obras existen personajes que realizan un viaje o están en movimiento, lo que quizás es resultado de la vida viajera de Carpentier.

Las obras de Carpentier han tenido un impacto en el mundo literario y cultural. Aunque muchas de sus obras han añadido a su estatura, la recepción crítica de su obra nos dice que el género de la literatura latinoamericana ha sido ampliado. Carpentier intenta cambiar el enfoque de la experiencia latinoamericana con nuevas perspectivas, e incluye su propia experiencia de su fondo cultural complejo. Se puede decir que Carpentier ofrece una nueva perspectiva en el pasado colonial de América Latina.

El estilo de escritura de Carpentier integró el resurgente estilo barroco, o estilo barroco del Nuevo Mundo que los artistas latinoamericanos adoptaron del modelo europeo y asimilaron a la visión artística latinoamericana. Con una experiencia de primera mano del movimiento surrealista francés, Carpentier también adaptó la teoría surrealista a la literatura latinoamericana. Siempre ansioso por explorar más que la identidad cubana, Carpentier utilizó sus experiencias de viaje por Europa y América Latina para ampliar su comprensión de la identidad latinoamericana.

El mundo novelístico de Carpentier ha creado un universo en cual los mismos problemas se repiten con insistencia, siempre dentro de distintas situaciones, siempre en tiempos diferentes, siempre en escenarios mudables. Sus obras han creado el concepto del hombre que es siempre lo mismo para el novelista y el tiempo es una mera ilusión en un universo en el cual los hombres viven en un tiempo sin tiempo. Los personajes que Carpentier crea son personajes de hoy pero también de ayer y seguramente de mañana” que participan en revoluciones de ayer que también podrían ser las revoluciones de mañana, y en sus obras podemos ver la presentación de temas históricos y personales más variados a través de la superposición de planos en lo individual y en lo social.

Esta visión del tiempo y la historia es una de las influencias más claves que Carpentier ha tenido sobre la literatura latinoamericana. La descripción de la cultura de Occidente es también una de las características predominantes en la obra del autor que ha influido en la escritura después de sus publicaciones.

"Lo maravilloso" puede confundirse fácilmente con el realismo mágico, ya que ambos modos introducen eventos sobrenaturales sin sorprender al autor implicado. En ambos, estos eventos mágicos son esperados y aceptados como sucesos cotidianos. Sin embargo, el mundo maravilloso es un mundo unidimensional. El autor implicado cree que cualquier cosa puede suceder aquí, ya que el mundo entero está lleno de seres y situaciones sobrenaturales para empezar.

Los cuentos de hadas son un buen ejemplo de literatura maravillosa. La idea importante para definir lo maravilloso es que los lectores entiendan que este mundo ficticio es diferente del mundo donde viven. El mundo unidimensional "maravilloso" difiere del mundo bidimensional del realismo mágico porque, en este último, el reino sobrenatural se mezcla con el mundo natural y familiar llegando a la combinación de dos capas de realidad: la bidimensionalidad.

#### **Elementos de comedia en la novela**

El humor surrealista también conocido como ‘humor absurdo’, o ‘comedia surrealista’, es una forma de humor basado en violaciones deliberadas del razonamiento causal, produciendo eventos y comportamientos que son obviamente ilógicos. Las construcciones de humor surrealista tienden a implicar yuxtaposiciones extrañas,

incongruencias, situaciones no equitativas, irracionales o absurdas y expresiones de sinsentido. El humor surge de una subversión de las expectativas del público, por lo que la diversión se basa en la imprevisibilidad, separada de un análisis lógico de la situación. El humor deriva su atractivo de lo ridículo y lo improbable de la situación. El género tiene sus raíces en el surrealismo artístico.

El arpa y la sombra, la novela de la que hablaré a continuación, es el último libro que escribió, que apareció en 1978 y fue recompensado con el prestigioso premio Médicis Étranger y trata de las expediciones a las Indias de Cristóbal Colón, que resultó en el descubrimiento de las islas del Caribe e incluyendo América, así como una discusión ficticia sobre su posible canonización.

El libro se divide en tres partes distintas, claramente delineadas entre ellas tanto por la naturaleza del tema que se está tratando, la forma en que este se trata, y por la longitud de tiempo en que se lleva a cabo la acción. En la primera parte, fechada en 1851, tenemos como personaje principal al Papa Pío IX, quien, después de numerosos retrasos, se ve obligado a evaluar la solicitud de beatificación del famoso navegante genovés. Aburrido y dormilón en gran medida, el capítulo se pierde en descripciones y momentos interminables e irrelevantes cuya única contribución consiste en preparar al lector para una segunda parte, más interesante y llena de acontecimientos, en la que Cristóbal Colón se convierte en el héroe principal.

Rendido desde su propia perspectiva en forma de recuerdo, desde su lecho de muerte, de las tres expediciones en las que participó, el capítulo nos presenta a un navegante que está tras el oro y la fama y el prestigio que estos le confieren, no se detiene en nada para lograr sus objetivos, e incluso se cree igual a un rey.

Seduciendo a la reina Isabel de España, logra, tras innumerables retrasos, obtener de ella las tres carabelas necesarias para el inicio de la expedición. A la cabeza de una tripulación de "cristianos recién bautizados, ladrones perseguidos por la policía, circuncidados amenazados de expulsión, pícaros y aventureros, no gente del mar que sabe subir y bajar las velas, Colón, después de amenazarlos y prometerles todo tipo de tesoros para que no se rebelen, finalmente llega a la tierra soñada, pero descubre un país pobre, habitado por hombres y mujeres desnudos que usaban, como único objeto de ropa, trapos de algodón que apenas cubrían su vergüenza.

Tiene que volver a España con la mano casi vacía pero no del todo vacía, porque se había llevado consigo algunas plantas, algo de oro, varios loros y siete esclavos que finalmente dieron su fin común, muertos por todo tipo de enfermedades a las que no estaban acostumbrados. Pero Colón no se deja desanimar, y si el oro no se puede obtener, se decide que en el nombre de la Iglesia y con el pretexto de su domesticación, va a secuestrar a los nativos y venderlos como esclavos.

Como este plan falla, la reina Isabel se opone vehementemente a la trata de esclavos, Colón, en su tercera expedición, eligió una estratagema más directa, misionera, con el objetivo de obtener mano de obra gratis. Todos estos acontecimientos se describen en forma de analogías, Colón recordándolos desde su lecho de muerte, esperando al confesor, y pareciendo repudiar su pasado.

Pero no se dejen engañar por su acto de bravuconería, su falsa contrición, porque en la última parte del libro nos encontramos con el mismo estafador perfecto, "capaz de vender a Cristo por treinta denarios", como la reina Isabel correctamente reprocha. Esta vez, como espíritu, Colón, muerto desde hace siglos, es testigo de una discusión que tiene como tema posible la canonización y en la que participan todo tipo de personalidades y personajes. Víctor Hugo, Julio Verne o el Abogado del Diablo.

La parodia de la erudición libresca se manifiesta igualmente mediante continuas notas a pie de página y la proliferación característica de referencias, obras oscuras y de difícil acceso. El tono intelectual de algunos pasajes contrasta fuertemente con el bajo estilo burlesco de numerosos diálogos y escenas en las que Carpentier hace uso de un argot callejero y vulgar sin precedente en el resto de sus novelas. Esta autoconciencia narrativa propia de toda metaficción invade igualmente el ámbito historiográfico.

### **Conclusión**

*El arpa y la sombra* no sólo explora un personaje histórico (Colón) y sus múltiples recreaciones literarias, sino ante todo el proceso de configuración del discurso historiográfico, así como su naturaleza ficticia y narrativa. El origen se revela en última instancia como una fábula, un “retablo de las maravillas,” una impostura elaborada por Colón, Mastai y Carpentier que se resiste a toda verbalización.

Carpentier se destaca en esta parte, los diálogos son espumosos e hilarantes al mismo tiempo, elevando permanentemente la sutil ironía que había escondido detrás de las incongruencias y discrepancias en el carácter de Cristóbal Colón. Afortunadamente, el Abogado del Diablo está haciendo su trabajo esta vez, demostrando que el navegante genovés es culpable tanto de relaciones extramaritales como de trata de esclavos, y por lo tanto obstaculiza su canonización.

El realismo mágico presente en las obras de Carpentier difiere del abordado por otros escritores, como Gabriel García Márquez o Miguel Ángel Asturias por la naturaleza de lo fantástico que aparece en él. Si en los autores mencionados se distingue claramente la ficción de la realidad en el caso de la realidad sudamericana de Carpentier, como él mismo explica, es tan trágica e inconsistente que para un extraño puede parecer irreal, si no mágica. Hay una magia de lo real “lo real maravilloso” - y no la magia del realismo que encontramos en los otros escritores mencionados anteriormente. Usando el estilo barroco característico del género, la sutil ironía detrás de las exageraciones, las referencias intertextuales Alejo Carpentier consigue así no solo escribir una de las mejores novelas históricas de la literatura hispanoamericana sino también una sátira llena de momentos cómicos inverosímiles, pero a la vez muy reales.

El realismo mágico es una mercancía internacional, pero que tiene un lugar de nacimiento hispano, el realismo mágico es una continuación de la tradición realista romántica de la literatura española y sus homólogos europeos. Hay desacuerdo entre quienes ven el realismo mágico como una invención latinoamericana y quienes lo ven como el producto global de un mundo posmoderno.

La sátira y la sátira política utilizan la comedia para retratar a las personas o las instituciones sociales como ridículas o corruptas, alienando así a su audiencia del objeto de su humor. La parodia subvierte los géneros y formas populares, criticando esas formas sin necesariamente condenarlas.

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## **LA ADQUISICIÓN DE LA COMPETENCIA FÓNICA EN EL AULA DE E/LE EN CONTEXTOS ROMÁNICOS: CÓMO EVITAR EL CÓMIC SONORO**

**Victor-Emanuel CIUCIUC\***

**Abstract:** *The present research will discuss pronunciation in Spanish as a foreign language. We are especially interested in its present position in teaching Spanish as a foreign language (i.e., ELE) and, more specifically, in teaching Spanish to Romance language speakers. We would also like to investigate the available tools and strategies for implementing this aspect of the language. To this end, our approach focuses on three fundamental aspects: 1. the position of the phonic level of the language in the teaching of ELE (in contrast to the position of the other linguistic levels); 2. identifying the specific problems of Lusophones, Italophones, Francophones, and Romanophones; 3. determining the methodological directions that should be adopted in this regard, according to experts in the field. Supposing the primary goal of studying a foreign language is to acquire the capacity to communicate effectively with native speakers, mastering pronunciation is essential for adequately transferring the message. In this view, it is expected that the prevalent communication techniques will consider this factor; nevertheless, based on the contents seen in ELE approaches and the cumulative teaching experience, it is typically given minimal weight. Determining the state of the art in the teaching of pronunciation in ELE and, more particularly, in its teaching to speakers of other Romance languages is the primary purpose of this paper. The value of this work relies on the prospect of constructing the foundations of learners' fundamental knowledge and on gaining an insight of what has been accomplished thus far. Similarly, this study serves as a basis for potential future research that critically reflects on the treatment of the phonic component of language and the particular resources and materials available.*

**Keywords:** *phonetics, foreign language acquisition, Romance languages*

### **Antecedentes y motivación del trabajo**

El cómic sonoro, también conocido como comicidad involuntaria, es un fenómeno que puede surgir a raíz de los errores fonéticos al hablar una lengua extranjera. Este fenómeno se produce cuando la pronunciación incorrecta de ciertos sonidos o acentos da lugar a palabras o frases con un significado diferente al que se pretendía transmitir. En el ámbito de la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera, es fundamental evitar estos errores para garantizar una correcta comunicación entre los hablantes. En este sentido, el presente artículo se enfocará en ofrecer una aproximación didáctica a la adquisición de la competencia fónica en el aula ELE, especialmente en un contexto románico, con el objetivo de evitar el cómic sonoro y mejorar la pronunciación de los estudiantes.

El artículo se estructura en tres partes: en primer lugar, se describe el proceso de recopilación y clasificación de bibliografía realizado para llevar a cabo el estudio. En segundo lugar, se analizan los datos obtenidos a través de la revisión de los trabajos consultados, contrastando las distintas opiniones y enfoques encontrados. Por último, se presenta una conclusión crítica sobre los resultados obtenidos y se proponen posibles áreas de estudio para futuros trabajos.

Este trabajo es importante porque permite establecer los fundamentos para comprender el papel crítico de la pronunciación en la comunicación efectiva en una

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lengua extranjera, especialmente en el contexto de la enseñanza a hablantes de otras lenguas románicas. Asimismo, ofrece una visión general de los recursos y materiales disponibles para su enseñanza, lo que puede ser de gran ayuda para los profesionales de la enseñanza de ELE. En definitiva, este artículo busca contribuir al desarrollo y mejora de la enseñanza de la pronunciación en ELE.

#### **Metodología de la revisión bibliográfica**

Para llevar a cabo la revisión bibliográfica del presente estudio, hemos consultado diversos buscadores académicos, como *Google Academics*, *Dialnet*, *Web of Science*, *Scopus* y la biblioteca electrónica Cervantes, así como las bibliotecas de la Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo y de la Universidad de Bucarest. A través de este proceso de búsqueda, hemos encontrado información relevante sobre la enseñanza de la pronunciación en ELE.

La mayor parte de los artículos científicos fueron obtenidos de *Google Academics* y *Dialnet*, mientras que en las otras fuentes solo encontramos un artículo de interés en *Web of Science*. También revisamos algunos libros, tanto de didáctica general del español como específicos sobre la enseñanza de la pronunciación a extranjeros.

Para clasificar los artículos, los hemos organizado según su contenido sobre el estado actual de la enseñanza de la pronunciación en ELE, los problemas específicos de los perfiles lingüísticos seleccionados y las orientaciones propuestas para abordar este aspecto en el aula.

#### **Datos obtenidos**

### **ESTADO DE LA CUESTIÓN DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA PRONUNCIACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: UN ENFOQUE MULTIDIMENSIONAL**

En este apartado abordaremos de forma sintética las siguientes cuestiones: la situación actual de la didáctica de la pronunciación en ELE, el enfoque que se le ha dado a lo largo de los años, el tratamiento que se ha hecho de ella desde los métodos comunicativos, las creencias de los profesores en tomo a su aplicación práctica, su presencia en materiales didácticos, la formación que debe tener el profesor de español y, finalmente, la norma que según los estudiosos se debe enseñar.

Los expertos coinciden en que la pronunciación es el plano más desatendido en la enseñanza de español a extranjeros (Aurrecoechea, 2002: 21; Poch, 2005: 753; Pato y Molinié, 2009: 168; Orta, 2009: 50; Ahumada, 2010: 10; Rodríguez, 2012: 740; Paredes, 2013: 2). Su desarrollo, de hecho, ha sido menor que el de otros planos de la lengua (Cantero, 1997: 1; Arroyo, 2009: 61), pues se le presta menos atención que a otros aspectos de la lengua, y su enseñanza se limita a correcciones esporádicas en clase o a la presentación de los sonidos del español en las primeras clases (2007: 175). Además, la enseñanza de los elementos suprasegmentales es aún más escasa que la de los sonidos aislados (Cantero, 1994: 250; Lacorte, 2007: 60; Santamaria, 2010: 3; Ahumada, 2010: 12; Rodríguez, 2012: 740), lo cual es paradójico dada su importancia en la comunicación (Briz, 2002: 73-74; Poch y Harmegnies, 2009: 107).

En lo referente al enfoque que se le ha dado a lo largo de los años, se ha argumentado que la enseñanza de la pronunciación en ELE se ha basado

históricamente en una perspectiva lecto-escritora (Cantero, 1997: 2; Usó, 2008: 105; Orta, 2009: 51; Ahumada, 2010: 12), al contrario de lo que ocurre con la lengua materna, en la que se comienza a escribir una vez dominada la lengua hablada (Siles, 1992: 87). Esta aproximación presenta el riesgo de que los estudiantes se enfoquen en la ortografía y traduzcan “los signos gráficos en las realizaciones fonéticas que les da su lengua materna” Díaz (2007: 485), es decir, las palabras a partir de su lengua materna. Este planteamiento, además, entra en contradicción con el enfoque comunicativo, desde el que algunos afirman que se le ha dedicado una escasa atención (Cantero, 1997: 1; Poch, 2005: 753; Ahumada, 2010: 12).

Sin embargo, muchos expertos argumentan que la atención a la pronunciación es fundamental en el enfoque comunicativo (Aurrecochea, 2002: 10; Cantero, 2003: 21; Llisterri, 2003: 92, Paredes, 2013: 4), pues una buena pronunciación favorece el desarrollo de la expresión oral y, consecuentemente, la comunicación (Blanco, 2012: 129; Dos Santos y Capozzi, 2015: 4). El tratamiento de la pronunciación implica proporcionar estrategias a los estudiantes para percibir y producir sonidos de manera efectiva (Cantero, 2003: 4; Santamaría 2010: 4) lo que permitirá el dominio de la capacidad comunicativa en la lengua extranjera.

