



the language of the grotesque  
le langage du grotesque  
el lenguaje de lo grotesco  
die sprache des grotesken

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**2-1997**

## **interlitteraria**

*Tartu Ülikooli maailmakirjanduse õppetooli ja Eesti Võrdleva Kirjandusteaduse Assotsiatsiooni aastakiri.*

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Toimetuskolleegium/Editorial Board:

*Jüri Talvet (toimetaja/editor), Kerttu Metsar-Parhomenko, Tiina Aunin (abitoimetajad/assistant editors), Kersti Unt, Reet Sool, Marina Grišakova*

Address/Address:

*INTERLITTERARIA, Tartu Ülikool, maailmakirjanduse õppetool, EE2400 Tartu, Estonia  
tel./fax: +372 7 441 542 (until Aug. 31, 1997); +372 7 465 350 (from Sept. 1, 1997),  
e-mail: talvet@admin.ut.ee*

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tel.: +372 7 430 061, 430 851, fax: +372 7 430 061, e-mail: tyk@psych.ut.ee*

Kujundaja/Designer:

*Lemmi Koni*

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TARTU ÜLIKOOLI  
KIRJASTUS

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## Introductory Note

The preparation of the manuscript of *Interlitteraria 2* sadly coincided with the death of Pent Nurmekund, the most celebrated polyglot of Estonia. During his long lifespan (1906–1996) he managed to learn to speak nearly all major languages of the world, both Occidental and Oriental (including Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Japanese, etc.). On the eve of his 90th birthday (and, more sadly, scarcely two weeks before his death) he could see published his first book of poems, written in the language of his South Estonian birthplace. Although he was not, literally, a “literary man”, he was one of these great personalities who in the dull closure of the Soviet years silently prepared Estonia’s openness and dialogue with other cultures and nations. He was also a man of good humour who liked to tell his numerous students at Tartu University jokes and laugh with them at the grotesques the Soviet reality abundantly provided.

To give an example, at the beginning of the 60s, coinciding with the much claimed “eternal friendship” between the USSR and the Peoples Republic of China, an important official Chinese delegation visited Estonia. As one of the few speakers of Chinese in Estonia, Pent Nurmekund was asked to go to the capital Tallinn, to do the job of the interpreter. However, as an intellectual of “bourgeois background”, he was not considered worthy of standing by the Communist Party bosses of Estonia and the Chinese guests but was asked to take his place in the watching crowd, at some distance, and was only from time to time asked to approach the official circle to interpret. The Chinese guests were visibly puzzled: while the Estonian CP bosses could not speak Chinese, a peasant-looking man — Pent Nurmekund used to wear a sheepskin coat in winter — emerged from a crowd of natives, speaking fluent Chinese!

This is how the grotesque appears — a carnivalesque intrusion of laughter (and life) breaking official norms and ridiculing an artificially built society and its ideology.

We would like, thus, *Interlitteraria 2* to become a homage to the memory of Pent Nurmekund, the man who made Estonia more open and contributed worthily to Estonia's *interlitteraria*.

Most of the texts in *Interlitteraria 2* have emerged as the harvest of the 1st International Conference of the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature, "The Language of the Grotesque", held in Tartu between April 1 and 4, 1996. The idea of such a conference was first suggested by the anniversaries of some of the great masters of the literary grotesque (as, by way of coincidence, in 1994, 500 years of Rabelais's birth, and in 1995, 350 and 250 years, respectively, of Quevedo's and Swift's death lapsed).

However, life inevitably introduced its amendments to the initial project. The outcome was a lively polylogical conference in the vein of the grotesque itself: without any subject limitations, intended to cast light on the complex phenomenon both from the theoretical and practical point of view, from the ancient times to our postmodern *fin-de-siècle*. In addition to the papers of the conference, *Interlitteraria 2* includes some other valuable contributions, like by the German scholars Felix Karlinger and Dorothea Scholl, the Italian Alessandro Baldi, the Colombian Alvaro Ramírez-Ospina and the Estonian Rein Tootmaa.

*Interlitteraria 2*, thus, has turned into a happy polylogue of several generations of scholars: along with merited academicians we hear young "postmodern" voices. Sometimes they contradict each other, but there are also surprising coincidences, making possible a fertile dialogue.

In the theoretical preamble, the merited Russian aesthetician Yuri Borev summarizes his long experience in dealing with the grotesque: in his view, the grotesque in art and literature, whatever its ambiguities, is always "laughter over chaos in the name of harmony". The young German scholar Dorothea Scholl presents a systematic and highly illustrative panorama of how the grotesque has been interpreted since the notion came into existence. Like the Swede Ingemar Haag, she reminds us of the penetrating (and nowadays unjustly forgotten) philosophy of the grotesque emerging already in German romantics, especially in the work of Friedrich Schlegel. Then she goes on to expound Wolfgang Kayser's and Mikhail Bakhtin's influential theories, concentrated respectively on the alienation and the carnivalesque in the

grotesque. She refers also to the importance of the grotesque in intercultural dynamics (as accentuated by the Lithuanian Jurgis Baltrušaitis) and in the theatre of the absurd. The grotesque, in her view, is always in the vanguard of modernity, or, as she concludes, it is “an interminable principle of negative dialectics”. Ingemar Haag, on his part, analyzes the complicated relationship between the sublime and the grotesque, and tends to interpret the latter as “the ultimate failure of a language unable to depict the infiniteness of the world” or, in other words, a failure to attain the sublime.

As Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque and the grotesque has engendered dense polemics and repercussion throughout the postmodern era, in my own article I make an attempt to illuminate some of the aspects of the often overlooked “border situation” in which the great Russian scholar wrote his work. Inspired by the late writing of Yuri Lotman about the “border” and “explosion” in the “semiosphere”, I suggest that the grotesque is essentially a phenomenon of (chrono)cultural “borders” and “peripheries”, being, thus, fully adaptable to our own *fin-de-siècle* “border”.

In the majority of the texts in *Interlitteraria 2* some special author, text, or a textual body centred in the grotesque has been dealt with. However, none of these close scrutinies of concrete phenomena overlook theoretical contexts. The Estonian translator of Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, Anne Lill, shows convincingly that the grotesque, already in its earliest manifestations, eluded strict aesthetic classification and contradicted the allegoric principle, mostly ascribed to Apuleius’ clever book. On the basis of a great variety of examples Ülar Ploom, the Estonian translator of Petrarch’s *Secretum*, suggests that while on the “macrotextual” (or, metatextual) level of Dante’s *Inferno* the grotesque is really overcome, on the “microtextual” level it remains essential to Dante’s great work.

A distinguished researcher of Rabelais’s work, Madelaine Lazard from France admits the general value of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque conception, but considers that Bakhtin had underestimated the type of playful laughter that reaches Rabelais from the ancient masters of satire. The young Spanish scholar Juan Carlos Pueo, on the contrary, follows Bakhtin’s ideas and is convinced that after Rabelais’s work the grotesque laughter gradually becomes narrower and withers. The intertextual relationship between



Rabelais and the great Spanish author of the grotesque, Francisco de Quevedo, is viewed in the article by the Argentine comparatist Susana G. Artal. Another Spanish professor, José María Balcells, offers a stimulating panorama of the burlesque epic in Spain, both before and after Rabelais (there are curious parallels in the sexual imagery between the anonymous Spanish *Carajicomedia* and Rabelais' oeuvre). Marina Grishakova, from the Lotman school, proves in the footsteps of Vladimir Nabokov that Cervantes' *Don Quixote* has not only fitted perfectly the baroque, the romantic and the modernist code, but is also, including its grotesque aspect, a postmodern novel par excellence.

The renowned German connoisseur of folk literature (and an old friend of Estonia) Felix Karlinger analyzes what in Kayser's terms should be "the mild grotesque" in the work of Italian authors of the *Seicento*. His observations should also prove that mannerist and popular laughter, despite their differences, could well coexist in time. How Quevedo in his grotesques reverted the neoplatonic imagery, characteristic of Renaissance poetry, is eloquently demonstrated by Angel García Galiano. M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Díaz de Alda Heikkilä, in her turn, shows the surprising abundance in Spanish poetry of the *Siglo de Oro* of grotesque and satiric use of the imagery derived from ancient myths.

Krzysztof Biliński, from Poland, and Giuseppina Restivo, from Italy, are both influenced by Yuri Lotman's ideas of structural semiotics. On the examples of Rabelais and Swift, Biliński discusses how the grotesque can be fitted to the concept of "secondary modelling systems", while Restivo proves the continuous intertwining coexistence of the symbolic and syntagmatic codes, suggested by Lotman, from the Enlightenment (Swift) to postmodernism (Vonnegut).

With the article of Tiina Aunin, *Interlitteraria* 2 moves decidedly into the 20th century. Aunin shows interesting parallels of the same animal motif in the grotesque image stretching from Poe to the Estonian master of short fiction (and one of his country's top intellectuals) Friedebert Tuglas (1886–1971) and the American J. C. Oats (whose short fiction is also known in Estonian translation). The animal or, to be more exact, the insect motif has also inspired the grotesque of the Italian contemporary of Tuglas, Tommaso Landolfi. Now his compatriot Alessandro Baldi exposes

its detailed psycho-ontology. Reijo Virtanen, from Finland, evokes the grotesque and religious satire in some of the great authors of world literature whom the postmodern public is inclined to forget: the Americans Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair, among others.

A very important facet in the grotesque is treated in the article by the Spanish professor Vicente J. Benet: its relationship with (mass) literature of horror and violence. It also concerns essentially the virtuality of the grotesque in our postmodern era. Kersti Tarien, a young Estonian researcher of the black humour phenomenon, shows, on the examples of Beckett's and Orton's plays, the intrinsic closeness between the grotesque and black humour. The article by the Estonian writer and critic Rein Tootmaa about the grotesque in the work of two of the leading Estonian writers in the 60s and 70s, Arvo Valton (b. 1935) and Vaino Vahing (b. 1940), should reveal how important the grotesque as a mental form of opposition to the totalitarian régime was and what the main types of its imagery looked like.

We are glad to include valuable contributions about the grotesque in Latin American literature and cinema. The Brazilian Julieta Haidar and the Mexican María de la Luz Sevilla González offer a varied panorama of the use of the grotesque in the 20th-century Mexican literature, including its facets of the neobaroque (Salvador Novo, whose sonnets remind us of those of Quevedo), the feminist irony (Rosario Castellanos) and the intellectual absurd (Juan José Arreola whose ingenious short fiction, by the way, has not only been published in Estonian translation but also staged on Estonian TV). Finally, the Colombian Alvaro Ramírez-Ospina proves that the carnivalesque grotesque, contrary to the opinion of some of Bakhtin's critics, has not died with the Middle Ages but lives on in the postmodern Latin American TV series.