En cuanto a las creencias de los profesores, algunos autores sostienen que consideran la experticia en la materia como una condición necesaria para abordar los problemas de la pronunciación en ELE, mientras que otros argumentan que no es necesario prestar atención a este aspecto ya que la pronunciación española es fácil de adquirir (Cantero, 1994: 253; Aurrecochea, 2002: 22; Poch, 2004: 1-2; Fragapane, 2008: 2; Paredes, 2013: 5). Asimismo, se ha pensado que la pronunciación puede adquirirse por la mera interacción con nativos (Aurrecochea, 2002: 21; Padilla, 2007: 872) o por pura imitación (Blanco, 2012: 130). Una de las razones argumentadas para la falta de atención a la pronunciación es el hecho de que esta desatención se debe al propio estatus que tiene la disciplina dentro del sistema lingüístico (Paredes, 2013: 4), ya que es desatendida incluso por el propio sistema educativo español, que no se detiene en aspectos como la correcta articulación de los sonidos o la entonación (Álvarez, 2005: 86). Por otro lado, en opinión de Orta (2009: 51) los alumnos valoran la enseñanza de la pronunciación y por ello se muestran inseguros a la hora de expresarse de manera oral. Sin embargo, Padilla (2007: 872) cree que la mayor parte de ellos sienten rechazo por su tratamiento explícito en el aula al igual que los profesores.

Los materiales didácticos también han sido señalados por varios autores como una debilidad en la enseñanza de la pronunciación (Ramos, 2006: 41; Arroyo, 2009: 60; Rodríguez, 2012: 740). Esto dificulta su integración en el aula y representa un reto adicional para los profesores (Bartolí, 2005: 3; Silvia, 2007: 164). Según Santamaría (2010: 4), incluso en los manuales generales de ELE, el espacio dedicado a su estudio es mínimo y a menudo se aborda de manera aislada respecto a otros contenidos, en el apartado final de cada unidad. Además, hay poca bibliografía disponible sobre este tema (Santamaría, 2010: 2) en comparación con otros campos debido a la falta de especialistas, investigadores y profesores interesados en la enseñanza de la pronunciación (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 168; Blanco, 2012: 130). Sin embargo, algunos autores señalan que los profesores están mostrando un creciente interés por la enseñanza de la pronunciación, aunque aún carecen de recursos y técnicas específicas para aplicar en el aula (Aurrecochea, 2002: 8; Santamaría, 2010: 1).

En relación con la formación que debe tener el profesor de ELE, existen opiniones encontradas. Mientras que algunos autores sostienen que no es necesario que el profesor sea un experto en fonética, sino que debe conocer algunos aspectos básicos y su aplicación práctica (Poch, 2004: 3; Santamaria, 2010: 3), otros defienden que es preciso que el profesor tenga un buen conocimiento de la descripción fonética de la lengua y del funcionamiento del sistema que enseña (Muñoz, 2002: 335; Carbó et al., 2003: 12; Álvarez, 2005: 95; Gil et al., 2012: 29; Rodríguez, 2012: 741).

Finalmente, en cuanto a la norma que se trabaja, Poch (2005: 759) sostiene que los materiales orales utilizados en clase presentan una pronunciación y una prosodia neutras que no se corresponden directamente con las variantes que se usan en la lengua. Rivas (2012: 467) destaca que el profesor suele modificar su discurso de una manera en la que no hablaría en una conversación cotidiana fuera del aula. En este sentido, algunos autores señalan que no es necesario que el profesor seleccione el estándar para impartir sus clases (Poch, 2004 y 2009; Poch y Harmegnies, 2009; Rivas, 2012), entendiendo por estándar la norma prestigiosa de cada variante del español, que en muchas ocasiones se basa en criterios no lingüísticos (Poch, 2004: 3). Sin embargo, estos mismos autores reconocen que el profesor debe conocer la norma estándar para situar su propia variante con respecto a ella y para que los alumnos sean conscientes de la variedad de normas existentes (Bartolí, 2005: 21; Pato y Molinié, 2009: 174; Gil et al., 2012: 122). Asimismo, Carbó et al. (2003: 2) señalan la importancia de abordar la cuestión de la norma de manera flexible, teniendo en cuenta el uso de diferentes variantes según la situación comunicativa.

En conclusión, es necesario reconocer la importancia de la enseñanza de la pronunciación y otorgarle el lugar que se merece en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. A pesar de que en el pasado ha sido desatendida, es alentador ver que los autores consultados demuestran un gran interés por destacar su papel primordial.

#### **REVISIÓN DE LOS PROBLEMAS ESPECÍFICOS DE ADQUISICIÓN DE LA PRONUNCIACIÓN EN HABLANTES DE LENGUAS ROMÁNICAS**

En este apartado trataremos los problemas específicos de adquisición de la pronunciación por parte de hablantes de portugués, italiano, francés y rumano como lengua materna.

Por lo que respecta a los hablantes lusófonos, algunos de los principales problemas que los autores señalan son la nasalización de las vocales (Poch, 2005: 755; Dos Santos y Capozzi, 2015: 7), la transferencia de la abertura de las vocales de su lengua materna al español (Dos Santos y Capozzi, 2015: 6; França, 2015: 37) o la dificultad de reducir el sistema vocálico del portugués, más amplio que el español.

Con respecto a las consonantes, señalan la dificultad de pronunciación tanto de la fricativa velar [x] -en ocasiones, realizada como fricativa postalveolar sonora [ʒ] en el portugués de Brasil- como de la vibrante simple [r] en lugar de la vibrante múltiple [r̃] (Dos Santos y Capozzi, 2015: 6). Otro problema de los hablantes de portugués de Brasil es la palatalización de las oclusivas que tiene mayor presencia con el fonema / t / que con / d / (Brisolara, 2011: 174). Por otro lado, presentan también la vocalización de la lateral alveolar /l/ con mayor incidencia en casos como norma[w]mente por normalmente, por ejemplo (Brisolara, 2011: 170). Se

produce también la diptongación de la nasal a final de palabra (Brisolara, 2011: 171) y la sonorización de /s/ intervocálico (Brisolara, 2011: 172; Fança, 2015: 35). Por lo que respecta a los hablantes itálofonos, se ha señalado que los sonidos que más les causan dificultades son aquellos que tienen una relación fonética muy similar pero no exactamente igual entre ambas lenguas (Lacorte, 2007: 60; Fragapane, 2008: 6; Rubio, 2010: 15). Otros autores afirman que los sonidos más problemáticos son aquellos que no existen en el sistema fonológico de la lengua materna del alumno (Poch, 2004: 5). En cualquier caso, Arroyo (2009: 60) afirma que el tipo de errores que cometen estos hablantes son errores que no dificultan la comunicación.

En cuanto al acento, los estudiantes italianos tienden a aplicar el sistema acentual de su lengua materna al español, alargando las vocales acentuadas (Poch, 2005: 756; Rubio, 2010: 21). Asimismo, la mayoría de las palabras en italiano son esdrújulas, mientras que en español predominan las palabras llanas (Rubio, 2010: 22), lo que influye en la producción oral de los alumnos (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 81). Respecto a las vocales, algunos autores señalan que el sistema vocálico del italiano del centro de Italia cuenta con siete vocales, lo que puede influir en la pronunciación del español de los alumnos provenientes de esa zona (Saussol, 1982: 144; Rubio, 2010: 19-20) quienes deben hacer un esfuerzo por reducir dicho sistema.

Los hablantes itálofonos presentan problemas específicos en la adquisición de la pronunciación del español, como la dificultad para diferenciar sonidos parecidos pero no idénticos, como los alófonos fricativos de los fonemas /b/, /d/, /g/ - [β], [ð], [ɣ] - optando siempre por su realización oclusiva en cualquier distribución, tal y como sucede en italiano (Fragapane, 2008: 7, Rubio 2010: 15-17). Otro de los problemas comunes es diferenciar fonéticamente las grafías b y v, identificando esta última como la representación gráfica de la fricativa [v] por influencia de su lengua materna (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 82; Fragapane, 2008: 8).

También presentan problemas con la vibrante múltiple /r/ Rubio (2010: 18), ya que al no existir en la mayoría del territorio itálofono, los alumnos tienden a realizarlo como simple. Adicionalmente, produce problemas el fonema fricativo alveolar sordo /s/ en posición intervocálica, sobre todo en el norte de Italia, donde es propio pronunciar la -s en esta posición como fricativa alveolar sonora [z] (Rubio, 2010: 18-19), ocurre lo mismo en Cerdeña (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 82). Otros de los problemas que surgen es la sustitución de la oclusiva dental sonora intervocálica por su correspondiente sorda en palabras como *marito* y la pronunciación de -u en palabras como *sigue* o *guerra* (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 81-82). Por otro lado, en lo referente a los sonidos que no existen en su lengua materna, producen serios problemas el caso de la velar fricativa sorda /χ/ o de la interdental fricativa sorda /θ/ (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 81-82; Fragapane, 2008: 5; Rubio, 2010: 14).

Más aún, en la isla de Cerdeña, encontramos influencias no solo del italiano, sino también del sardo, que generan unos problemas específicos de este grupo de estudiantes. Entre ellos encontramos la cerrazón de vocales en casos como *quí* por *que*, o la tendencia a formar hiatos en palabras con -u tónica más vocal como en *fue* (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 83). También tienden a geminar las consonantes dentales y bilabiales (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 83-84) y a confundir

entre [j] y [x] pronunciando indistintamente [ij os] por [ixos] o [inflúxe] por [inflúj e] (Galiñanes y Romero, 2004: 84).

En cuanto a los problemas específicos de los hablantes de francés, algunos autores señalan que los sonidos que les generan mayores dificultades son aquellos que no existen en su lengua materna (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178). Por otro lado, García (2010: 4), por su parte, destaca el acento léxico como el rasgo que más problemas les plantea. Al igual que ocurre con los hablantes de portugués, la nasalización de las vocales es uno de los principales problemas que presentan los hablantes de francés al hablar español (Poch, 2005: 755; Molinié, 2010: 52; Ribera, 2013: 2). También se enfrentan a la dificultad de no redondear las vocales al hablar español, ya que en francés existen vocales redondeadas que no tienen equivalente en español (Poch, 2005: 756).

En cuanto a las vocales, Nguendjo (2013: 37) señala la pronunciación de la vocal palatal de abertura media /e/ como [ə], [ø] o [æ], en los francófonos de Camerún. Otro problema es la ruptura sistemática del diptongo (Molinié, 2010: 43; Nguendjo, 2013: 38) en francófonos de Camerún y de Quebec. en francófonos de Camerún y Quebec. Sin lugar a dudas, la mayor dificultad que enfrentan los hablantes de francés con respecto a las vocales es reducir su amplio sistema vocálico a uno más simple (Molinié, 2010: 43).

En cuanto al acento, los hablantes de francés tienden a aplicar el sistema acentual de su lengua al español y a acentuar la última sílaba (Poch, 2005: 757; Pato y Molinié, 2009: 177; Molinié, 2010: 43). Además, García (2010: 3) añade que estos alumnos suelen tener dificultades para distinguir pares mínimos del tipo límite/limite.

Otro desafío importante en la pronunciación del español por parte de los francófonos es la vibrante simple y la vibrante múltiple, que a menudo se sustituyen por la pronunciación francesa uvular [R] (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 177; Molinié, 2010: 49; García, 2010: 3; Ribera, 2013: 2; Nguendjo, 2013: 40) o bien por la velar [χ] (García, 2010: 3; Nguendjo, 2013: 40) en algunos casos. También se ha observado la relajación de [χ] y su sustitución por [g], ya que el fonema velar fricativo sordo no existe en francés (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178; Molinié, 2010: 52; Nguendjo, 2013: 42); sin embargo, otros autores indican que algunos estudiantes son capaces de realizar el sonido debido quizás a su proximidad en el lugar de la articulación con [R] (García, 2010: 3). En otros casos, apunta Molinié (2010: 52) a la pronunciación de [χ] como [R] francesa o aspirada.

La diferenciación de [b] y [v] también es problemática, ya que la lengua francesa no es betacista (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178; Molinié, 2010: 53; García, 2010: 3). Además, advierten de la tendencia de estos hablantes a realizar como fricativas las consonantes africadas (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178; Molinié, 2010: 53). Asimismo, el fonema fricativo interdental sordo [θ] constituye otra dificultad, ya que lo acaban sustituyendo por la fricativa alveolar [s] (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178; Molinié, 2010: 89; García 2010: 3; Ribera, 2013: 2; Nguendjo, 2013: 39) y en el caso de hablantes francófonos de Camerún incluso, en ocasiones, como labiodental fricativo sordo (Nguendjo, 2013: 39).

Otro problema que presentan es el yeísmo, la sustitución de [λ] por [j] (Pato y Molinié, 2009: 178; Molinié 2010: 91), algo que no supone mayores problemas dado que se ha adoptado en el español estándar; sin embargo, la mayoría de los francófonos adopta pronunciaciones como [l+i] o [l+j] que sí necesitan subsanarse (Molinié, 2010: 91). Se ha señalado también la palatalización de las

dentales /t/ y /d/ seguidas de [i] y [j] (Molinié, 2010: 55; Nguendjo, 2013: 39) en los hablantes de Quebec y de Camerún. Indica, además, Molinié (2010: 47) la casi nula realización de los alófonos aproximantes de las oclusivas sonoras – [β], [δ], [ɣ]-.

En cuanto a los hablantes rumanófonos, se ha identificado un único estudio que se centra en los problemas específicos que presentan al aprender español. Según Silvia (2007: 167) entre estos problemas destacan la relajación en la articulación y sonoridad de las vocales, que se debe a la influencia del rumano en la pronunciación del español. Además, el fenómeno de la diptongación del rumano también puede afectar la pronunciación del español por parte de estos estudiantes (Silvia, 2007: 168). Por otra parte, los alumnos suelen confundir la [j] palatal fricativa o africada sonora con la semivocal [j̥] ya que este sonido no existe en el sistema fonológico del rumano (Silvia, 2007: 169). Los hablantes nativos de rumano también tienen dificultades con la pronunciación de la /χ/ velar o uvular fricativa sorda, que en el español se realiza de forma diferente a la laríngea aspirada del rumano (Silvia, 2007: 170). Asimismo, la interdental fricativa sorda /θ/ se pronuncia como /s/ en el rumano (Silvia, 2007: 169), lo que puede generar confusión.

Otro problema que se destaca es la pronunciación de la nasal bilabial sonora /m/ que en español tiene un punto de articulación diferente al del rumano (Silvia, 2007: 171). Contrariamente a otros perfiles lingüísticos, la /r/ del rumano tiene el mismo punto de articulación que en español, por lo que lo que más problemas provoca a los rumanófonos es la pronunciación de la vibrante simple. Por ello, lo que provoca más problemas a los rumanófonos es la pronunciación de la vibrante simple (Silvia, 2007: 172). Además, en el rumano no se produce la vibrante simple fricativa intervocálica, lo que puede llevar a confundirla con la fricativa [ð] en la pronunciación del español (Silvia, 2007: 172). Por último, se destaca que la entonación del rumano es bastante similar a la del español, por lo que no suele generar grandes problemas en este aspecto (Silvia, 2007: 173).

En resumen, aunque existen algunas similitudes en las dificultades específicas de los diferentes perfiles lingüísticos abordados, cada uno de ellos presenta particularidades que los diferencian del resto. Por esta razón, consideramos que es fundamental crear actividades y materiales adaptados a las necesidades de cada tipo de alumno.

### **PROPUESTAS PARA MEJORAR LA PRONUNCIACIÓN EN HABLANTES ROMÁNICOS: ENFOQUES Y MÉTODOS**

En esta sección, se abordarán las propuestas de varios autores en relación al tratamiento de la pronunciación en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. Se discutirá el papel que se le otorga a la entonación, así como cuándo es conveniente abordar la enseñanza de la pronunciación dentro del proceso de aprendizaje del estudiante. También se examinará el itinerario propuesto por estos autores y los métodos que defienden para la enseñanza de la pronunciación en el aula de ELE.

Antes de comenzar con el diseño de actividades y la corrección fonética, muchos autores recomiendan la necesidad de conocer las características de la pronunciación de la lengua materna de los alumnos, ya que esto puede ayudar a determinar los problemas que presentarán (Bartolí, 2005: 17; Arroyo, 2009: 64). Además, algunos autores destacan la importancia del conocimiento del sistema que se enseña para prever errores (Ramos, 2006: 42). Según Poch (2004: 4), lo primero que se debe hacer es determinar los errores a corregir y establecer una

sistematización de los mismos. Algunos autores proponen el análisis contrastivo entre la L1 y la L2 para llegar a dicha sistematización (Saussol, 1982: Tocco y Russo, 1996: 451; Rodríguez, 2012: 741; Gil et al. 2012: 111), aunque otros defienden la necesidad de tener en cuenta la fonética combinatoria, ya que los sonidos varían en función de su distribución en la cadena hablada (Poch, 2004: 6 y 2009: 196-199; Ramos, 2006: 42). Por otro lado, Cortés (2002: 47), advierte que el análisis contrastivo solo da cuenta de los errores potencialmente susceptibles de aparecer, y Arroyo (2009: 60) propone complementar el análisis contrastivo con el estudio exhaustivo de la interlengua de los aprendices.