The grotesque would not be itself had it been exhausted in *Interlitteraria* 2. The discussion and dialogue will remain open in the following *varia*-issues of *Interlitteraria*, which we have now decided to publish — abandoning our initial plans — every second year. Thus the first chance will be *Interlitteraria* 3, 1998; the manuscripts should arrive by November 30, 1997.

Jüri Talvet,  
Editor

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## The Grotesque

YURI BOREV

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Let us begin by integrating the experience of world aesthetics in defining the grotesque.

Grotesque — fantastic in form or composition, strange, quaint (*The American Heritage Dictionary* 315), ridiculous, absurd, distorted, an extravagant depiction of reality (*Modern American Dictionary* 220). The grotesque — a kind of satirical typification by which real-life correlations are transformed and verisimilitude is replaced by caricature, the fantastic, and sharp contrast (*Kratkaya Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya*). The grotesque is a deliberate distortion and disfigurement whose aim is to shock, ridicule or amuse (Gray 1994: 131). The grotesque is a satirical artistic device: the transformation of reality by means of fantasy and the association of sharply contrasting qualities which are not contingent in real life (real and imagined, terrifying and comical). People and objects take on a quality not found in real life when presented in a grotesque manner (Lesin, Pulnets 1971: 95–96).

The characteristic features of the grotesque: eccentricity, artificiality, imagery which distorts proportion. The grotesque arouses sardonic laughter. Hyperbole exaggerates that which exists in reality. The grotesque combines the existing with that which does not exist. Swift's giants represent hyperbole, the parties who argue over which end of an egg to eat first, the pointed or the round end, comprise the grotesque element (Cuddon 1987: 295–296). The grotesque can be recognized by an absurd, ridiculous appearance (*Bolshoi anglo-russkii slovar'* 1972: 612).

Karl Flögel, the first scholar to investigate the phenomenon of the grotesque, considered it to be a higher form of caricature, carried to the limits of the impossible (zur Unmöglichkeit), and a higher degree of comic contrast (Flögel 1788, 1862).

The grotesque is fantastically strange, an exaggeration of real forms sharply caricatured to the point of deformity, so that the comic is elevated to tragedy (for example in the drawings of Daumier, the etchings of Goya, the paintings of Bosch, Brueghel) (*Kratkii slovar' terminov* 1959). Hugo noted that the grotesque combines the ugly and the horrible, comedy and buffoonery (Hugo 1956: 86).

Aesthetics has produced three points of view regarding the nature of the grotesque. That is, 1) in caricature (Krause, Eberhart, Hartman); 2) in imagination and fantasy (Fischer, Kostlin); 3) in the synthesis of caricature and fantasy (Schneegans 1894: 13; *Literaturnaya Entsiklopediya* 1930).

To follow this brief survey of concepts of the grotesque in world aesthetics I shall formulate a few of my own ideas which agree with some concepts, contradict others, and make some contribution to what we already know.

Imagination is the most important instrument of the grotesque. We encounter the grotesque imagination in the horrifying graphics of Goya and the painfully hypertrophied images of Dalí.

The grotesque is created by artistic imagination. It is a source of aesthetic pleasure (joy accompanies poetic vision, as Flaubert has said) and this distinguishes it from hallucination. The grotesque is a joyful subjugation of horror, joy from horror, which arises from an aesthetic treatment of reality and from the enlightenment of depiction with reference to the ideal. The grotesque is both decoration and caricature. The grotesque is uneven exaggeration, comically deformed reality.

The universal guiding force is entropy, since every process in nature produces chaos. Life is a drop in the ocean of the universal. Life is harmony which arises in defiance of chaos. Life seems to exist in reverse time. Hegel, considering the factor of chance, once asked: how many times must you toss down the letters of the alphabet before they spell out a stanza from the "Iliad"? Can chaos engender harmony? Life itself provides the answer to this question.

Life is a grandiose harmony fortuitously and necessarily engendered by chaos.

One of the most striking grotesque images of world culture is provided by the folklore of the intelligentsia. I was told this story by Mikhail Romm.

Once he and the famous Polish film director Andrzej Wajda were given permission to view some filmed documentaries in the cinema archives. The technician loaded a reel of film at random; before the amazed Wajda and Romm rolled images of Stalin and his comrades bearing a coffin with the body of Kirov, next Stalin and his comrades bearing a coffin with the body of Gorky, then — coffins with the bodies of Ordzhonikidze, Kuibyshev, Zhdanov...

The film montage produced a grotesque image of Stalin as the bearer of death. It is of no importance that this montage occurred by chance: an unknown bureaucrat had given directions for films concerning the funerals of eminent government figures to be combined on one reel. Totalitarian reality had coincidentally and necessarily produced an effect which was both in its own likeness and yet in opposition to totalitarianism and any form of evil — the grotesque.

The grotesque is a likeness of life. It is based on the same principles as life itself. The grotesque is laughter over chaos in the name of harmony; the harmonization of chaos, whether consciously or accidentally.

Suppose the letters lie before us in form of a stanza from the "Iliad". If we cast them down again in haphazard fashion and film this process of the disintegration of harmony we have a model of that process which occurs in nature according to the law of entropy. Let us now rewind the film: now we see a picture of harmony (the stanza from the "Iliad") arising from chaos (the scattered letters). This is also a model of the life process. Life as the antithesis of nature as a whole and as a contradiction to entropy. The grotesque is similarly anti-entropic.

It is a challenge to the world. It is joy despite evil and even apropos evil, at least in the name of spiritual defeat of evil. As life is a creation of a second, organic, self-regulating from the nature, so the grotesque is a creation of a second form of existence — an imaginary artistic world of spiritual harmony.