Una vez realizada la sistematización de los errores, se procede a jerarquizarlos en función de su relevancia para la comunicación (Poch, 2004: 5). A partir de ahí, se diseñan actividades de enseñanza de la pronunciación y se emplean técnicas de corrección fonética en el aula. En cuanto al momento adecuado para llevar a cabo dicha corrección, algunos autores defienden que esta debe comenzar desde el principio de la instrucción de la lengua extranjera, tanto de forma correctiva como preventiva (Arroyo, 2009: 61; Rodríguez, 2012: 741; Gil et al., 2012: 14). No obstante, en el caso de la corrección de las vocales en hablantes rumanófonos, Silvia (2007: 174) señala que esta suele llevarse a cabo en niveles más avanzados, ya que resulta difícil para los alumnos rumanos distinguir las vocales de su propio sistema de las del español.

Aunque existe debate en cuanto al momento idóneo para la corrección fonética, varios autores coinciden en que el primer paso para aprender a pronunciar correctamente es la discriminación auditiva por parte del alumno (Poch, 2004: 6 y 2009: 198; Díaz, 2007: 487; Gil et al. 2012: 123; Paredes, 2013: 8). Para Tocco y Russo (1996: 450) las actividades para sensibilizar el oído del alumno deben implicar también a los órganos articulatorios. En este sentido, Díaz (2007: 489) defiende que el alumno debe llevar a cabo un periodo de entrenamiento para modificar el comportamiento de los órganos fonatorios antes de adquirir nuevos sonidos. Según el autor, la pronunciación correcta implica la comodidad del hablante en la producción, lo que a su vez influye en la fluidez (2007: 492).

Los autores coinciden en la importancia de la entonación en el aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera, debido a que su adquisición temprana puede favorecer la comprensión auditiva y la comunicación efectiva (Hidalgo y Cabedo, 2012: 31; Gil et al., 2012: 109). Asimismo, destacan que la entonación es una de las características prosódicas más relevantes en la lengua materna y por lo tanto, su enseñanza debería comenzar desde el primer contacto con la L2 (Hidalgo y Cabedo, 2012: 31; Gil et al., 2012: 111). En este sentido, autores como Cantero (1994: 250 y 2003: 21), Bartoli, (2005: 20), Ahumada, (2010: 21) defienden la importancia de dar un papel predominante a la enseñanza de la entonación y el ritmo en el aprendizaje del español.

A lo largo del tiempo se han propuesto distintos métodos para abordar el diseño de actividades y propuestas didácticas en torno a la pronunciación, los cuales son descritos y recopilados por autores como Arroyo (2009: 62-63), García (2010: 3-9) o Paredes (2013:10-26). De entre ellos, los estudios consultados se centran principalmente en la aplicación práctica del laboratorio de idiomas, del método articulatorio y, mayoritariamente, del método verbo-tonal. En este sentido, los autores consultados exponen sus preferencias y dan indicaciones al respecto.

Silvia (2007: 174) propone ejercicios de escucha y reproducción de sonidos aislados y en contexto silábico mediante grabadora. Sin embargo, para otros

autores, la técnica de «escuchar y repetir» no es efectiva debido a que los alumnos pueden no ser capaces de apreciar las diferencias entre lo que escuchan y lo que pronuncian (Saussol, 1982: 147; Cortés, 2002: 84-85; Carbó et al., 2003: 11). En relación a esto y enfocándose en el estudio de la entonación, Hidalgo y Cabedo (2012: 57) sostienen que aunque un alumno pueda pronunciar o entonar correctamente en un momento dado, no se puede garantizar que pueda transferir esa pronunciación correcta a otra producción oral a largo plazo, especialmente si se trata de una actividad de habla espontánea.

A raíz de ello, los autores mencionados afirman que las actividades de escucha y repite son útiles como introducción, pero no suficientes por sí solas. Para complementarlas, proponen la visualización de las curvas entonativas utilizando programas específicos o gestos, lo cual también es defendido por Cortés (2002: 87). Además, Gil et al. (2012: 25) destacan la importancia de la retroalimentación audiovisual y Rodríguez (2012: 741) sugiere el uso de programas como Audacity o Praat para tal fin. Entre las propuestas didácticas que se proponen se encuentran la imitación de tonemas y curvas entonativas y la práctica del ritmo mediante golpes de voz. Por otro lado, Gil et al. (2012: 115) recomiendan emplear ejercicios sin sonidos concretos que se centren en los patrones entonativos, como las actividades de reconocimiento del estado de ánimo según la entonación (2012: 117), y la práctica de la entonación y acentuación en un discurso real entre los alumnos (2012: 95).

Es curioso que décadas atrás Saussol (1982: 152) considerara que el laboratorio de idiomas era un método efectivo pero insuficiente para la enseñanza de la pronunciación. Además, señalaba la escasez de materiales enfocados a itálofonos en aquel momento y proponía la creación de grabaciones con voces masculinas y femeninas adecuadas para proporcionar material fiable en el aula. Saussol también destacaba la importancia del uso de transcripciones fonéticas con su correspondiente indicación prosódica (1982: 152), algo que difiere de las modernas concepciones que se centran en la percepción y discriminación del sonido sin soporte escrito.

Según Saralegui (2008: 369-370), los materiales auditivos a menudo presentan una dicción que no se corresponde con la lengua oral, debido a un “afán cultista”, como la supresión de la sinalefa en palabras como “padre envejecido” o “la alumna”. Arroyo (2009: 66) también señala que esto puede deberse a la influencia de la lengua escrita, donde los espacios entre las palabras no reflejan la “realidad física del habla”. Por tanto, este aspecto debe ser abordado en la aplicación didáctica de la fonética.

No obstante, muchos autores defienden la utilidad del método de grabación de la propia producción y comparación con modelos nativos para mejorar la pronunciación (Muñoz, 2002: 336; Arroyo, 2009: 62; García, 2010: 7; Rodríguez, 2012: 747). Sin embargo, Rivas (2012: 474) advierte sobre las limitaciones del uso de las nuevas tecnologías en la enseñanza de la pronunciación. En este sentido, Silvia (2007: 173) propone que, además de cintas de audio, video, películas, cortometrajes o anuncios publicitarios, el profesor sirva como modelo de pronunciación.

En cuanto al método articulatorio, Ramos (2006: 47) sugiere su uso y ejemplifica algunos de los problemas de los hablantes de portugués con las vocales, principalmente con la excesiva abertura con que realizan las españolas, explicando cómo los alumnos deben posicionar los labios en cada caso. Tocco y Russo (1996:



451) también se centran en el reconocimiento de los órganos articulatorios como fase previa a la actividad fonética, para luego proponer ejercicios lúdicos y propios del método verbo-tonal, como trabalenguas y canciones, además de pares mínimos que trabajen el sonido o sonidos objeto de estudio (1996: 451-452). En este sentido, Muñoz (2002: 338) destaca la importancia de que los alumnos conozcan tanto el aparato fonador como la articulación de los sonidos de la lengua que estudian. Sin embargo, otros autores afirman que el conocimiento de la disposición de los órganos articulatorios para pronunciar un sonido determinado no implica necesariamente que los alumnos puedan producirlo (García, 2010: 6).

Ahora bien, cabe destacar que la mayoría de las propuestas encontradas se centran en el método verbo-tonal, que apela al tratamiento del factor lúdico-afectivo en las actividades, así como al entrenamiento receptivo y productivo, trabajando tanto los sonidos como la prosodia (Hernández, 2006: 133; Arroyo, 2009: 63; Gil et al., 2012: 103). De los estudios consultados, cuatro presentan secuencias de actividades específicas basadas en estos preceptos y enfocadas a los perfiles de alumnos que nos atañen: Aurrecoechea (2002: 36-45), Gironzetti y Pastor (2007: 96-100 y 2008: 153-158) y Ahumada (2010: 94-116). En cuanto a Rubio (2010: 29-40), aunque no especifica la utilización de este método, observamos en su propuesta de actividades muchas coincidentes con las de los autores anteriormente citados, exceptuando las dedicadas a la reflexión sobre la pronunciación del español. Para Aurrecoechea (2002: 37), el uso de estas actividades previas funciona para liberar al alumno de prejuicios con respecto a la lengua que está estudiando, basándose en cuestionarios sobre los sonidos más difíciles del español o en imitar el acento extranjero hablando en la lengua materna del alumno.

Asimismo, se pueden encontrar diversas actividades dedicadas a la recepción y producción del español, como la clasificación de palabras según su patrón acentual, la identificación de estados emocionales mediante la escucha de conversaciones grabadas, la producción de enunciados relacionados con signos ortográficos o estados de ánimo, la identificación de objetos en imágenes que contengan el sonido a trabajar, y bingos para practicar los principales problemas fonéticos. En este sentido, Brisolará (2011: 180) también propone algunas actividades lúdicas que incluyen el uso de canciones o trabalenguas, así como actividades más técnicas centradas en la discriminación de sonidos mediante pares mínimos o la identificación de sílabas tónicas en palabras heterotónicas en portugués y español.

Silvia (2007: 175) propone el método articulatorio como solución para la pronunciación de la fricativa laríngea aspirada del rumano (/χ/) en alumnos que hablan este idioma. La autora sugiere comenzar con la producción de este sonido en posición intervocálica mediante dos vocales posteriores y la realización de ejercicios de pares contrastivos. Además, propone la inclusión de actividades lúdicas como la reproducción de trabalenguas o frases célebres. Para la corrección de la pronunciación uvular de [r] y [r], García (2010: 8) destaca la importancia de la prosodia, la fonética combinatoria y la pronunciación matizada. En este sentido, Jiménez et al. (1975: 42) defienden el uso de la fonética combinatoria argumentando que se facilita la reproducción de un sonido si se le presenta en una combinación favorable. No obstante, advierten que la asimilación de nuevos sonidos requiere tiempo y paciencia (1975: 43).

Arroyo (2009: 65) también sigue el método verbo-tonal y propone una serie de ejercicios específicos para estudiantes itálofonos. En el caso de la

consonante /d/ final, sugiere ofrecer modelos de pronunciación fricativos débiles o incluso la eliminación de dicha consonante, ya que los italianos tienden a producirla de manera oclusiva en cualquier contexto (2009: 67). Para la reducción de vocales tónicas, que en italiano suelen ser prolongadas, Arroyo sugiere trabajar con pares mínimos y con las vocales cerradas /i/ y /u/. Además, indica la preferencia por el uso de sílabas trabadas y con varias sílabas después de la sílaba tónica, ya que las sílabas finales en español suelen ser más largas (2009: 68).

Molinié (2010: 84-95) propone una serie de ejercicios basados en el método verbo-tonal para ayudar a los estudiantes francófonos a corregir su pronunciación. Para solucionar el problema de la pronunciación uvular de [R], sugiere el uso de consonantes y vocales que dirijan la lengua hacia adelante, como en las onomatopeyas “¡rin, rin!” (2010: 93). Para mejorar la pronunciación de la /s/ francesa, que es más sibilante que la española, propone su colocación en posición no acentuada entre vocales posteriores o la vocal media [a] para reducir la tensión articuladora y matizar su duración e intensidad.

Ribera (2013: 3-4), por otro lado, plantea una propuesta que combina sonidos, gestos y ritmos. En la primera fase, se presentan pares mínimos para su audición, y luego se asocia cada sonido con una imagen familiar y un gesto, como abrir una puerta después del sonido del timbre “ring, ring” si se está trabajando con [r], junto con la representación de la posición de los órganos articulatorios. Luego, se establece una fase de producción en un contexto comunicativo, utilizando la pronunciación matizada y llevando a cabo actividades como teatrillos o *sketches*. En conclusión, el método verbo-tonal y articulador se presentan como propuestas útiles y eficaces para la enseñanza de la pronunciación en alumnos de diferentes lenguas maternas, ya que se basan en la percepción y producción de los sonidos del español, así como en el tratamiento lúdico-afectivo de las actividades. Asimismo, se ha destacado la importancia de la interacción comunicativa en el aprendizaje y el papel fundamental del profesor como modelo de pronunciación. En este sentido, se ha subrayado la necesidad de huir de la intelectualización y abogar por una clase de pronunciación motivadora, espontánea y divertida. Así pues, se hace hincapié en la diferencia que se da entre una clase de pronunciación y un curso de fonética.

### **Reflexiones finales**

Como colofón, podemos decir que la adquisición de la competencia fónica en el aula ELE en un contexto románico es un tema relevante y de gran importancia para la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. Como hemos visto, los hablantes de lenguas románicas presentan dificultades específicas en la adquisición del sistema fonológico español, lo que puede generar un cómic sonoro a raíz de los errores fonéticos que cometen. Es por ello que resulta crucial abordar estas dificultades y diseñar actividades específicas y adaptadas a los perfiles lingüísticos de los estudiantes para evitar el cómic sonoro y facilitar su aprendizaje de la pronunciación del español. En definitiva, la correcta adquisición de la competencia fónica en el aula ELE en un contexto románico no solo mejorará la comunicación del alumno, sino que también tendrá un impacto positivo en su autoestima y confianza al hablar en español.

En resumen, esta investigación ha permitido delimitar los problemas específicos de los hablantes de lenguas románicas al aprender el sistema fonológico español. La gran similitud entre estas lenguas en el plano léxico y gramatical no se extiende al plano fónico, lo que complica la adquisición de algunos sonidos

específicos del español ausentes en el resto de los sistemas románicos. Asimismo, las realizaciones diferentes en cada lengua de algunos fonemas también suponen una dificultad añadida. A pesar de que estas realizaciones no afecten directamente a la comprensión, pueden generar confusión en los alumnos y dificultar la adquisición del nuevo sistema fonológico. Por tanto, es fundamental tener en cuenta estas peculiaridades y diseñar actividades específicas y adaptadas a los perfiles lingüísticos de los estudiantes para facilitar su aprendizaje de la pronunciación del español.

Desde luego, la delimitación de las dificultades específicas de los hablantes de lenguas románicas nos ha permitido sistematizar los errores a nivel segmental -sonidos aislados y combinados- y suprasegmental -patrones acentuales y entonación- que presentan. No obstante, debemos tener en cuenta que esta sistematización se centra únicamente en estos perfiles lingüísticos y, en caso de incluir otros tipos de lenguas en el estudio, sería necesario ampliar las categorías de errores a considerar, como el tono de las vocales. Ergo, esta delimitación nos ha permitido profundizar en las dificultades concretas de estos hablantes y establecer una base sólida para el diseño de metodologías efectivas para la enseñanza de la pronunciación del español como lengua extranjera.

A fin de cuentas, queremos resaltar que, aunque existe un consenso sobre la importancia de incluir la enseñanza de la pronunciación en la didáctica del ELE, no hay un acuerdo generalizado sobre el enfoque y la metodología que se debe seguir. Cada autor defiende un método específico que se centra en diferentes aspectos, pero la mayoría de ellos coinciden en la necesidad de partir de la percepción auditiva. Lo que queda claro es que la enseñanza de la pronunciación es un tema cada vez más relevante para investigadores y profesores, y es nuestra responsabilidad seguir desarrollando técnicas y recursos específicos que ayuden a nuestros alumnos a superar los principales obstáculos en este ámbito.

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**«MEMORIAS DE UN CORTESANO DE 1815»,  
UN TOQUE DE HUMOR DENTRO DE LA GRAVEDAD  
DE LOS «EPISODIOS NACIONALES» DE GALDÓS**

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**Abstract:** *Literary critics and exegetes unanimously appreciate that Galdós' "National Episodes" constitute the fictionalized history of nineteenth-century Spain, since they relate all the relevant events of the tormented nineteenth century in Spain, between naval battles and patriotic insurrections, with the sessions of the Congress of Deputies and the difficult daily life of the military and the humble or well-to-do Spaniards. Among the novels of the second series, "Memoirs of a Courtier from 1815" becomes an oasis of humour and irony, since it only relates the vain confrontations of the courtiers and their ridiculous quarrels, provoked by greed or envy. Juan Pipaón, the hero of the novel, is selfish and very hypocritical, he promises help to everyone and sincerely believes that he has great influence over King Ferdinand VII. He actually looks out only for his own interests and is remorselessly deceiving others. Just when he thinks he is in his glories, a young woman takes revenge on him and makes a fool of him.*

**Keywords:** *Galdós, National episodes, humour*

### **I El realismo de los Episodios nacionales**

A pesar de haber sido “el primero en asimilar la lección de Balzac y de Dickens, al par que supo dar sentido nuevo al retorno hacia el antiguo realismo español, apropiándose lo substancial y rehuendo la trampa de la imitación externa...” (Del Río, 1982: 295) y de ser reconocido unánimemente como “el verdadero creador de lo que entendemos por realismo moderno en la novela española” (*ibidem*), algunos piensan que “el «realismo» de Pérez Galdós es algo bastante discutible” (Vargas Llosa, 2022: 300).

Según la mayoría de los críticos y exegetas, el realismo de Galdós no se puede negar, “no es más que un escritor dedicado día tras día durante cincuenta años [...] a observar la realidad española y llevar el fruto de sus observaciones a su obra novelística.” (Gonzálvez; Sevilla, 2017: 11).

En su discurso de ingreso en la Real Academia Española, el escritor aclaraba sus ideas sobre la novela: tiene que ser “imagen de la vida” y el arte de escribir novelas supone

...reproducir los caracteres humanos, las pasiones, las debilidades, lo grande y lo pequeño, las almas y las fisonomías, todo lo espiritual y lo físico que nos constituye y nos rodea y el lenguaje que es la marca de la raza, y las viviendas que son el signo de la familia, y la vestidura que diseña los últimos trazos externos de la personalidad...” (<http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/130020.pdf>).

Siempre confesó que aspiraba a narrar en sus obras la vida del “pueblo, que con su miseria, sus disputas, sus dichos picantes, hacía la historia que no se escribe, como no sea por los poetas, pintores y saineteros” (Galdós, 1945: 548).

Son los preceptos más puros del realismo, hay que reconocerlo. Es obvio que, un siglo después del fallecimiento del autor, las novelas de Galdós ofrecen un

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inestimable tesoro de informaciones históricas y antropológicas. Sin ser libros de historia.

Galdós introdujo en sus obras acontecimientos reales y personalidades históricas, de manera que es difícil desentrañar qué prestó de la vida y qué inventó:

La realidad de la historia y la fantasía del novelista se alían armoniosamente en los episodios galdosianos para ofrecer, con las naturales y justificables licencias, una imagen verosímil y aleccionadora de la España contemporánea; lo que Galdós inventa, se ajusta muy cabalmente al sucedido histórico: está a su servicio y lo complementa (Menéndez Peláez et al., 2005: 334).

Los críticos literarios y los exégetas aprecian unánimemente que los Episodios nacionales de Galdós constituyen la historia novelada de la España decimonónica, ya que relatan todos los acontecimientos relevantes del atormentado siglo XIX en España, entre batallas navales e insurrecciones patrióticas, con las sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados y el difícil vivir de cada día de los militares y de los españoles humildes o acomodados. El mismo autor asegura que los *Episodios Nacionales* “o no son nada, o son el vivir, el sentir y hasta el respirar de la gente” (Galdós, 2021-4: 1249), sugiriendo que constituyen indudablemente una lectura imprescindible para quien desee conocer la historia de España en el siglo XIX y sabe que no la puede encontrar en “los abultados libros en que sólo se trata de casamientos de reyes y príncipes, de tratados y alianzas, de las campañas de mar y tierra, dejando en olvido todo lo demás que constituye la existencia de los pueblos” (*ibidem*).

Pero Mario Vargas Llosa tiene razón: en los episodios nacionales hay elementos románticos. Recuerdan mucho el romanticismo el encarnizamiento de esas batallas en las que no falta la improvisación, la naturaleza y sobre todo “el amor, inseparable de la muerte, como en todo drama romántico” (Vargas Llosa, 2022: 8).

## **II La segunda serie de los Episodios Nacionales**

Es interesante recordar que Galdós, al acabar la segunda serie, daba por terminada su tarea y juraba no añadir “más cuartillas a las diez mil de que constan los Episodios nacionales” (Galdós, 2021-4: 1249). No dudaba en proclamar con mucho énfasis: “Aquí concluyen definitivamente estos” (*ibidem*). Consideraba que los acontecimientos siguientes estaban demasiado cercanos y vivos en la memoria de los lectores y su evocación podía volver a abrir heridas dolorosas. Necesitó diecinueve años para cambiar de opinión y atreverse a quebrar su juramento.

En las diez novelas que constituyen la segunda serie, el autor relata lo ocurrido en España entre 1813 y 1834, aproximadamente. El hermano de Napoleón, efímero rey de España, se va y deja detrás recuerdos amargos, de batallas sangrientas y de numerosos abusos, quemas de conventos y destrucción de obras de arte etc.

Los estragos provocados por los franceses son recordados en España muchos años después de la guerra: “En 19 de septiembre de 1810 los franceses que nada respetaban, entraron en Solsona con estrépito, y después de cometer mil desmanes se entretuvieron en quemar la catedral, con cuyo siniestro desplomáronse las torres y vinieron al suelo las campanas” (Galdós, 2021-3: 845). No les bastó con quemar la catedral, su fatal frenesí necesitaba emociones de otra naturaleza para aplacarse. No dudaron en violar a las monjas: “También pusieron mano en los conventos, encariñándose demasiado con los de religiosas, donde cometieron desafueros que mejor están callados que referidos” (*ibidem*). Los franceses redujeron a ruinas el edificio y robaron numerosos tesoros:

El convento de monjas dominicas llamado San Salomó por ser fundación del marqués de este nombre (1573) padeció diversos tormentos de los que no pocas memorias guardaron las espantadas vírgenes del Señor. Tan horribles desmanes no eximían a las santas casas de sufrir expoliaciones y derribos, y San Salomó, que perdiera en aquel horrendo día tantos tesoros, se quedó también sin copón, sin candeleros y sin las arracadas de la Virgen. Desaparecieron cuadros y estatuas, y un trozo del ala de Poniente fue derribado a cañonazos, quedando reducidas a escombros seis celdas del piso alto y el refectorio que estaba en el bajo (*ibidem*).

Una de las monjas sobrevivientes evoca espantada la trágica profanación cometida por “una soldadesca infame” (*idem*: 862). Nada puede borrar unos recuerdos tan terribles: “yo vi a tres hermanas degolladas y a otras injuriadas horriblemente. Los pocos cabellos que tengo se erizan todavía en mi cabeza al recordar aquel día de Setiembre de 1810” (*ibidem*).

Los españoles que habían ayudado a los franceses, volviéndose *afrancesados*, eran aborrecidos hasta por sus madres y por sus novias.

En *El equipaje del rey José*, la madre de Salvador Monsalud se desmaya al ver que su hijo lleva el uniforme francés. Viendo lo ocurrido, la vieja Perpetua, amiga de la madre, no duda en llamar a Salvador “monstruo”, lo amenaza con un palo y discurre: “La muerte del hijo que perece en los campos de batalla destroza el corazón, pero no afrenta; la traición del hijo desvergonzado, que comete la infamia de pasarse al enemigo, es el más vivo de los dolores de una madre española” (Galdós, 2021-1: 50). Salvador Monsalud era muy pobre y había aceptado servir a los franceses para poder comer y era leal, no pensaba traicionar a quien le pagaba el sueldo.

Para Genara, el español que ayuda a los enemigos “es un traidor cobarde, un ser despreciable, un Judas. Los perros de España merecen más consideración que el que tal vileza comete” (*idem*: 58). Está enamorada de Salvador Monsalud y sospecha que él ha cometido aquella vileza. Le dice sin vacilar: “Si tú la cometieras, Salvador, no sólo te aborrecería, sino que me mataría la vergüenza de haberte querido” (*ibidem*).

El odio hacia los *afrancesados* era inmenso y “algunos renegados a quienes no fue posible ni huir, ni cambiar de vestido, recibieron rápida muerte todos juntos en fiera hecatombe, sin que les valiese la ardiente protesta de abjurar y volver a los amores de la patria” (*idem*: 151). Sorprendentemente, a menudo los *afrancesados* son ajusticiados por mujeres, por las madres que habían enviado a sus hijos a la guerra.

El rey español legítimo, Fernando VII, regresa del exilio, pero decepciona a muchos de sus súbditos. Son tiempos convulsos y España se rompe en dos, ya que parte de su población apoya al Antiguo Régimen absolutista, mientras la otra parte está a favor de la monarquía constitucional. Florecen las sociedades secretas y las logias masónicas. Los políticos no tienen escrúpulos y sólo velan por sus propios intereses.

*El terror de 1824*, otra novela de la serie, nos presenta un mundo de pesadilla: delaciones, cárcel, justicia corrupta y “el crimen de la pena de muerte” (Galdós, 2021-3: 839). El escritor se atreve a llevar a sus lectores a la capilla de los reos de muerte, “el local más decente de la cárcel de Corte” (*idem*: 824). Un sitio mísero no hubiera sido digno de España: “No parecía en verdad decoroso, ni propio de una nación tan empingorotada que los reos se prepararan a la muerte mundana y salvación eterna en una pocilga como los departamentos donde moraban durante la causa” (*ibidem*) y tampoco de los ilustres visitantes: “en la capilla entraban movidos de curiosidad o compasión muchos personajes de viso, señores obispos, consejeros, generales, gentiles-hombres, y no se les había de recibir como a cualquier pelagatos” (*ibidem*). No faltan la actitud, la psicología y los cambios físicos de los condenados: “Generalmente los



condenados, por valientes que sean, toman un tinte cadavérico que anticipa en ellos la imagen de la descomposición física, asemejándoles a difuntos que comen, hablan, oyen, miran y lloran para burlarse de la vida que abandonaron” (*ibidem*).

Podemos afirmar que la segunda serie de los *Episodios nacionales* relata acontecimientos históricos siniestros y lamentables, que las generaciones siguientes deben conocer, para tratar de evitarlos en el presente y en el futuro y no provocar de ninguna manera su repetición.

### **III Memorias de un cortesano de 1815**

#### **III 1 La novela dentro de la segunda serie de los Episodios nacionales**

Entre las novelas de la segunda serie, *Memorias de un cortesano de 1815* llega a ser un oasis de humor y de ironía, puesto que no relata acontecimientos trágicos. Hay una historia de amor que podría acabar de manera trágica, pero el final es feliz. Parece una historia de opereta: la simpática y traviesa Presentación Rumblar está enamorada del joven Gasparito Grijalva, un preso político que había calumniado al rey e iba a ser ahorcado. Presentacioncita llora desconsolada y pide ayuda a todos sus conocidos que pueden intervenir en el asunto. Se equivoca y acude a quien no debe, pero tiene suerte y su novio es puesto en libertad.

En realidad, la novela no narra más que los enfrentamientos vanos de los cortesanos y sus rencillas ridículas, provocadas por la codicia o la envidia.

Juan Pipaón, el narrador y héroe de la novela, es egoísta y muy hipócrita, promete ayuda a todo el mundo y cree sinceramente que goza de gran influencia sobre el rey Fernando VII. En realidad vela solamente por sus propios intereses y engaña sin remordimientos al prójimo. Promete a las señoras de Porreño ayuda para recuperar su fortuna sin tener que pagar las deudas. Pero, cuando se le presenta la oportunidad, Pipaón pide al rey todo lo contrario y al final consigue para él mismo las posesiones de las señoras de Porreño. A Presentacioncita le promete interceder a favor del joven Gasparito, novio de ella, pero le pide al rey que el joven siga en prisión y el monarca decide que “no estaría de más que ese don Gasparito, o don Moscón, durmiese unas noches más en la cárcel” (Galdós, 2021-2: 211).

Cuando Pipaón cree estar en sus glorias, la joven Presentacioncita consigue vengarse de él y le pone en ridículo.

#### **III 2 El humor en Memorias de un cortesano de 1815**

Presentacioncita provoca muchas situaciones cómicas a lo largo de la novela. Cuando está seria, trama seguramente “alguna ingeniosa picardía” (*idem*: 169).

Es una joven encantadora y aprovecha la debilidad que tienen por ella los hombres, para burlarse de ellos durante las tertulias. “Temblábamos ante ella” (*ibidem*) confiesa Juan Pipaón, y añade: “Su gravedad era una máscara detrás de la cual se fraguaban hipócritamente todas las aleves conspiraciones contra nuestras casacas, contra nuestras chupas y también contra nuestras pobres carnes” (*ibidem*).

El cortesano no duda en enumerar las burlas de la chica:

“en cierta ocasión clavó en los sillones donde Ostolaza y yo nos sentábamos, algunos alfileres tan soberanamente dispuestos, que mi buen amigo y yo vimos sin ser astrólogos, todo el sistema planetario. Otra vez cosió mis faldones a un infame aparato, que moviéndose echó por tierra la cesta de costura donde doña Paz tenía mil distintas suertes de labores, ovillos, canutillos, lienzos, de tal modo, que levantarme yo y venir el mujeril aparato al suelo, fue todo uno. A veces inventaba un juego de acertijo, en el cual había un plato artificiosamente ahumado, que nos aplicábamos a la cara para saber el

secreto, y puesta la sala a oscuras, resultaba después que aparecíamos Ostolaza y yo con la cara tiznada, de lo cual se holgaban y reían mucho los concurrentes. A menudo recibía yo cartitas y recados de monjas mandándome llamar, y luego salíamos con que era mentira. Y no digo nada de aquella graciosísima invención que consistía en darme un dulce, y cuando yo todo almibarado de gozo me lo metía en la boca, resultaba más amargo que la misma hiel” (*ibidem*).

El de Presentacioncita es un bellissimo retrato femenino de Galdós, tenemos que reconocerlo. Es una adorable e irresistible mujer – niña, que no puede pasar desapercibida. Pipaón la llama “la graciosa niña” (*ibidem*) y, a pesar de ser un hombre frío y calculador, no puede dejar de admirarla. En cuanto a las bromas que gasta la joven a los tertulianos, hay que admitir que son inocentes, sin consecuencias, de niña mimada, pero jamás malvada. Ella sabe que sus víctimas no podrán enfadarse. “Por mi parte, me moría de gusto”, confiesa Pipaón (*idem*: 168).

Pipaón es adulador con los poderosos y llega a conocer las costumbres y las debilidades del rey Fernando VII y trata de sacar provecho de sus conocimientos.

Galdós describe al rey despiadada e irónicamente, apuntando las murmuraciones de los cortesanos:

Los favoritos habían observado que cuando Su Majestad, al sentarse junto a la mesa de su despacho, movía volublemente los dedos sobre ella, como quien toca el piano, modulando al par entre dientes un sordo musiquero, estaba en excelente disposición para conceder lo que se le pedía. Por el contrario, cuando se rascaba la oreja o se pasaba la palma de la mano por la frente, era casi seguro que negaría la petición (*idem*: 206).

Los cortesanos, hombres avisados y astutos, se comportan según el humor del monarca y le piden favores solamente cuando ven que es “día de piano” (*ibidem*).

Con malicia, Juan de Pipaón logra manipular al rey y se sale con la suya, consigue las tierras de las señoras de Porreño y puede constituir un mayorazgo y pensar en casarse y tener hijos. Se siente muy orgulloso de sí mismo y no cabe en sí de gozo:

...estaba envanecido de mí mismo, y entonces empecé a conocer lo mucho que para tales asuntos valía. Yo era una firme columna del Estado; yo desplegaba en servicio de mi Soberano absoluto y del sumiso reino, tendido a sus pies como un perro enfermo y calenturiento que no puede moverse de pura miseria, las más altas calidades intelectuales. Indudablemente Dios debía de estar satisfecho de haberme criado, viéndome tan hormiguilla, tan allegador, tan mete-y-saca, tan buen amparador de los poderosos para que los poderosos me amparasen a mí (*idem*: 226).

No duda en compararse con Colón: “En tal materia yo, era más que Colón, porque este descubrió sólo un mundo y yo descubría todos los días uno nuevo” (*ibidem*).

A Pipaón le gusta Presentacioncita y tiene intención de revelarles sus sentimientos. Ella le promete una cita. Será una cita romántica, de noche, ella en su casa y él en la calle, hablando por las rejas de la ventana. En realidad, serán dos citas. Presentacioncita finge una gran pasión... por el rey, confiesa a Pipaón que está enamorada del rey y llora otra vez desconsolada. “¡Qué lástima que aquel rocío celeste no fuera para mí!” (*idem*: 231), exclama él para sus adentros. La hipocresía del cortesano Pipaón no tiene límites: deja de lado sus sentimientos y trata de proporcionar un encuentro entre Presentacioncita y el rey. Se olvida tan rápidamente de sus propósitos porque Fernando VII le había declarado que la joven le parecía muy guapa. Por eso, Pipaón piensa que en el futuro podrá sacar algún provecho, podrá conseguir algún favor del rey. Se lo dice claramente a Presentacioncita: “¡Oh, mujer feliz entre

todas las mujeres felices de la tierra! En vuestra grandeza, señora mía, no olvidéis de hacer algo por este humilde servidor de Vuestra Majestad” (*idem*: 233).

Pipaón, Presentacioncita y el hermano de ella parten hacia la Casa de Campo, lugar de recreo del rey. Don Diego de Rumblar, hermano de Presentacioncita, va engañado, creyendo que se van a divertir pescando y paseando por el jardín. O al menos esto sabe Pipaón, que sólo tiene ojos para Presentacioncita y no puede dejar de sentir miedo:

En medio de la confianza que me inspiraba la niña, tenía yo cierta sospecha vaga, que aun después de verme en el camino del triunfo, se removía vagamente en el fondo de mi espíritu. A cada instante creía que la encantadora muchacha iba a escaparse de mis manos, dejándome burlado... (*idem*: 237).