And of course living nature exists not only despite the non-living, since non-living matter is at its origin, and not only by violating the laws of the non-living, but also by virtue of these laws. The same is true of the grotesque — it is the antipode of reality and the likeness of reality. The grotesque strives to destroy the existing world of evil and creates a new, artistic world which is similar and yet different in principle from the surrounding world. The grotesque is both destruction and creation. The destruction of deriding evil, the refinement of reality, and the creation of a world which is enlightened by the ideal and corresponds to the ideal.

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# Zur Genealogie, Phänomenologie und Theorie des Grotesken

DOROTHEA SCHOLL

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La solitude fait des gammes  
Le désert les multiplie  
arabesques indéfiniment réitérées

Signes  
non de toit, de tunique ou de palais  
non d'archives et de dictionnaire du savoir  
mais de torsion, de violence, de bousculement  
mais d'envie cinétique

Henri Michaux, *Face aux verrous*  
Paris, Gallimard, 1992, S. 17.

## **Pallagonia und Fornarina: Goethe und das Groteske**

Am Montag, den 9. April 1787, nach seiner Besichtigung des Lustschlosses des Principe di Pallagonia in der Gegend von Palermo, schreibt Goethe in sein Reisetagebuch:

Heute den ganzen Tag beschäftigte uns der Unsinn des Prinzen Pallagonia, und auch diese Torheiten waren ganz etwas anderes, als wir uns lesend und hörend vorgestellt. Denn bei der größten Wahrheitsliebe kommt derjenige, der vom Absurden Rechenschaft geben soll, immer ins Gedränge: er will einen Begriff davon überliefern, und so macht er es schon

zu etwas, da es eigentlich ein Nichts ist, welches für etwas gehalten sein will. Und so muß ich noch eine andere allgemeine Reflexion vorausschicken, daß weder das Abgeschmackteste noch das Vortrefflichste ganz unmittelbar aus einem Menschen, aus einer Zeit hervorspringe, daß man vielmehr beiden mit einiger Aufmerksamkeit eine Stammtafel der Herkunft nachweisen könne. (Goethe 1982: 242).

Es folgt die detaillierte Beschreibung des Landsitzes. Skulpturen, die "Ungeheuer von tierischer und menschlicher Gestalt" darstellen, "Mythologie mit fratzenhaften Zutaten [...], Pferd mit Menschenhänden, Pferdekopf auf Menschenkörper, [...] alle Arten von Pfoten an Figuren aller Art, Verdoppelungen, Verwechslungen der Köpfe", Dachreihen, die "mit musizierenden Affenchören und ähnlichem Wahnsinn verbrämt [sind] [...], ein Atlas, der statt der Himmelskugel ein Weinaß trägt" (ibid. 244f). Alles auf diesem Landsitz scheint darauf angelegt, daß der harmonische Gleichgewichtssinn, "das Gefühl der Wasserwaage und des Perpendikels, das uns eigentlich zu Menschen macht und der Grund aller Eurythmie ist, in uns zerrissen und gequält wird" (ibid. 245). Selbst die Möbel im Innern des Palastes sind ein Affront gegen die menschliche Würde:

Im Schlosse selbst nun, dessen Äußeres ein leidliches Innere erwarten läßt, fängt das Fieber des Prinzen wieder zu rasen an. Die Stuhlfüße sind ungleich abgesägt, so daß niemand Platz nehmen kann, und vor den sitzbaren Stühlen warnt der Kastellan, weil sie unter ihren Sammetpolstern Stacheln verbergen. (Ibid. 246)

In der Schloßkapelle, wo sich ein Kruzifix mit einem Christus befindet, in dessen Bauchnabel "ein Haken eingeschraubt" ist, der mit einer Kette verbunden ist, an welcher die Skulptur eines knienenden Mannes in betender Pose hängt, in der Goethe "ein Sinnbild" des Schloßbesitzers vermutet, "findet man den Aufschluß über den ganzen Wahnsinn, der nur in einem bigotten Geiste bis zu diesem Grad wuchern konnte" (Ibid. 246).

Ebenso wie Horaz am Anfang seiner Poetik das Groteske, ohne das Wort zu kennen, als Ausdruck der nichtigen Fieberphantasien



eines Kranken (“velut aegri somnia, vanae fingentur species”) charakterisiert (Horaz 1980: 4), deutet Goethe das Groteske auf dem Landsitz des Fürsten Pallagonia als das Absurde und beschreibt es mit Metaphern des Fiebers, des Wahnsinns und der Nichtigkeit. Goethe nennt das Schloß ein “Tollhaus”, ein “abgeschmacktes Unternehmen” (Goethe 1982: 247–248), in dem Extravaganz waltet und die reine Willkür herrscht, und das überdies unvollendet ist, “wie denn der grenzenlose Wahnsinn des Besitzers mit seinen Narrheiten nicht zu Rande kommen kann”. Daß diese “Unschöpfung” keine isolierte Erscheinung der “Pallagonischen Raserei” ist, die etwa von besonderer Originalität und Genialität zeugen würde, wird ausdrücklich betont. Das Groteske hat Vorläufer und steht in einer Tradition. Auch außerhalb des Wirkungskreises des Fürsten entdeckt Goethe Spuren des Grotesken. “Schon früher leugnete ich des Prinzen Pallagonia Originalität; er hat Vorgänger gehabt und Muster gefunden. Auf dem Wege nach Monreale stehen zwei Ungeheuer an einer Fontäne und auf dem Geländer einige Vasen, völlig, als wenn sie der Fürst bestellt hätte.” (Ibid. 268).