Cuando entran al jardín real, el cortesano ve sus expectativas colmadas: “Yo estaba como el general que acaba de ganar una batalla” (*ibidem*). La joven no piensa huir, sino todo lo contrario: se anima a subir a uno de los botes y los tres pasean por el lago. Don Diego rema bien, pero Pipaón se marea y le suplica que le lleve a la orilla. Don Diego no le hace caso y Presentacioncita le ironiza.

Llega el rey con su séquito y todos contemplan el bote y a sus ocupantes. Presentacioncita le pide a Pipaón que se levante y salude al rey. El cortesano lo hace y la joven traviesa le empuja, hasta que él cae al agua. Está en peligro de muerte, pero lo sacan del agua y se convierte en el hazmerreír de la corte. Su aspecto es lamentable:

Cuando me sacaron, no sin trabajo, los guardas, ayudándose de ganchos, mi persona inspiraba horror, según me han dicho. Yo era una masa de fango pestilente. Los cortesanos huyeron de mí con asco, mientras los guardas me envolvían en mantas, haciéndome los tratamientos necesarios para volverme a la vida (*idem*: 240).

Su despertar es ridículo, igual que su inmensa presunción:

Cuando adquirí la certeza de que aún vivía para bien de la humanidad y amparo de los desvalidos, era ya de noche. Todo era silencio. Estaba en una sala, y a mi lado no vi ni Rey ni cortesanos. Los guardas me miraban y recordando el chasco, se reían (*idem*: 241).

Se pone a pensar y se da cuenta de que Presentacioncita se ha vengado de él.

#### **IV Conclusiones**

*Memorias de un cortesano de 1815* es una novela aparte dentro de la segunda serie de Episodios nacionales, entre novelas que relatan generalmente acontecimientos históricos ominosos y sangrientos. Las *Memorias...* no narran más que los esfuerzos de un cortesano ambicioso e hipócrita para subir en la jerarquía. Fingiendo y traicionando sin remordimientos, Juan de Pipaón consigue amasar una fortuna y cree que puede manipular a los más poderosos, hasta al rey Fernando VII. Cuando está contento y muy orgulloso de sus logros, una joven se burla de él y lo deja en ridículo.

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## **BUFONES, COMEDIANTES Y ARLEQUINES EN LA PINTURA ESPAÑOLA**

**Sorina Dora SIMION\***

***Abstract:** The fashion for people of pleasure dates to the Middle Ages and is pan-European, but it flourished, more than in other countries, at the court of the Spanish Habsburgs, between the 16th and 17th centuries. In this work we intend to analyse the roles, functions and the differences between monsters, fools, madmen, dwarves, and buffoons, so we consider the documents that testify and document their existence and the traces they left in Spanish painting. The courtly images of men of pleasure highlight their importance as attributes of Habsburg power, from Carlos V and Felipe II to the last of them, Carlos II, and show affection, Christian mercy and, thanks to the antithesis, highlight regal qualities and distinction. Later painters, for example, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes and Pablo Picasso, drew on the sources of Spanish painting of the 16th and 17th centuries and delved into the differences between abnormal, weird, and comic characters and circus or comedian actors.*

***Keywords:** crazy, dwarfs, buffoons, Spanish painting*

### **1. Introducción**

Nos proponemos describir, analizar e interpretar la aparición, frecuencia y papel de los personajes cómicos mencionados en el título de nuestro trabajo, y también las transformaciones que se dieron a lo largo del tiempo en cuanto a los personajes cómicos presentes primeramente en la corte de los soberanos españoles y después en funciones o espectáculos, según las particularidades y características de las épocas respectivas.

Enfocamos los aspectos citados incluso a través del espejo subjetivo de los artistas plásticos atraídos por el efecto visual de tales personajes, pintores más o menos conocidos, que filtraron mediante su propia visión la realidad en los cuadros de diferentes géneros. Por supuesto, los cambios son evidentes, las percepciones, distintas, la sustancia misma del cómico y de los personajes cómicos desemeja: lo feo, lo monstruoso, lo diferente, lo otro, en el Barroco que hereda la tradición de la Edad Media y algo del Renacimiento, con su cariz profundamente humana, en la serie de los bufones de Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez; el acercamiento al espectáculo popular, en la pintura de Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, cercano al Romanticismo; y, por último, la profesionalización de estos personajes en las funciones de los comediantes ambulantes, según la imagen ofrecida por Francisco de Goya, o de los arlequines y bufones del circo Medrano, en la pintura de Pablo Picasso, en la acepción propia de la Modernidad.

Indudablemente, en la pintura, podríamos identificar un número restringido de enanos y bufones, en comparación con el número total de la gente de placer que vivió en la corte de los Austrias, pero, a veces, no fue posible identificarlos en los cuadros y permanecen desconocidos, y los arlequines y comediantes de los cuadros objeto de nuestro estudio quedan anónimos, en su mayoría. Cabe destacar que los pintores viven y representan la fascinación de lo visual, en todos estos casos, como igualmente la antítesis patente entre lo normal y lo diferente o extraño, entre lo cómico y lo trágico, entre los héroes deformes cuya anormalidad les aseguran la existencia y los actores cómicos que sobreviven gracias a su profesión. En muchos de estos casos, detrás de su

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papel cómico, se notan las desgarradoras y profundas soledad y tristeza, sentimientos humanos de los pobres desheredados o de los actores, saltimbanquis o arlequines humildes.

## 2. Gente de placer

¿Cómo se justifica y cómo se podría documentar la presencia y existencia de este tipo de seres humanos en la corte de los soberanos españoles?

La tradición de los reyes españoles de ser acompañados por esta clase de gente remonta por lo menos hasta el siglo XIII, con Sancho IV de Castilla y su enano García Yáñez, pero tiene sus raíces en la Edad Media y una difusión europea. Si en los cuadros aparecen unas 20 figuras, en realidad, José Moreno Villa documenta, entre 1563 y 1700 (un siglo y cuarto), 123 y saca la conclusión de que “cabe decir que los Austrias gastaron un loco o un enano por año” (Moreno Villa, J., 1939: 15).

La catalogación o realización de una lista y la documentación aferente resultan bastante difíciles por la razón muy sencilla de que ser enano o loco no significa ni cargo, ni oficio y las búsquedas realizadas en las cuentas palatinas de Sancho IV de Castilla por Mercedes Gaibrois de Ballesteros y en una serie de documentos por José Moreno Villa demuestran no solo los obstáculos, sino también la escasez de la información y la dificultad de rehacer un marco completo.

La investigadora susodicha, al buscar en los documentos mencionados, revela los nombres, papeles y funciones de esta gente en la corte del hijo de Alfonso X el Sabio, Sancho IV de Castilla, que reinó entre 1284 y 1295:

Regocijo de la Corte eran los truhanes y bufones, tales como el inspirado poeta “Arias Páez, juglar”, e Ismael “juglar de la Rota”, que recibían sueldo del rey, junto con Johanet, juglar del Tamboret, probablemente catalán, recitador de romances populares, que vestía saya, pellote y caperot de “valenciana reforzada”, y Arnolt, joglar, acaso provenzal, que usa tabardo de Estanfort. Rodrigo, joglar, tenía el año 1285 un beneficio en las rentas “de la tafurería” de Badajoz. (Gaibrois de Ballesteros, M., 2019: 40).

Destaca García Yáñez, el enano favorito de los reyes, que recibe para sus bodas 1500 maravedises, lo que se menciona en una partida: “a García Yáez, el nano, por vestir dél e de su mujer, M maravedís”. Además, se paga una cantidad por “un asno para las juglaresas”, ya que existían también mujeres dedicadas a esta profesión, por ejemplo, María Martín, la “bufona”, compañera de Hohan, bufón de Sotesgudo. Divertían asimismo a los reyes los músicos como Fate el trompero y los “moros saltadores”, que recibían tinto para vestir y solían ir con sus mujeres e hijos, dándose a uno de ellos algunas varas de *blao* (*ibidem*: 40).

Por su parte, José Moreno Villa pone de relieve la diversidad de los archivos estudiados para poder realizar la documentación de la presencia de los locos o enanos en la corte de los soberanos españoles a lo largo de un siglo y cuarto:

Unos cobraban en raciones de cera, o sea por la Cerería; otros cobraban en panes, por la Panadería; unos son pagados simplemente con mercedes; otros no figuraban más que en los viajes o jornadas. [...] He tenido que perseguirlos en los rincones más pequeños de la Administración [...]. En los pliegues más pequeños de la vida palatina (Moreno Villa, *op. cit.*: 16-17).

Son pequeños héroes que alegraron el Alcázar viejo, pero igualmente personajes insignificantes de la categoría de los criados palatinos y dejaron rastros en unos retratos o/y en los rincones oscuros de los documentos hurgados por los

investigadores. Asimismo, los nobles imitaban a los reyes y tenían sus enanos. Algunos de los del palacio vivían en el Alcázar y otros fuera del Alcázar viejo. Unos eran indispensables en los viajes, por ser muy divertidos, como, por ejemplo, Juan Bautista de Sevilla o Bautista el del ajedrez que jugaba al ajedrez con Felipe IV y las negrillas jugaban con el rey, y otros no acompañaban a las personas reales durante sus jornadas.

Estos criados, personas alimentadas, sostenidas y vestidas, es decir, criadas por el señor, estaban de moda en Persia, Egipto, Grecia y Roma, y la bufonería, en la Edad Media, se extendió por todos lados, en castillos, casas, cortes, conventos o monasterios, pero en el siglo y cuarto indicado por José Moreno Villa, la bufonería tuvo características distintas en comparación con los siglos anteriores, a causa de la estrechez y extrañas relaciones entre la realeza y los locos o enanos. El origen asiático exótico de la moda de tener locos y enanos domésticos, la evolución misma de la bufonería, con sus principios, desarrollo y decadencia, con su vulgaridad y tosquedad durante la Edad Media y, sobre todo, con el abrumador número en el siglo XVII, pero con enanos o locos ya domados o domesticados y moldeados o formados y educados, es una evolución que demuestra la especificidad de tal fenómeno en la corte española. Por una parte, los Austrias españoles les tenían flaqueza o hasta cariño, considerándolos instrumentos familiares muy importantes para la vida afectiva, instrumentos que los señores y damas de la corte no podían ser, esto es, “una válvula de escape en la tiesura cortesana” (*ibidem*: 29), y, por otra parte, los enanos y locos se convirtieron en un atributo de la dinastía.

En los siglos XVI y XVII, la bufonería cortesana tiene sus rasgos distintivos y diferentes de los de los siglos anteriores y en el siguiente siglo, XVIII, si los Borbones renunciaron a los enanos y locos, no desterraron a los negros y siguieron la costumbre austríaca de bautizarlos con los nombres de la familia real. Por ejemplo, Carlos III le tenía cuidado paternal a Alfonso Carlos de Borbón, negro y arquitecto (*ibidem*: 30). La presencia del doble o de la sombra, bajo diversas formas, en la corte española llega a ser un atributo distintivo tanto de los Austrias como de los Borbones, dada la fuerza intrínseca de la antítesis, y de su refuerzo del poder real.

Rodrigo de Villandrando sorprende en su cuadro (*El Príncipe Felipe con el enano Miguel Soplillo*, óleo sobre lienzo, hacia 1620, Museo del Prado) la esencia de esta relación entre los Austrias y los hombres de placer: “este cariño como del amo al perro por su lealtad y constante asistencia, e incluso por los saltos y locuras de alegría ante el señor, es humano y comprensible” (*ibidem*: 31). Miguelito Soplillo, regalo de parte de su tía de Flandes, Isabel Clara Eugenia, podría ser, por una parte, el símbolo de cualquier súbdito y entonces el gesto protector del príncipe de Asturias en aquel entonces, y futuro Felipe IV, se reflejaría sobre todos sus súbditos, o, por otra parte, un homenaje a su tía, que aparecía en el cuadro de Alonso Sánchez Coello, cuarenta años antes, en una postura similar con la enana Magdalena Ruiz (*La infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia y Magdalena Ruiz*, óleo sobre lienzo, 1585-1588, Museo del Prado).

Bufones, truhanes, albardanes, repentistas, locos, simples, enanos, negros, monstruos o fenómenos, seres imperfectos u hombres de placer, ocupaban un lugar distinto e importante en el juego cortesano dentro de la compleja organización política de la corte de los Austrias españoles. Además de saltarse la férrea etiqueta borgoñona instaurada por Carlos V con la presencia y actuación de los hombres de placer, se establecía una antítesis entre seres perfectos y seres imperfectos, en cuanto al aspecto físico y comportamiento, entre los normales y los anormales, entre los bellos y los feos. En la corte de los soberanos podrían hasta convertirse en un atributo iconográfico, como el cetro y la corona para otras monarquías, y se encuentran en una asociación natural

con los símbolos del poder real. Fernando Bouza Álvarez se centra en esta antítesis y afirma que todos ellos servían de contrapunto y ampliaban el espectro de lo correcto: “estos seres descomunales, faltos o excesivos, afirman en los otros la normalidad que su cuerpo o mente están negando” (Bouza Álvarez, F., 1991: 96).

Tanto la realeza como los nobles tuvieron enanos y bufones a su servicio, ya que era un signo de distinción y poder, pero no hay que pasar por alto la vertiente de la piedad cristiana que destaca, entre otros, Julián Gállego, puesto que en aquellos tiempos piadosos aumentó el número de “hombres de placer” que podían:

facilitar el ejercicio de una caridad áulica. En el ámbito contrarreformista era importante manifestar públicamente los valores cristianos defendidos por los católicos y mantener estos seres deformes o locos en palacio era una forma de hacerlo. La caridad se fue desfigurando en manos de algunos nobles que llegaron a considerar a enanos y bufones como objeto de lujo, símbolo de ostentación en tiempos de decadencia, que como ejercicio de caridad cristiana (Gállego, J., 1986: 16).

### 3. Imágenes cortesanas de los hombres de placer

Para las “sabandijas de palacio”, que se encuentran fuera de la norma usual y marginados, su deformidad, paradójicamente, se convierte, unas veces, en apoyo o sostén de su existencia. Pero hay que destacar, por cierto, qué diferencias hay entre los monstruos, los bobos, simples o locos, los bufones y los enanos, ya que las imágenes ponen de manifiesto sus papeles y hasta la actitud para con ellos, en cada caso.

Los dichos monstruos despiertan la curiosidad ante lo maravilloso, extraño o anormal, y los pintan para que la gente los vea, por ejemplo, en los cuadros de Juan Sánchez Cotán (*Brigida del Río, la barbuda de Peñaranda*, 1590, óleo sobre lienzo, 102x61 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado), José de Ribera, “El Españolito”, (*La mujer barbuda*, que amamanta y que está junto a su marido, o *Magdalena Ventura con su marido*, 1631, 196x127 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado) o de Juan Carreño de Miranda (la monstrea vestida y desnuda – *Eugenia Martínez Vallejo*, vestida, hacia 1680, óleo sobre lienzo, 165x107 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado y *La monstrea desnuda*, como Baco, hacia 1680, óleo sobre lienzo, 165x108 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado). Son cuadros dedicados a cosas maravillosas y nunca vistas y transformados en testimonios de la existencia de seres tan raros (Pérez Sánchez, A. E., 1986: 9) percibidos como presencias pasivas en sus rasgos tan insólitos.

Los artistas miran e immortalizan a los bobos, simples o locos, “almas de Dios”, personas ingenuas, buenas, cariñosas o afectuosas, con manías o que carecen de plena razón, con intelecto disminuido, pero con una simpleza en antítesis con los cortesanos intrigantes, aduladores o mentirosos. Los retratan, con humana y profunda compasión, Diego de Velázquez (Calabacillas o el bobo de Coria, el niño de Vallecas y Pablo de Valladolid) o también Juan Carreño de Miranda (Francisco Bazán). Son imágenes que nos muestran la sumisión y la simpleza risueña de estas personas con discapacidad física o intelectual. Además, se aprecia la sinceridad de estos seres simples en contraposición con la adulación y mentira de los cortesanos, como contraveneno de adulaciones: “La sinrazón de un loco puede ser razonable contrastada con la hipocresía de los cortesanos” y el loco “puede resultar gracioso, con sus contorsiones o con sus impertinencias” (Gállego, J., *op. cit.*: 15).

En cambio, los bufones y los enanos compensan cualquier deformidad “con la inteligencia viva y la agudeza ingeniosa [...] o la malignidad vengativa [...] disfrazada



de salida de tono o de alarde compensatorio de su pequeñez” (Pérez Sánchez, A. E., *op. cit.*: 10), y cuentan, además, con la protección de la realeza en cuya proximidad se encuentran, por lo tanto, resuelven todas las situaciones incómodas con risotadas. Los bufones siempre se manifiestan con familiaridad, seguridad, audacia para probar su autoridad gracias a la confianza con las personas reales. El loco o el bufón no respetan las conveniencias sociales y muestran la mera verdad, pura y sin retoques, y dejan al príncipe la libertad de admitir el mensaje o rechazarlo como insensato, ya que, como es sabido, cuentan con inmunidad.