Goethes Einschätzung des Grotesken ist nicht *nur* negativ; er zeigt sich bei der Besichtigung des Palazzo Reale in Portici und beim Spaziergang durch die Ruinen des Palastes von Nero voller Bewunderung angesichts der “alten Herrlichkeit”, von der das *domus aurea* bruchstückhaft Zeugnis ablegt (ibid. 138). Verfolgt man in der *Italienischen Reise* die Aussagen Goethes hinsichtlich der *antiken* grotesken Ornamentik und ihrer Wiedergeburt in der Renaissance, so stellt man fest, daß Goethe diese Kunst immer mit Fröhlichkeit, Bewegung, Lebenslust, Fülle, Heiterkeit, Leichtigkeit, Anmut, Eleganz und geistreicher Spielerei in Verbindung bringt (vgl. ibid. 198, 212, 456). In seinem Aufsatz “Von Arabesken” deutet er die ornamentalen Grotesken Raffaels in den Loggien des Vatikans und in Raffaels Villa, “wo er an der Seite seiner Geliebten den Genuß des Lebens aller Kunst und allem Ruhm vorzog” (ibid. 529), als Ausdruck der freizügigen lebenssprühenden Macht der Liebe.

Am meisten im Sinne der Alten dünken mich die Arabesken in einem Zimmergen der Villa, die Raphael mit seiner Geliebten bewohnte. Hier findet

man, an den Seiten der gewölbten Decke, die Hochzeit Alexanders und Roxanens, und ein ander geheimnisvoll allegorisches Bild, wahrscheinlich die Gewalt der Begierden vorstellend. An den Wänden sieht man kleine Genien und ausgewachsene männliche Gestalten, die auf Schnirkeln und Stäben gaukeln, und sich heftiger und munterer bewegen. Sie scheinen zu balancieren, nach einem Ziel zu eilen, und was alles die Lebenslust für Bewegungen einflößen mag. Das Brustbild der schönen *Fornarina* ist viermal wiederholt, und die halb leichtsinnigen halb soliden Zieraten dieses Zimmergens atmen Freude, Leben, Liebe. (Goethe 1990: 194f).

In Goethes (von seiner Haltung zur Antike abhängigen) Einschätzung des Grotesken zeigen sich zwei Tendenzen, die als paradigmatisch für dessen metakritische Beschreibung in der Theorie des Grotesken angesehen werden können: die mit ästhetischer Degradierung einhergehende Pathologisierung, und die mit ästhetischer Aufwertung verbundene glorifizierende Apotheose des Grotesken als eines Phänomens der Normabweichung bzw. der Normverletzung hinsichtlich der konventionellen Repräsentation von Wirklichkeit. In der ästhetischen Theorie zeigt sich die Beurteilung des Grotesken bis zum 19. Jahrhundert überwiegend als von Horaz abhängig, und man braucht nur an die Rede von der "entarteten Kunst" zu denken, um zu sehen, daß bis ins 20. Jahrhundert hinein Künstler, die von anerkannten Normen abwichen, pathologisiert wurden.

### **Das Groteske im Kosmos: Die Welt der Korrespondenzen**

Innerhalb der poetologischen und philosophischen Reflexion stellt jedoch bereits das 19. Jahrhundert mit Friedrich Schlegel, Victor Hugo und Charles Baudelaire einen entscheidenden Wendepunkt dar, insofern das Groteske nun nicht mehr im selben Maße wie vorher diskriminiert oder marginalisiert wird, sondern in Bezug zum Universum, der Welt als Chaos und Kosmos gedeutet wird.

Ohne Sinn fürs Groteske giebt's keine Universalität.  
Groteske ist Universalspiel. (Schlegel 1958f: 187)\*

Sowohl die helle, leichte, ludistische Dimension des Grotesken als Ausdruck eines Ideals der Harmonie, der Schönheit und der künstlerischen Freiheit und Ironie, als auch die dunkle Seite des Grotesken als Ausdruck einer Disharmonie zwischen Mensch und Welt, Realität und Ideal, Künstler und Gesellschaft, wird im 19. Jahrhundert ernstgenommen. Diese neue, universalistische Haltung, zeigt sich in verschiedener Ausprägung: Mit Victor Hugo wird das Groteske als kontrastive Kategorie im Verhältnis zum Erhabenen im Kosmos angesiedelt, den der Künstler *imitieren* soll.

[La muse moderne] sentira que tout dans la création n'est pas humainement *beau*, que le laid existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière. [...] Elle se mettra à faire comme la nature, à mêler dans ses créations, sans pourtant les confondre, l'ombre à la lumière, le grotesque au sublime, en d'autres termes, le corps à l'âme, la bête à l'esprit [...]. (Hugo 1968: 41).

Charles Baudelaire verlagert den kosmischen Dualismus noch stärker ins Innere des Menschen und betrachtet das Groteske als *kognitive* und *kreative* Kategorie in der Korrespondenzrelation zwischen Anthropos und Kosmos.

Le comique est, au point de vue artistique, une imitation; le grotesque, une création. (Baudelaire 1980: 696).