Los enanos aparecen, por ejemplo, en los cuadros de Eugenio Cajés (*Adoración de los Reyes Magos*, hacia 1625, óleo sobre lienzo, Madrid, Depósito del Museo del Prado - Museo de la Trinidad) o Vicente Carducho (*La adoración de los Reyes Magos*, 1619, Comunidad de Madrid, Iglesia de la Asunción de Algete) cerca de los Reyes Magos o al lado de los animales. Igualmente son los acompañantes ideales de los infantes o las infantas, ya que se parecían a los niños, por sus dimensiones reducidas y su carácter juguetón, y, al mismo tiempo, los niños reales podrían aprovecharse de la ventaja de su mayor edad y experiencia. Esta convivencia desde la más tierna edad explica la benevolencia y clemencia con las que las personas reales trataban a estas personas descomunales, dada la familiaridad con ellas desde la infancia. Explica, de igual modo, la importancia de los enanos en la corte los Austrias y la participación en las ceremonias oficiales, las comidas del rey o en los despachos políticos, o bien en los espectáculos reales, al lado del rey, en el balcón, ricamente vestidos. Son las razones por las cuales ocuparon un lugar destacado en la corte española, a pesar de que, fuera de España, a finales del siglo XVII, la costumbre de mantener enanos ya había caído en desuso. Pero sólo con los Borbones desaparecerá de la corte española esta tradición austríaca, a causa de la nueva sensibilidad moral y estética y la creación de un mundo gobernado por la razón. Por ende, en aquel momento, “ese repertorio de enanos, monstruos, bufones y locos se incorporará al caudal de la España dramática y sombría, sostenido con poética evidencia por las humanísimas efigies de Velázquez” (*ibidem*: 13).

Las imágenes cortesanas de los hombres de placer ya son frecuentes a finales del siglo XV y en este mismo siglo aparecen los primeros retratos en solitario de ellos, pero el género se desarrolla en el siglo XVI en la corte de la rama española de los Austrias debido tanto a la tradición familiar (la herencia borgoñona, austríaca y también castellana) y cortesana de Carlos V y Felipe II como a la tradición general europea. La costumbre de tener, mantener y retratar a estos personajes continuó y aumentó en la época de los Austrias menores.

Las figuras de los hombres de placer son parte del decorado cortesano, un atributo iconográfico y compositivo, o aparecen en solitario. Los miembros de la familia real retratados muestran una actitud protectora a esta gente, como, por ejemplo, en el *Retrato de Mariana de Austria* (1666, óleo sobre lienzo, 211x125 cm, Toledo, Museo de El Greco) o de *La Infanta emperatriz Margarita Teresa* (1665-1666, óleo sobre lienzo, 205x144 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado), obras de Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, o el *Retrato de Isabel Clara Eugenia y Magdalena Ruiz* de Sánchez Coello (1585-1588, óleo sobre lienzo, 207x129 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado), o del *Príncipe Felipe y el enano Miguel Soplillo* de Rodrigo Villandrando (hacia 1620, óleo sobre lienzo, 204x110 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado).

Asimismo, los enanos aparecen junto a un perro o animales palaciegos, para ponerse de manifiesto sus dimensiones reducidas, como en una obra del taller de Velázquez, *Enano con un perro* (hacia 1645, óleo sobre lienzo, 142x107 cm, Madrid,

Museo del Prado; atribuido a Velázquez mismo, a Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, su yerno, o a Juan Carreño de Miranda), o en los cuadros de Juan Carreño de Miranda, *Enano Michol* o *Enano de Carlos II con un perrillo* (1680-1682, óleo sobre lienzo, 123,5x103,8 cm, Dallas, Meadows Museum).

Los retratos reales disponían de una función representativa fundamental, ya que tenían que impresionar, como si la presencia real misma lo hiciera. En el retrato cortesano de los Austrias (Antonio Moro, Alonso Sánchez Coello, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez o Juan Carreño de Miranda) o retrato de aparato, los pintores se decantan por uno de los siguientes modelos: el modelo germánico o descriptivo, sobrio y en el cual la figura se perfilaba sobre un fondo oscuro o un paisaje sin mucho relieve; y el modelo de aparato simbólico, de fuente italiana, que muestra la magnificencia y cuenta con figuras alegóricas o mitológicas.

El modelo germánico o descriptivo propuesto por Tiziano (*Carlos V con el perro*, 1533, óleo sobre lienzo, 194x112,7 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado), tan dramático en su sencillez y austeridad, lo siguen Antonio Moro y Alonso Sánchez Coello y los enanos y bufones, personajes grotescos, en tal atmósfera austera y de una sencillez impactante, llegan a ser un elemento de la composición, que, por contraste, embellecen y dignifican a los miembros de la familia real y permiten mantener la veracidad de los rasgos magníficos de los reyes o príncipes retratados. Para Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, los enanos se convierten en atributos regios (Gállego, J., *op. cit.*: 16), esto es, atributos de la monarquía y de los Austrias.

Los retratos en solitario de Antonio Moro (*Perejón, bufón del conde Benavente y del gran duque de Alba*, hacia 1560, óleo sobre lienzo, 184,5x93,5 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado); de un anónimo (*Magdalena Ruiz*, hacia 1580, óleo sobre lienzo, 41,5x36 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado); de Juan Carreño de Miranda (*El bufón Francisco Bazán*, hacia 1680, óleo sobre lienzo, 200x101 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado); de Juan van der Hamen (*Retrato de enano*, hacia 1626, óleo sobre lienzo, 122,5x87 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado); y la serie de los bufones de Velázquez cuentan con una gran fuerza visual. A los artistas les fascina esta fuerza visual de los hombres de placer que, con la llegada de los Borbones, salen del palacio, vuelven a pertenecer al pueblo y, en un corto lapso, llegan a ser la imagen representativa de los circos ambulantes o de los espectáculos callejeros (*Los cómicos ambulantes* de Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, 1793, óleo sobre hojalata, 42,5x31,7 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado), gracias al poder visual de tales personajes cómicos ataviados con trajes llamativos: “Con el circo han llegado también, hasta nuestros días, los enanos como seres cómicos o grotescos. Vestidos de torreros o de flamencas excitan las carcajadas de un público que considera normal” (Gállego, J., *op. cit.*: 16).

En la corte de los Habsburgo españoles, por una parte, la presencia de los enanos, bufones o gente de placer no es solo una tradición heredada de los reyes peninsulares anteriores, sino fortalecida por una tendencia europea general de los soberanos y nobles, dada la existencia de estos seres deformes en las cortes europeas, por ejemplo, en la corte borgoñona, austriaca, italiana, etc. Por otra parte, se puede afirmar y documentar que los enanos o bufones llegan a ser para los Austrias Menores españoles un atributo real, un signo distintivo, como si se tratara del cetro o la corona, algo más que en el caso de las demás cortes, debido no sólo al importante número, sino también a las relaciones que se establecían entre el soberano y esta gente.

En el Barroco, se podría interpretar como representación total de la Naturaleza en todos los aspectos, en lo bello y lo feo, y, si los Borbones españoles renuncian a los enanos y bufones, conservan a los negros, lo que representaría igualmente un signo de

distinción y ofrecería la dimensión de su poder. En general, funciona la teoría del doble negativo, en perfecta antítesis y simetría con la figura omnipotente y destacada del rey, y, si los Borbones españoles devuelven a estos seres distintos al pueblo, favorecen, al mismo tiempo, el acercamiento de aquellos al mundo profesional del circo. Los Borbones prefieren como atributos representativos y simbólicos de sus representaciones cortesanas la corona u otros signos.

Una vez realizada la transición hacia el mundo del circo, gracias a los comediantes callejeros goyescos, los cuadros de Pablo Picasso envían obsesivamente a la tristeza y melancolía de estos actores cómicos cuya vida es tan difícil a causa de la pobreza, y, sobre todo, a causa de lo pesado e incómodo de la actuación del cómico que tiene que sobreponerse en cualquier circunstancia, etapa o momento de su existencia y despertar la risa del público. En los cuadros de Pablo Picasso (*Los dos saltimbanquis, arlequín y su compañera*, 1901, óleo sobre lienzo, 73x60 cm, Moscú, Museo Pushkin; *Arlequín pensativo*, 1901, óleo sobre lienzo, 80x60,3 cm, Nueva York, Museum of Modern Art; *La familia de saltimbanquis*, 1905, óleo sobre lienzo, 212,8x22,6 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art; *Arlequín*, 1915, 183,5x105,1 cm, Nueva York, Museum of Modern Art; *Arlequín con espejo*, 1923, óleo sobre lienzo, 100x81 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza; *El bobo, según Velázquez y Murillo*, 1959, óleo y colores de esmalte sobre lienzo, 92x73 cm, Colección particular) aparece el revés del espectáculo cómico y otros sentimientos de los actores, es decir, la melancolía y la soledad de estos héroes. Además, la fascinación del mundo del circo extiende el traje del arlequín a los seres queridos, como su hijo o su mejor amigo (*Paul vestido de arlequín*, 1924, óleo sobre lienzo, 130x97,5 cm, París, Musée Picasso; y *Arlequín sentado* o *El pintor Jacinto Salvador*, 1923, óleo sobre lienzo, 130x97 cm, París, Centre George Pompidou). Los cuadros mencionados demuestran el interés del pintor por las facetas del cómico y sus posibles hipostasis y representaciones, es el interés por lo que el público no puede ver: la vida triste y desprovista del glamur del escenario del espectáculo de todos estos héroes.

#### 4. Conclusiones

Los enanos y bufones ganan el afecto protector de los miembros de la familia real y una posición importante en la corte, pero igualmente facilitan el ejercicio de una caridad áulica y de los atributos regios y cristianos de la realeza. No hay que olvidar que el lienzo velazqueño *Las Meninas* (1656, óleo sobre lienzo, 320,5x281,5 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado) se llamaba *La Familia*, lo que apoya la afirmación de que estos seres desdichados representan el atributo real de los Austrias, un símbolo de su poder, como la corona y el cetro, por ejemplo. Los enanos y locos pertenecen a la abundante servidumbre palaciega y son “objetos de reflexión y diversión, como espejos deformantes” “pequeñeces y manías” (Gállego, J., *op. cit.*: 16), al representar las dos caras de Jano, una positiva y otra llena de incertidumbre, o los dos lados distintos del hazmerreír, lo cómico y lo grotesco o caricaturesco, por una parte, y su cara oculta, trágica o, por lo menos, melancólica.

En conclusión, los retratos de los monstruos, bobos, enanos, locos o bufones, en retratos de grupo, en retratos de sus amos, en solitario, muestran las distintas sustancias típicas de los papeles desempeñados y las caras mismas de los acompañantes permanentes de sus dueños. Son personajes que se perfilan en los lienzos de tantos pintores españoles: tristes o alegres, preocupados o juguetones, risueños o sobrios, ricamente vestidos y pintados de tal forma que exhiban sus rarezas o sus funciones.

Tal vez, en los cuadros de Francisco de Goya y Lucientes y Pablo Picasso, que extraen la savia de las obras maestras velazqueñas, se observe más la tristeza del cómico, del arlequín o del actor de circo, aquel que deleita al público e interpreta sus roles, pero que vive sus momentos difíciles en una profunda tristeza, ensimismándose, en la postura moderna del ser humano solo rodeado por los demás y aislado. Es el destino del actor cómico inmerso en la más profunda melancolía cuando no actúa delante de su público, es el destino del cómico que tiene que ocultar delante del público sus dolores y hacerlo reír.

De los cuadros de todas las épocas se desprenden los héroes y actores cómicos que nos miran y nos invitan a reflexionar sobre las dos vertientes de los sentimientos humanos en antítesis: la alegría y la tristeza, pero igualmente sobre sus actuaciones y sobre nuestros propios actos.

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## **FRENCH INFLUENCES, ECHOES AND PRESENCES IN OSCAR WILDE'S THEATER**

**Ruxandra HERA\***

***Abstract:** The present article considers the French influence in the work of Oscar Wilde, starting from the comparative study of the recurrences between him and other previous and contemporary French playwrights. In this way, direct links between two or more works will be identified, highlighting similar elements. It stands out in the composition of his dramatic works, the inspiration of Wilde in Taking over the French methods in the theme of the pieces, as well as in the composition methodology brought by Scribe. Adaptations of characters and similar situations in other plays and the inclusion of Wilde's own variants and personal aesthetics. The naturalness of the dialogue and lines used by his characters and the reproduction of the most pressing problems of the moment.*

***Keywords:** influence, French dramaturgy, dandy, Wildean*

### **Biography and artistic aspects**

Paris played an essential role in the life of Oscar Wilde, being raised by a nanny of French origin, cultivating a Parisian atmosphere. The first visit to France, as an accomplished artist, is in 1882. The honeymoon, in 1884, being married to Constance Loyd, spending it in Paris demonstrating the fluency and naturalness of using the French language like a native French. He was, according to his words: French by sympathy, Irish by birth and condemned to speak Shakespeare's language, proclaiming that for him there are only two languages in the world: French and Greek. He returns after being imprisoned for homosexuality, frequenting salons and literary cafes, giving him a sense of peace and freedom. In 1900, Oscar Wilde ends his biographical journey with his exile in Dieppe, Berneval-sur-mer and dies in Paris, being buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery.

Despite the tragic end, he spent memorable moments in Paris with French friends, developing his literary skills and writing in French, the play *Salomea* (1896), being representative of his connections, influences and links with France. Andre Gide and Emile Zola remember the admirable French he spoke and together they created certain literary confluences that lead to new ideas, overcoming taboos and social prejudices, French being proclaimed the lingua franca for the educated society.

Ignoring the literary origins and isolating the author from the dramatic period would be risky precisely because an analysis of the departure time of the work makes sense, transcending the author's writing process. Influence and subversion meet in a unitary whole, in a complementary binomial, without excluding each other since both represent the author's attempts to create the artistic form.

In this sense, it is believed that the boulevard theater, due to its marginality to official theaters, scenes of the classic bourgeois canon and above all, as it is a theater of extremes oscillating between tear gas and comic sublimation, for its success among the most popular strata social, serves as an accurate x-ray of the changing society and acts as a descriptor of the literary and social history of the era. Precisely this indissolubility

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between audience, author and performance, serves as the scenic and compositional basis for Wildean society comedies.

These moments reverberate openly in his work and fiction, being treated in relation to each other, anticipating the vital French connections and similarities in Wilde's work.

Academic criticism studies review the presence of French playwrights in Irish dramatic, poetic, narrative and essay works. Names such as Sardou or Scribe and boulevard theater titles such as Alexandre Dumas Fils in his work *Francillon*, are recurrent in the elaborated comparative analysis and clearly discernible connections and differences between the French and English plays.

Looking from these perspectives of theoretical and biographical approach, the study will focus on the main axes, common traces in the French operas and social comedies of Oscar Wilde.

### **The revival of French dramaturgy**

The boulevard theater takes its name from its geographical location located on the outskirts of Paris in contrast to the center of the Comédie Française, the main rooms are crowded, they reduced the theaters to a number of eight. But in addition to its topographical location, the boulevard theater defines some authors and works that transcend the spatiality that gives them their name. The boulevard is a homogeneous space, originating from the Napoleonic censorship that favored the classical theater and which, consequently, forced the authors to present their new plays in unofficial rooms, grouped and well located, in order to facilitate their institutional control.

### **Melodrama**

The British critic characterized the genre as an "illogical tragedy", causes and effects being blown out of proportion, where the hero or heroine are playthings of special providences.<sup>1</sup>

Melodrama and vaudeville represent the most popular genre in French theater in the 19th century defined by the supposed lack of literary content, and the excessive use of the sensational with Manichean essences, with simple characters and less complex plots, the essence and success consisting in the visual transmission through simply show that Gautier was referring to and the interaction of the actors on stage with the audience. Based on strictly literary parameters, melodrama has been described as a "minor" genre

Melodrama, a term born in Italy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, being a sung drama. In France, melodrama appears in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the conflicts between Italian and French musicians.<sup>2</sup>

In the 19th century, they were defined as silent or dialogic pantomime and action drama. Pixérécourt, in 1802, was designated the father of melodrama and later, in 1835, the French Academy officially defined it in the pejorative sense as a hybrid genre, originating from the sentimentalist drama of the 18th century - aimed at a working public with problems derived from political feelings from the French revolution with a

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<sup>1</sup> Archer W., *About the theatre. Essays and studies*, T Fisher Unwin, Londra, 1886, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Thomasseau, J-M, *Commerce et commerçants dans la littérature: actes du Colloque international organisé par le Département Techniques de Commercialisation de l'IUT "A", Université de Bordeaux I (25-26 septembre 1986)*. Presses Univ de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 1988, p. 118.

mixture of drama and lyrics to music where the spoken words are prepared and announced by the musical phrase.