Je trouve inutile et fastidieux de représenter ce qui est, parce que rien de ce qui est ne me satisfait. La nature est laide, et je préfère les monstres de ma fantaisie à la trivialité. [...] [L'imagination] décompose toute la création, et, avec les matériaux amassés et disposés suivant des règles dont on ne peut trouver

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\* "Aus dem romantischen Gesichtspunkt haben auch die Abarten der Poesie, selbst die ekzentrischen und monströsen, ihren Wert, als Materialien und Vorübungen der Universalität, wenn nur irgendetwas drin ist, wenn sie nur original sind." (Athenäum, Fragment 139).

l'origine que dans le plus profond de l'âme, elle crée un monde nouveau, elle produit la sensation du neuf. (Ibid. 750–751).

Sowohl Victor Hugo als auch Baudelaire sehen im Grotesken den Ausdruck der Modernität, die sie als Freiheit des schöpferischen Individuums von festgelegten Konventionen und als Transgression ästhetischer und auch ethischer Normen und Formen begreifen. Die Beschreibung eines Werkes als "grotesk" hängt davon ab, in welchem Maße es als Abweichung von etablierten Normen und Formen wahrgenommen wird. So charakterisiert Théophile Gautier Autoren des Barock als *Les Grotesques*, weil diese Autoren von der gewohnten klassischen Norm abweichen. (Vgl. Gautier 1985). Gautiers Unternehmen, barocke Autoren der Vergessenheit zu entreißen und sie in einer Art Galerie exotischer Kuriositäten dem Publikum vorzuführen, entspringt dem von den französischen Romantikern immer wieder bekundeten Überdruß an einer institutionell propagierten Vormachtstellung klassischer Regelästhetik und ist Ausdruck ihrer bewußten Hinwendung zur Modernität. Das Difforme und Abnorme wird im 19. Jahrhundert als Ausdrucksweise eines *modernen* Bewußtseins gewertet, das einer pluralistischen Ästhetik des Subjektiven, des Individuellen, der Differenz und des Wandels ein Daseinsrecht zuspricht.

Toutes les beautés contiennent, comme tous les phénomènes possibles, quelque chose d'éternel et quelque chose de transitoire, — d'absolu et de particulier. La beauté absolue et éternelle n'existe pas, ou plutôt elle n'est qu'une abstraction écrémée à la surface générale des beautés diverses. L'élément particulier de chaque beauté vient des passions, et comme nous avons nos passions particulières, nous avons notre beauté. (Baudelaire 1980: 687).

Diese von den Symbolisten weitergetragene und von den Dadaisten und Surrealisten radikalisierte Haltung gegenüber der klassischen Tradition wird innerhalb der Literaturkritik erst nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, nachdem der von der sogenannten Literatur des Absurden ausgelöste Schock verarbeitet ist, zögernd akzeptiert und in ihrer ästhetischen Eigenwertigkeit wahrgenommen. Unwiderruflich hat die neue Einstellung Einfluß auf die

Art und Weise, mit der nunmehr die Wertmaßstäbe angesetzt werden.

### Das Groteske im Chaos: Die absurde Welt

Die Reflexion über das Absurde und Unpersönliche leitet eine neue Phase in der Phänomenologie des Grotesken ein. Witold Gombrowicz, der von der chaotischen Häufung und Auflösung von Einzelelementen bis hin zur Sprachgroteske und dem explosiven großen Lachen nahezu sämtliche Register der Groteske durchspielt, bei dem das Prinzip der scheinbaren Symmetrie, der Doppelung, des Parallelismus, der Wiederholung und der Korrespondenz zwischen Mikro- und Makrokosmos Stilprinzip und zugleich Obsession ist, läßt einen Kosmos entstehen, als dessen wesentliche Bestandteile ein Korke, eine Untertasse, Pfeile, Holzstücke, ein an einem Faden aufgehängter Spatz als Zeichen einer chaotischen und undurchsichtigen Welt fungieren und deutet diese Zeichen als brutalen und skandalösen Einbruch einer "logischen Absurdität" (Gombrowicz 1966: 10), deren Sinn nicht erschlossen werden kann (*Kosmos*).

Das Gefühl des Absurden, des metaphysischen Schwindels, der Unzugänglichkeit, Unfaßbarkeit, Unkommunizierbarkeit und Entzogenheit von Sinn, das man provokativ im Kantschen Sinne als Erfahrung des *Erhabenen* interpretieren kann, hängt aufs engste mit der Gestaltung des Grotesken zusammen. Sartre nennt es *La Nausée* und vermittelt es über die groteske Anthropomorphisierung der Gegenstände in den kafkaesken Visionen Eugène Roquentins, die diesen in der banalen Alltäglichkeit seines Lebens überfallen, und denen er hilflos ausgeliefert ist. Albert Camus diagnostiziert es als undurchsichtige Fülle der Welt, als das Fremde, Unmenschliche, das den modernen Menschen determiniert (Camus 1942: 28)\* Auch der Mensch erscheint unzugänglich, sinnlos und überflüssig, insofern er sich in seiner repetitiven Banalität zu erkennen gibt.

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\* "Un degré plus bas et voici l'étrangeté: s'apercevoir que le monde est «épais», entrevoir à quel point cette pierre est étrangère, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier."

Les hommes aussi secrètent de l'inhumain. Dans certaines heures de lucidité, l'aspect mécanique de leurs gestes, leur pantomime privée de sens rend stupide tout ce qui les entoure. [...] Ce malaise devant l'inhumanité de l'homme même, cette incalculable chute devant l'image de ce que nous sommes, cette «nausée» comme l'appelle un auteur de nos jours, c'est aussi de l'absurde. (Ibid. 29).

“Des êtres noyés dans l'absence de sens ne peuvent être que grotesques, leur souffrance ne peut être que dérisoirement tragique” (Ionesco 1966: 261), so beschreibt Ionesco die Figuren, die er in seinen Theaterstücken auf die Bühne bringt.

In dieser historischen Situation, in der das Absurde als omnipräsent wahrgenommen und von Autoren indirekt oder direkt thematisiert wird, erscheinen die beiden für das 20. Jahrhundert richtungsweisenden Theorien des Grotesken, zunächst Wolfgang Kayser's *Das Groteske. Seine Gestaltung in Kunst und Literatur* (1957), und einige Jahre später Michail Bachtins *Tvorčestvo Fransua Rable* [Rabelais und seine Welt] (1965). Beide wurden in der Folgezeit mehrmals aufgelegt und mehrfach in andere Sprachen übersetzt und haben zahlreiche weitere Studien angeregt. So gibt etwa Martin Esslin, der Verfasser des Standardwerkes *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), in einem späteren Artikel schon im Titel “Der Blick in den Abgrund. Das Groteske im zeitgenössischen Drama in Frankreich” (Esslin 1962: 95–122) den Bezug zu Kayser und seiner Kategorie des Abgründigen zu erkennen. Was die Rezeption der Kategorien Bachtins betrifft, so sei als Beispiel Robin Howells Studie *Carnival to Classicism: The Comic Novels of Charles Sorel* angeführt, der Bachtins Konzept des Karnevalesken, des Dialogismus und des grotesken Körpers übernimmt, um die Romane Sorels zu analysieren (Howell 1989).

### Die entfremdete Welt: Wolfgang Kayser

Kaysers Sichtweise des Grotesken ist geprägt durch die Erfahrung des Surrealismus, des Expressionismus und der existentialistischen Reflexion über das Absurde. Nach Kayser ist ein Kunstwerk nur

dann grotesk, wenn die in ihm dargestellte Welt Mimesis einer befremdenden und unheimlichen Wirklichkeit ist, in der das Ich seine Orientierung verloren hat und sich in einem Zustand physischer und metaphysischer Haltlosigkeit vorfindet. Die zentrale kritische Kategorie, mit der Kayser das Phänomen des Grotesken epochenübergreifend zu fassen versucht, ist das Konzept der Entfremdung, das er, wenn er es auch nicht im Hinblick auf dessen spekulative Voraussetzungen (Hegel, Marx, Freud, Heidegger, Feuerbach) reflektiert, mit Dürrenmatt aus der konkreten historischen Situation seiner Gegenwart und der apokalyptischen Ängste ableitet, die angesichts der universellen Bedrohung durch die Atombombe ausgelöst wurden. Kayser bezieht seine magische Wesensbestimmung des Grotesken (Kayser 1961: 198–201) nicht nur auf die Literatur und Kunst seiner Gegenwart, auch hinsichtlich früherer Epochen betrachtet er das Phänomen des Grotesken expressionistisch als Reaktion der „Ratlosigkeit“, als „Empfinden der Abgründigkeit angesichts einer absurd gewordenen, phantastisch entfremdeten Welt“ (ibid. 83). Immer wieder betont er den dunklen, unheimlichen, grauenvollen Aspekt des Grotesken; auch angesichts Goethes Glorifizierung der grotesken Ornamentik Raffaels vermutet er abgründige und beklemmende Aspekte: „Man kann zweifeln, ob Goethe damit nicht eine letzte Unheimlichkeit verschwiegen hat, die auch in der Spielwelt Raffaels liegt.“ (Ibid. 22). Und an Friedrich Schlegels Konzeption des Grotesken vermißt Kayser „die Bodenlosigkeit, die Abgründigkeit, das sich einmischende Grauen angesichts der zerbrechenden Ordnungen“ (S. 54). Das durch die Gestaltung des Grotesken in Kunst und Literatur hervorgerufene Lachen ist nach Kayser niemals fröhlich oder befreiend, sondern beklemmend, ebenso wie der Geist, der einem grotesken Kunstwerk zugrunde liegt, nicht aufbauend, sondern — im Sinne Jean Pauls „Die vernichtende Idee des Humors“ — zerstörend wirkt. Wesen und Funktion grotesker Kunst bestehen nach Kayser in der durch die Zerstörung aller Ordnungen bewirkten vollständigen Verunsicherung und Desorientierung der

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\* *“das Groteske ist die entfremdete Welt”; “das Groteske ist die Gestaltung des “Es”; “die Gestaltungen des Grotesken sind ein Spiel mit dem Absurden”; “die Gestaltung des Grotesken ist der Versuch, das Dämonische in der Welt zu bannen und zu beschwören”.*

Wahrnehmung und dem Versuch, die bösen Geister zu rufen und zu bannen.

Ironie ist daher nach Kayser eine "Schwächung" des Grotesken, denn sie bekundet Distanz zwischen der Wahrnehmung des Autors und der grotesken Welt und drückt Bewußtsein und Überlegenheit aus (vgl. *ibid.* 173 zu Thomas Mann). Deutende oder *raisonnierende* Erzählereinschaltungen, erzähltechnische Mittel wie die *mise en abyme* oder nachträgliche Erklärungen bzw. Motivationen und Rationalisierungen durch den Erzähler erklärt Kayser für eine "Abmilderung" bzw. "Störung" (zur These der Abschwächung vgl. auch *ibid.* 23; 67–77; 142). So meint er, Pirandello würde durch problematisierende Reflexionen verhindern, daß die in seinen Dramen dargestellte "sich entfremdende Welt grotesk wird" (*ibid.* 148). "Der Gestalter des Grotesken darf und kann keine Sinngebung versuchen" (*ibid.* 200). Ebenso ist auch die explizite Thematisierung von Absurdität, Sinnlosigkeit, Unsinn oder Ungeheimtheit, wie man dies etwa am Ende von Gogols Erzählung *Die Nase* beobachten kann, nach Kayser ein Fremdkörper innerhalb der Erzählung, der die "echte" Groteske relativiert, eben weil sich in der Erzählhaltung und in den Interventionen des Erzählers auktoriale Ironie bekundet, die Distanz zum repräsentierten Geschehen ausdrückt.