British theater in the 19th century cannot be studied without paying close attention to the French dramatists Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) and his disciple and successor, Victorien Sardou (1831-1908), an obligatory reference and the detailed analysis of Zeinab Mohamed Raafat who he said that all the English dramatists of the century took over French models of drama either through translation and adaptation or by borrowing and processing French material.<sup>1</sup>

The overall scheme called later *la pièce bien faite* used by Eugène Scribe refers to a play in which the development of action, intrigue and suspense is characterized by an inevitable cause and effect.

The journalist and novelist Jerome K Jerome, noted for the timeless comic novel, *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), wrote in his satirical essay about the stagnation of dramatic forms in Great Britain characterized by dramaturgy stereotypes reiterating the hero, the heroine, the villain, the old man, the lawyer and significantly identifies the presence of the adventurer archetype recognized in Wilde's characters, born from her French origin and previously called "fallen woman", "woman with a past".<sup>2</sup>

#### **Oscar Wilde's work - French influences.**

"Anything for a change"<sup>3</sup> - Arthur Bingham Walkey concluded briefly in his article in *The Speaker*, on February 27, 1892, a week after the premiere of the film *Lady Windemere's Fan* in London, highlighting the visible influences of the French theater, a repeated remark in satirical reviews and caricatures portraying Oscar Wilde with his elbow resting on a pedestal on which 3 volumes were placed – *Le Supplice d'un femme*, *Odette*, and *Francillon* in contrast to the dethroned bust of Shakespeare suggesting the importance of French authors, Eugene Scribe, Alexandre Dumas Fils, Jules Lemaître<sup>4</sup>.

The result of the assimilation of French plots and motifs, of well-made plays starting from the movement of Eugene Scribe and Sardou, and the vaudevilles and farces of Eugene Labishe represent the French model to follow and the veneration of French dramatists in British works recognized by Wilde<sup>5</sup>. Family conspiracies, the recreation of French sources, the unfaithful husband, the evolution of the adventurer archetype, the representation of the "mother non-mother" model of Mrs. Erlynne, through which Wilde captures a new face of society, lead to the pure individualism of the female dandy and the regeneration of a corrupt society. According to the words of Robert Macfarnale<sup>6</sup> - the reiteration of French models in Oscar Wilde's work was "intrinsic, not hostile, to creativity", as Wilde states that pure originality is found rather in the use of models than in their rejection.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raafat, Z. M., *The influence of Scribe and Sardou upon English dramatists in the 19th century with special reference to Pinero, Jones, and Wilde*. Diss. University of London, London, 1970, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Eltis, S., *The Fallen Woman on Stage: Miadens, Magdalens and the Emancipated Female ed. The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 2003

<sup>3</sup> Walkey A.B., *The Speaker*, 27 February 1892, vol.V., pp. 257-258

<sup>4</sup> Mullin D., *Victorian plays. A record of Significant Production on the London Stage, 1837-1901*, New York, London, Greenwood Press, 1987

<sup>5</sup> Ellemann R., *Wilde Oscar*, Penguin, London, 1987, p. 335

<sup>6</sup> Macfarnale, R., *Original Copy, Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth Century Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 169

<sup>7</sup> Wilde O., *Selected Journalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 114

### **L'Etrangère by Alexandre Dumas Son – “the new woman”**

Characterized as “fallen women”, who receive a simple nickname such as l'étrangère, the foreigner in origin embodies the archetype of the new woman<sup>1</sup> in the Alexandre Dumas Fils “L'Etrangère” plays, connecting the aesthetic and moral ideas of the Wildean dandy in the form of Madame Erlynne in “Mrs. Windemere’s fan” or Mrs. Cheveley in “An Ideal Husband” appearing and described directly by witnesses of her past and present. It has to be talked about, to be seen because the speech and the physical appearance were discussed in society. The past and the present are the starting line and foreshadow his identity.

She departs from the traditional feminine standard that obliges women to be an appendage for their husbands, attesting to their autonomy and creating rebellious and resistant women.

### **Francillon, by Dumas the Son; or about gender equality**

Lady Windermere in “Lady Windemere’s Fan”, viewed as devoid of guile as Walkey states, similar to Dumas’s Francillon, believes in a law of equal fidelity for both husband and wife. Labische’s vedevill titled Si jamais je te pince - bring to light the feminine utopia of marriage and the contempt suffered when they separate.

The “useful” theater of Dumas the son - Francillon has structures similar to Wilde’s works being perceived as another French influence in the drama of the Wilde characters when the female character runs away from home into the arms of another man when she is deceived. Pocainat the final seen as a leitmotif in the plays staged by Dumas the son, as well as in the works of Meilhac and Halévy in FrouFrou, a woman perceived as “unsteady” and “weak”.<sup>2</sup>

In an interview entitled “A discussion with Mr. Wilde”, the playwright stated that there have been too many plays lately that deal monstrously with the injustice of the current social code of morality. “It’s really a burning shame that there should be one law for men and another for women. I think there shouldn’t be a law for anyone.”<sup>3</sup> Catherine approves of equal opportunities in couples, as does Margaret Windermere. The presence of adventurers in a married couple is associated with failure, public opinion affecting the couple’s stability

Wilde creates female characters that come out of the Victorian patterns with the morals of individualism, with rebellious streaks, Wilde himself proposing Art as the supreme manifestation of human individualism, with aesthetic concerns as in the case of Mrs. Eryne<sup>4</sup> (“I never admitted that I was more than twenty and nine, at most thirty that show the split shown by Keats in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”).

Art and morality are dissociated “what consoles someone nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite overdue”<sup>5</sup>. Considering the final laugh and the attitude with which Mrs. Erlyne leaves the stage as a form of superior intelligence, she is considered a true Demi-mondaine until the end.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stein J., „*The new Woman in the decadent Dandy*”, the Dalhousie Review, vol. 55, no 1, Spring 1975, pp. 54-62

<sup>2</sup> Coste, C., “Le français macaronique dans le théâtre de la Belle Époque.” *Altérations, créations dans la langue : les langages dépravés* (2001), pp. 271-283.

<sup>3</sup> Mason S., *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*, London, T. Werner and Laurie, 1914, p. 440.

<sup>4</sup> Wilde O., *Selected Journalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 897.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 407

<sup>6</sup> Walkey A.B., *The Speaker*, 27 February 1892, vol. V, p. 123



The presence of dialogue for the configuration and exposition of theoretical explanations becomes inevitable by emphasizing subjectivism, with the constant flow of questions and answers diluting the positional objectivity characteristic of traditional academic criticism, revealing or hiding every fantasy or retaliated for any mood, showing itself as a true sculptor of characters and archetypes.

#### **An insignificant woman - the mother-child relationship**

The children, led by destiny towards their parents, bearing the burden of their parents' mistakes made the father or mother unable to be separated from their fruit, although attempts to erase the memories related to their existence complicate the plot, Wilde modeling his work according to the classical and conventional structure of the melodrama that opened the curtain of the first quarter of the century, thus fueling the desire of the general public.

In this way, Georges, from Al Dumas' play *Le Fils de L'Émigré*, presents the proposal to be secretary to the Marquis Edouard de Bray who had dishonored his mother years ago, just as he did to Gerald in *A Woman of No Importance*, accepts the position of secretary offered by Lord Illingworth, not knowing the identity of the parties, which according to public morality should not have been separated.

French influences can also be found in the doctrine of "pure individualism", reflecting undesirable popular values in the protective behavior of the mother as in the protective character of Mrs. Erlynne as well as in the behavior of Lord Illingworth.

#### **An ideal husband. The Wildean Dandy**

Similar approaches to the themes related to the idolized husband aspiring to perfection who ends up falling into disgrace in the situation of double standards. Although I do not feel direct influences from French plays, Wilde continues to surprise by polishing his own style, choosing to replace the basis of his comedy from French plays with extracts from the contemporary era, which represents a step forward.

Wilde plays with everything, with the spiritual, with philosophy, with drama, with actors, with the public, with the theater, creating Wilde characters that will in turn influence the literary space of Hankin, Maugham and Coward, ensuring models capable of change, shiny characters from upper classes, not middle classes, emphasizing differences in private and public behavior.

Wilde disrupts the public's expectations by emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation, wondering if they can be redeemed, characters who hold political power, choosing known plots but modified and personalized attracting the public's attention.

The playwright puts an end to dual situations relevant to the public thirsty for dishonorable appearances. The infidelity is revealed earlier, avoiding or not scenes of jealousy and revenge or ultimately the man's ignorance regarding his wife's deeds.

#### **Salome**

French is the language of the theater, reflecting the subtleties of worldly life easily conveyed using French. In "The French Play at London", the essayist and novelist Matthew Arnold analyzes the differences between English and French as a way of dramatic expression. Max Beerbohm Tree praises the French language on stage<sup>1</sup>: how quickly, how gracefully you can say exactly what you want to say to your interlocutor,

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<sup>1</sup> Hart- Davis R., *Comedy in French and in English, Max Beerbohm, Around theatres*. 1953, p. 217

conveying not only signature contents but also tones and moods that the abrupt English language could not reflect.

Wilde writes the play *Salomé* in French, where the sources are obvious as Robert Ross, friend and literary critic of Oscar Wilde's works said: especially Flaubert and Maeterlinck<sup>1</sup>. *Salomé* is a relatively minor biblical figure inspired the story "Hérodiade" from Gustave Flaubert's *Trois Contes* and his novel *Salammbô*, as well as Stéphane Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*.<sup>2</sup>

In *Salomé*, Wilde complained about the docility of the biblical Salome, heaping visions and dreams at her feet, turning her into the cardinal flower of the garden of debauchery.<sup>3</sup>

Wilde idealizes and builds a France that exists explicitly and implicitly in his works, not imitating it and writing himself in the play *Salomé*. *Salomé* is French not only in language, but also in origin and content.

### Conclusions

The classic scenes, the dramatic alternation through the juxtaposition of comic and tragic scenes, the division into acts corresponding to each well-defined symbolic scenario lead to the thought of French influences from melodrama and then from Scribe's well-made work highlighted in Wilde's works such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *An unimportant woman*.

The works of Scribe and Sardou attest to the success in Great Britain, and Wilde could not miss the numerous representations of the two masters of the boulevard theater who would later inspire the works of Augier, Dumas the Son in France and Arthur Wing Pinero and Sir Arthur Jones in Great Britain evolving towards character comedy, which is the origin of vaudeville as its own successful genre, differentiated from comedy, whose top representatives are Labiche and Feydeau.

The highlighting of these important aspects of the English theater lead to a more detailed understanding of Oscar Wilde's works as a forerunner of modernity in the theater of the 20th century.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmadgoli, K., Small I., *The Creative Editor: Robert Ross, Oscar Wilde and the Collected Works*. in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 51.2 (2008), p.142

<sup>2</sup> Dierkes-Thrun, P., *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression*. University of Michigan Press, 2011, p. 76

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

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**IL CINEMA BELLICO TRA IL RISIO E IL COMICO IN  
“LA VITA È BELLA” DI R. BENIGNI (1997) E “HASSAN TERRO”  
DI M. LAKHDAR HAMINA (1968)**

**Souad KHELOUIATI\***

**Abstract:** *Laughter and comedy through war cinema in “La vita è bella” by R. Benigni (1997) and “Hassan Terro” by M. Lakhdar Hamina (1968). La vita è bella and Hassan Terro, are war films, which take place between tears and laughter. Both films are inspiring, moving and engaging, counted as masterpieces of cinema. La vita è bella: It takes place between 1939 and 1945, when the Second World War ends, but it is not a story about fascism or, Nazism or their decadences. It is the human story of Guido, Dora and their son Giosuè, of a family desperately trying to survive in the midst of extermination, emphasizing the desire to still be happy despite the monstrosities that surrounded them. Hassan Terro: While he tries by all means to stay out of the bloody upheavals caused by the battle of Algiers, he is an honest and naive family man, accepts to offer, without knowing it, hospitality to a Maquisard actively sought by the French army. A series of events and misunderstandings quickly catapulted him to the front of the stage, presenting him under the pseudonym of “Hassan Terro”, a great fictional terrorist who would have sworn the loss of the French army, according to Le Maghreb des films, 2014. How did the two comedians make viewers laugh on tragic subjects like war? And what is the phenomenon that makes him act to become emotionally involved in the scene that amuses them? If laughter as a human behaviour arises in social life, it can be assumed that it meets certain needs of life. To shed light on the reason that makes us laugh, it is not enough to indicate when we laugh: we must also reflect on what we are laughing at which is, for Bergson, everything in which the imagination sees a kind of mechanization of life.*

**Keywords:** *war, laugh, cinema*

**Premessa**

*La vita è bella e Hassan Terro*, film di guerra, che si svolgono tra lacrime e risate. Entrambi film ispirati, commoventi e coinvolgenti, considerati, anche capolavori, del cinema italiano e algerino.

*La vita è bella*: Si svolge tra il 1939 e il 1945, quando finisce la seconda guerra mondiale, ma non è una storia né sul fascismo, né sul nazismo o sulle loro decadenze. È la storia umana di Guido, Dora e del loro figlio Giosuè, di una famiglia che cerca disperatamente di sopravvivere in mezzo allo sterminio, rilevando il desiderio di essere ancora felice nonostante le mostruosità che li circondano.

*Hassan Terro*: Hassan è un onesto e ingenuo padre di famiglia, mentre cerca in tutti i modi di tenersi fuori dai sanguinosi sconvolgimenti causati dalla battaglia di Algeri (1957), accetta di offrire, senza saperlo, ospitalità a un partigiano ricercato attivamente dall'esercito francese. Una serie di eventi e incomprensioni, lo catapultarono rapidamente davanti ai fatti, presentandolo sotto lo pseudonimo di *Hassan Terro*, un grande terrorista fittizio, che avrebbe giurato la perdita dell'esercito francese. (Le Maghreb des films, 2014).

In che modo i due attori sono riusciti a suscitare le risate degli spettatori su temi tragici e mostruosi come la guerra? E qual è il fenomeno che lo fa agire per coinvolgersi emotivamente nella scena che li diverte? Se la risata come comportamento umano sorge nella vita sociale, si può presumere che soddisfi determinati bisogni della vita. Per far luce sul motivo che ci fa ridere, non basterebbe indicare quando ridiamo:

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bisognerebbe anche riflettere su ciò di cui si ride che, per Bergson, è tutto ciò in cui l'immaginazione vede una sorta di meccanizzazione della vita. L'obiettivo che questo articolo intende mettere a fuoco è, invece, lo studio del trinomio riso-guerra-cinema con gli strumenti della ricerca scientifica, secondo una prospettiva fortemente multidisciplinare, vista la pluralità di approcci che tale accostamento consente. Già di per sé, infatti, il riso, il cinema e la guerra costituiscono fenomeni trasversali alle scienze umane e sociali. Indagarle insieme apre ulteriori piste e interpretazioni, che riteniamo irriducibili a un esclusivo campo del sapere, almeno che non si voglia correre il rischio di semplificare la complessità dei termini in questione.

### **1. Ridere non è semplice! Il ridere e Comicità**

Il riso tutte le volte "*non ci viene alle labbra*", Pirandello, (1992: 120), c'è qualcosa che lo trattiene. Che cos'è il riso? Per analizzare i due film è anzitutto importante capire i concetti. Dare una breve introduzione ai temi del riso e del comico possa offrire le basi teoriche per meglio comprendere lo sviluppo successivo di questo articolo.

Rido...dunque sono. Secondo Porfirio (2004: 85-86), discepolo di Plotino, è la capacità di ridere, propria dell'uomo, che lo distingue dagli altri animali. Nell'antichità il riso è prerogativa degli dei, che ridono degli uomini, i quali, quando ridono, partecipano del divino.

Secondo F. Rabelais in, *Gargantua e Pantagruelle*, (1993: 5), nel Medioevo il riso è diabolico, perché disfigura il volto, è pericoloso, perché cancella la paura, destabilizza l'ordine costituito. Il riso è, infatti, critica, ironia, decostruzione. Ridere significa trascendere la realtà.

In effetti, i contributi, più espressivi, furono dati da Henri Bergson e Sigmund Freud: essi hanno rintracciato le basi della comicità nell'intelligenza e nell'arguzia. Anche un letterato come Luigi Pirandello, però, si è dedicato all'analisi dell'umorismo, raggiungendo talvolta conclusioni molto interessanti.

Le riflessioni di Bergson sulla natura della comicità sono racchiuse nel breve libro intitolato, *Il riso, saggio sul significato del comico*, (1900). Bergson parte innanzitutto da una constatazione di natura generale: se il riso è un gesto che appartiene al comportamento umano, allora deve essere lecito domandarsi qual è il fine che lo muove. Ora, per comprendere, il fine cui, mira un comportamento si deve in primo luogo far luce sulle occasioni in cui accade. Per Bergson vi sono almeno tre punti che debbono essere a questo proposito sottolineati:

1. Secondo Bergson, si può ridere anche di un cappello o di un burattino di legno, "*Non vi è nulla di comico al di fuori di ciò che è propriamente umano*" (1991: 4).

2. "*il comico esige dunque, per produrre tutto il suo effetto, qualcosa come un'anestesia momentanea del cuore*" (Bergson, *op. cit.*: 6). Perché il riso possa scaturire è necessario che chi ride non si lasci coinvolgere emotivamente dalla scena che lo diverte e porci come semplici spettatori.

3. "*Il riso cela sempre un pensiero nascosto di intesa, direi quasi di complicità, con altre persone che ridono, reali o immaginarie che siano*" (Bergson, *op. cit.*: 6).

L'elemento che accomuna queste tre osservazioni generali è che il riso sembra essere strettamente connesso con la vita sociale dell'uomo, con il suo essere un animale sociale. Possiamo allora far convergere i tre punti, in un'unica tesi: "*Il 'comico' nasce quando uomini riuniti in un gruppo dirigono l'attenzione su uno di loro, facendo tacere la loro sensibilità, ed esercitando solo la loro intelligenza*" (Bergson, *op. cit.*: p. 6). E se le cose stanno così, se il riso come comportamento umano sorge nella vita associata,

allora si può supporre che esso risponda a determinate esigenze della vita sociale. Per far luce sul motivo che ci spinge a ridere non basta indicare quando ridiamo: occorre riflettere anche su ciò di cui ridiamo che è, per Bergson, tutto ciò in cui l'immaginazione scorge una sorta di meccanicizzazione della vita.

## 2. *La vita è bella* (R. Benigni): Riso e comicità



### 2.1. Sinopsi

*La vita è bella*, è un film del 1997 diretto e interpretato da Roberto Benigni. La pellicola vede protagonista Guido Orefice, uomo ebreo romantico nell'Italia di Mussolini, raggiunge Arezzo, nel 1939. Assunto come cameriere al Grand Hotel sposa Dora. Dal loro amore e della propaganda antisemita, nasce Giosuè. Cinque anni dopo la situazione precipita e Guido e Giosuè vengono deportati. L'uso cinematografico della comicità, assolve qui, a due compiti: caricare gli spettatori per affrontare l'orrore raccontato dalle vittime dell'olocausto e, allo stesso tempo, accentuare, la drammaticità di ciò che accadrà dopo. Guido oppone instancabilmente la forza del sogno all'incubo troppo reale dei campi di concentramento. Unicamente, l'innocenza e la spensieratezza di Giosuè che Guido vuole preservare e per farlo, s'inventa una volta rinchiusi nel campo, uno straordinario gioco a punti facendo credere al figlio che tutto ciò che vedono fa parte di un grande gioco collettivo.

### 2.2 Analisi del personaggio Guido

Guido, in questo film ci da la possibilità di ridere del busto di Mussolini, del manifesto della Razza, degli uomini e delle donne del fascismo attraverso le peripezie di un padre coraggioso che non insegna ma accompagna lungo sentieri di scoperta. L'idea di Guido è di usare il sorriso per preservare un bambino dagli effetti devastanti, per il fisico e per la psiche, della vita in un contesto ostile e orribile, in modo che, in futuro, possa continuare a pensare che la vita è bella. Così che spiega Guido a suo figlio il problema della supremazia della razza nazista rispetto agli altri razzi. Infatti, ridicolizzando e minimizzando l'ostilità, e questo che ci fa ridere gli spettatori:

[...] Eh, loro gli ebrei e i cani non ce li vogliono. Eh, ognuno fa quello che gli pare Giosuè, eh. [...]

Giosuè: Ma noi in libreria facciamo entrare tutti.

Guido: No, da domani ce lo scriviamo anche noi, guarda! Chi ti è antipatico a te?

Giosuè: I ragni. E a te?

Guido: A me... i visigoti! E da domani ce lo scriviamo: "Vietato l'ingresso ai ragni e ai visigoti". Oh! E mi hanno rotto le scatole 'sti visigoti, basta eh!  
(Sequenza presa dal film, *la vita è bella*, 1997)

Come si comporterebbe allora Guido, protagonista del film, un funambolo allegro e generoso in faccia all'orrore indicibile dei campi nazisti? L'orrore, dei campi nazisti, è talmente mostruoso e incomprensibile che a Guido non risulti impossibile occultarlo, né tanto meno farlo sembrare finto. Un passaggio del film, in cui Guido, prova un'altra volta a ridicolizzare i nazisti:

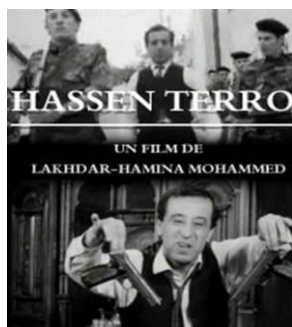
Soldato [in tedesco]: Attenzione! Attenzione! Silenzio! C'è un italiano che sa il tedesco qui?  
Guido [a Bartolomeo]: Che ha detto?  
Bartolomeo: Cercano uno che parla tedesco, spiega tutte le regole del campo.  
[Guido alza la mano] Che sai il tedesco?  
Guido: No.  
Soldato [in tedesco]: Ascoltatevi tutti; lo dico soltanto una volta.  
Guido: Comincia il gioco, chi c'è c'è, chi non c'è non c'è.  
Soldato [in tedesco]: Siete stati portati in questo campo per un motivo...  
Guido: Si vince a 1000 punti. Il primo classificato vince un carro armato vero.  
[...]  
Guido: Ogni giorno vi daremo la classifica generale da quell'altoparlante là.  
All'ultimo classificato verrà attaccato un cartello con su scritto "asino", qui sulla schiena.  
Soldato [in tedesco]: Avete l'onore di lavorare per la nostra grande madrepatria e di partecipare alla costruzione del grande Impero Tedesco.  
Guido: Noi facciamo la parte di quelli cattivi che urlano, chi ha paura perde punti.  
Soldato [in tedesco]: Non dovete scordare mai tre regole generali: 1) Non provate a scappare; 2) Seguite ogni comando senza fare domande; 3) Ognuno che protesta vien impiccato. È chiaro?  
Guido: In tre casi si perdono tutti i punti, li perdono: 1) Quelli che si mettono a piangere; 2) Quelli che vogliono vedere la mamma; 3) Quelli che hanno fame e vogliono la merendina, scordatevela!  
Soldato [in tedesco]: Dovreste essere contenti di lavorare qui. Non succederà niente a quelli che rispettano le regole.  
Guido: È molto facile perdere punti per la fame. Io stesso ieri ho perso 40 punti perché volevo a tutti i costi un panino con la marmellata.... [...]. (Sequenza presa dal film, *la vita è bella*, 1997).

In scena tanto immaginata, quanto reale, in cui, tutto sembra troppo assurdo perché sia vero. Giosuè non fatica a credere alle parole del padre. La realtà, in questo caso, è capace di superare la più fervida delle fantasie ed è così che si ride: si ride perché, se non fosse vera, sarebbe talmente incredibile da risultare addirittura divertente. E tuttavia, se non ci si ferma a questa constatazione in sé ovvia, si deve ammettere che in questi casi il rimando a ciò che è umano gioca un ruolo: di un cappello ridiamo perché vi vediamo espresso un qualche capriccio estetico dell'uomo, così come nella marionetta l'immaginazione vede i gesti impacciati di un uomo sgraziato (Bergson, 1900). Perché il riso possa scaturire, è necessario che chi rida non si lasci coinvolgere emotivamente dalla scena che lo diverte. Per ridere di una piccola disgrazia altrui dobbiamo far tacere per un attimo la pietà, la simpatia, l'empatia, l'identificazione con

la persona oggetto del riso, e rimanere spettatori o, per esprimerci come Bergson, come intelligenze pure. È il caso, infatti, del film *La vita è bella*, lo spettatore distacca la spina dei suoi sentimenti, pietà cioè l'orrore dell'olocausto e rimane spettatore che si diverte.

*La vita è bella*, se pur in modo iperbolico, dimostra come non solo umore ed orrore possono convivere ma come il primo, se usato in modo appropriato ed intelligente, può prevalere sul secondo. Guido conferma piuttosto che la risata e l'orrore, lontani dall'escludersi, si attraggono naturalmente. Ridere salva la vita, è una reazione vitale contro il caos e la disperazione. Il comico e il tragico si incontrano e si legano indissolubilmente, anche attraverso l'uso dell'iperbole, efficace tecnica del comico, che consiste in una esagerazione della realtà sino a spingerla nell'assurdo.

### 3. Hassan Terro (M. Lakhdar Hamina): Riso e comicità



#### 3.1. Sinopsi

*Hassen Terro*, è un film bellico, algerino, diretto da *Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina*, nel 1968, e interpretato da Rouiched (Ahmed Ayad). Il film è ambientato nella Casbah di Algeri, nel 1957, durante la battaglia di Algeri, più precisamente nel periodo dello sciopero di sette giorni, decretato dal FLN (Fronte di liberazione nazionale) per mobilitare il popolo musulmano alla sua causa. Questo sciopero aveva riacceso le fiamme tra combattenti algerini e francesi, che la guerra combatteva già da due anni. Il film è stato girato in bianco e nero, anche i suoi esterni, come un documentario, questo stile ereditato, dal neorealismo italiano, e dal cinema politico e sociale.

*Hassan*, onesto e ingenuo padre di famiglia, mentre cerca in tutti i modi di tenersi fuori dai sanguinosi sconvolgimenti provocati dalla battaglia di Algeri, accetta di offrire, senza saperlo, ospitalità a un partigiano attivamente ricercato dall'esercito francese. Una serie di eventi e incomprensioni lo catapultarono rapidamente davanti al palco, presentandolo sotto lo pseudonimo di *Hassen Terro*, un grande terrorista immaginario che avrebbe giurato la perdita dell'esercito francese, secondo (Le Maghreb des films, 2014).



### 3.2 Analisi del personaggio Hassan

Gli sceneggiatori con il personaggio di Hassan, *protagonista del film*, si sono spinti anche oltre, presentando l'eroe come borghese, codardo e fifone, che non voleva assolutamente sentir parlare di guerra e violenza, più preoccupato della sua vita e del benessere di sua famiglia, che con lo spirito rivoluzionario promulgato dai suoi correligionari, anche se era perfettamente consapevole dell'importanza della guerra di liberazione.

Hassan, dunque, è uomo impotente di fronte a una guerra in cui è necessario schierarsi. Un semplice cittadino la cui simpatia va certamente ai combattenti algerini, ma che non ha né la stoffa dell'eroe, né le capacità del combattente, e il cui rifiuto, di aiutare attivamente l'indipendenza dell'Algeria non lo classifica necessariamente tra le fila di traditori, contrariamente a quanto ci è stato fatto credere.

Hassan, nella sua perfetta condizione di padre senza storia, impreparato a imbracciare le armi, rappresenta al cento per cento l'algerino senza cultura rivoluzionaria, abituato da un colonizzatore che rifiuta ogni assimilazione a non riflettere più sulla sua condizione di oppresso, e soprattutto avere paura.

Hassan ha paura. Di tutti. Dai francesi, da quelli del FLN, la perdita del posto di lavoro per lo sciopero del 57, e tante altre cose che un'ora e mezza di film non potrebbe rivelare da sola. Un personaggio di verità assolutamente sbalorditivo, almeno nel suo ruolo di *eroe nonostante*, che in fondo non desiderava altro che trascorrere giorni sereni, circondato dalla sua famiglia. Tutti sappiamo che il riso è un'esperienza sociale: ridiamo meglio quando siamo insieme ad altri, ed il riso è spesso il fondamento che tiene unito un gruppo di persone (Bergson, 1900). Infatti, Hassan ha fatto ridere tutti gli algerini dall'inizio del film fino alla fine. Hassan ha dei dubbi. Non è sicuro. Non è certo del presente. Quando parla, è concreto, chiaro e semplice. Non fa filosofia, né poesia. Non è carnevale. È una tragedia. La tragedia della vita. Hassan lotta per la pace. Hassan è un *naïf* (nel senso di semplice e spontaneo). Hassan è l'antieroe che ha accettato la sua debolezza di non essere all'altezza dei suoi correligionari. Questa sua debolezza gli dà una grande umanità. Hassan durante tutto il film si è messo in situazioni imbarazzanti e ridicole. Per esempio, una delle prime scene del film, in cui vediamo, un rappresentante del FLN arrivare a casa di Hassan per chiedergli di ospitare, sotto falsi motivi, un combattente ricercato, è, nonostante la sua apparente futilità, essenziale per comprendere rapidamente la personalità di Hassan. Non dando all'uomo il tempo di spiegarsi, Hassan si affrettò a ficcargli in mano le banconote destinate ai fratelli d'armi, con la premura di chi non vuole essere più coinvolti nelle proprie azioni armate, pur dimostrando con un contributo finanziario la loro partecipazione allo sforzo bellico. In altre parole, Hassan vuole solo una cosa: mantenere la sua vita prima, pur mantenendo la coscienza pulita.

Messo in una situazione ridicola e imbarazzante, l'essere umano diviene un motivo di riso per i suoi simili. Ogni situazione comica è basata su questo. E per questo che tutti i miei film si basano sull'idea di crearmi dei fastidi, per darmi l'occasione di essere disperatamente serio nel mio tentativo di apparire un normalissimo piccolo gentleman. È per questo che, in qualunque situazione io mi trovi, la mia preoccupazione maggiore è sempre quella di raccogliere il bastone, di raddrizzare il mio cappello tondo e di aggiustare la cravatta, anche se sono appena caduto a testa in giù. (David Robinson, 1995: 120).

Il riso è sì un castigo sociale, risponde sì a determinate esigenze della vita sociale, ma le sue origini non appartengono alla società, ma alla vita stessa e debbono essere quindi viste sullo sfondo della lotta tra lo slancio vitale e l'inerzia della materia. Bergson viene sempre più chiaramente sostenendo che il riso sia semplicemente l'effetto di un meccanismo datoci dalla natura come una difesa immediata della vita che ci ha armato di una sorta di istintiva reazione alla comicità.

### Conclusioni

I due attori, *Guido e Hassan*, si presentano nei campi di sterminio, Guido vuole fare di tutto per evitare l'orrore per il figlio. Gli inventa una storia: è, infatti, un grande gioco d'avventura. I vincitori riceveranno in regalo il giocattolo preferito di Giosué, un carro armato. Guido trasformerà per Giosué tutti gli eventi del campo in elementi di gioco: il discorso di benvenuto delle SS diventa l'annuncio delle regole del gioco, la fonderia, il luogo dove viene realizzato il carro armato, il numero tatuato il loro numero di matricola, tutto quelli che scompaiono dalla stanza sono stati eliminati dal gioco. D'altra parte Hassan ha scelto di guidare in modo derisorio i suoi aguzzini inventando la nave d'armi nell'*El Makroud*, pasticceria tradizionale di Algeri.

Entrambi i personaggi affrontano un'angoscia e un dilemma pressanti, hanno fatto ricorso a meccanismi di difesa per reprimerli. I meccanismi di difesa sono tecniche intuitive che il cervello utilizza per disinnescare, schivare o proteggersi da situazioni difficili. L'interrogatorio di Hassen Terro e l'accogliente arringa delle SS di Guido presentano, ad esempio, un flagrante caso di meccanismo di difesa: L'umorismo. I protagonisti schivano, disinnescano e mascherano una vulnerabilità ricorrendo all'umorismo – perché, in effetti, finisce per confessarsi minimizzandole. Gli attori hanno usato l'ironia come marchio di fabbrica, attraverso i loro ruoli, nelle situazioni che affrontano.

In queste situazioni di guerra, morte e aggressione (Freud, 1998), l'umorismo, per il suo intrinseco potere di presa di distanza, svolge una funzione liberatoria poiché consente di risolvere la tensione che tali temi necessariamente provocherebbero. Sotto modo della derisione, l'umorismo rende sopportabile l'insopportabile e dà così all'individuo una superiorità che non aveva.

Si può anche dire secondo, *Hobbes, 2006; Alexander, 1986* che l'umorismo nei due film è come un mezzo per elevare lo status di un individuo abbassando quello di un altro, come lo sostiene J. Polimeni con la sua definizione. Questa definizione annuncia implicitamente una doppia funzione sociale del riso: inclusione/esclusione. Il riso, infatti, unisce il gruppo di persone che ridono, nel nostro caso gli spettatori, che insieme godono di un piacere comune, ma questo piacere si basa sull'esclusione di un individuo e/o di un gruppo, cioè i nazisti e i coloni francesi, che non condividono gli stessi riferimenti e quindi non possono apprezzare questo umorismo.

Possiamo concludere che l'umorismo è uno dei 31 meccanismi di difesa (o stili di coping) elencati dal DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1995: 875) come “*processi psicologici automatici che proteggono l'individuo dall'ansia o dalla percezione di pericoli interni o esterni o fattori di stress.*” Una risata creativa e salvatrice che i due film hanno quindi esasperato, non solo per allontanare la realtà ma anche per criticarla.

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