Das ist eine echte Groteske; das zentrale Motiv von dem allein durch die Welt ziehenden Körperteil kennen wir von Bosch und von Morgenstern her. Es fehlt auch nicht an Beklemmenden: wenn der Barbier sich nicht von dem fatalen Gegenstand befreien kann, wenn der Kollegienassessor aus der Welt ausgesperrt wird. Trotzdem zeigt sich an der Art der Gestaltung wie an dem Verlauf, der in keinen Abgrund, sondern genau an die Stelle des Ausgangs führt, daß hier das Groteske verharmlost und humorisiert worden ist. (*Ibid.* 135f)

Aufgrund der Festlegung auf das Abgründige, Bodenlose, Beklemmende und Dämonische des Grotesken entwickelt Kayser also Kriterien der Aussonderung. So läßt er nur solche Texte als reine Grotesken gelten, in denen der Leser ohne Vermittlung durch einen Erzähler bzw. ohne Erklärung in eine groteske Welt transportiert wird. Jede innerhalb der Struktur eines grotesken



Kunstwerks sich manifestierende Meta-Ebene ist in seinen Augen eine "Abschwächung", "Minderung", "Humorisierung", "Verharmlosung" der echten Groteske.

### **Die karnevaleske Welt: Michail Bachtin**

Die Emphase des bedrohlichen Aspekts grotesken Lachens wurde Kayser von verschiedenen Kritikern, die sich mit dem Phänomen des Grotesken auseinandergesetzt haben, zum Vorwurf gemacht (Thomsen 1977: 155; dazu Burwick 1987: 14), allen voran Michail Bachtin, der in seiner Rabelais-Studie ausdrücklich gegen Kayser nachzuweisen versucht, daß das groteske Lachen aus karnevaleskem Geist entsteht und Ausdruck eines kollektiven Überlegenheitsgefühls ist, das die Überwindung jeglicher Entfremdung mit sich bringt.

Der Einzelne empfindet auf dem Festplatz, in der Karnevalsmenge, wenn er mit fremden Körpern aller Altersstufen und sozialen Schichten in Berührung kommt, die Kontinuität des Lebens. Dort fühlt er sich als Teil des ewig wachsenden und sich erneuernden Volkes. Daher besiegt das volkstümlich-festliche Lachen nicht nur den überirdischen Schrecken, die Angst vor dem Heiligen und dem Tod, sondern auch die Angst vor jeder Macht überhaupt, vor den Spitzen der sozialen Hierarchie und vor allem, was unterdrückt und begrenzt. (Bachtin 1995: 142).

Bachtins Theorie des Grotesken ist wie seine Sicht des Volkes von der Idee des dialektischen Materialismus geprägt (ibid. 103). Bachtin sieht im karnevalesken Lebensgefühl den Vorschein der Utopie einer klassenlosen und unanimistischen Gesellschaft verwirklicht, in welcher das im Lachen intuitiv affirmierte überindividuelle kosmische Gesetz des natürlichen Wechsels von Tod und Leben, Vergänglichkeit und Erneuerung, jegliche subjektive Angst vor religiöser oder staatlicher Macht besiegt, auch die private Angst des Mannes vor dem "Gehörtwerden", denn der überindividuelle Zweck des Degradierens und Erneuerns heiligt die Mittel (vgl. ibid. 279–285). Bachtin folgt Kayser mit der Annahme,

daß die "modernistische Grotteske" (Jarry, der Surrealismus, der Expressionismus), "mit der Tradition der romantischen Grotteske verbunden ist" und stellt die These auf, daß die "realistische Grotteske" (Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, Pablo Neruda u.a.) "der Tradition des grotesken Realismus und der Volkskultur entstammt und bisweilen (bei Neruda) den direkten Einfluß karnevalesker Formen erkennen läßt" (ibid. 97). In Rabelais' Werk sieht Bachtin, weil er voraussetzt, daß es in direkter Abhängigkeit vom Karneval geschrieben wurde und Echo der Vielstimmigkeit des Karnevalstreibens auf dem mittelalterlichen Marktplatz ist, den reinsten Ausdruck grotesken Lachens, das er als "ambivalent" charakterisiert, da es analog zum Karnevalsritus degradierende und erneuernde Funktion hätte. Bachtin geht davon aus, daß seit dem 17. Jahrhundert eine zunehmende Schwächung und Domestizierung der Karnevalskultur auch eine Schwächung und "Privatisierung" des Grottesken in der Literatur zur Folge hat. Aus seiner These, daß das goldene Zeitalter des Grottesken am reinsten bei Rabelais verkörpert sei, weil dieser am nächsten zur Karnevalskultur stehe, gewinnt er, ähnlich wie Kayser, Kriterien der "Schwächung" und Abminderung bzw. Dekadenz des Grottesken, das durch gattungsmäßige Tradierung und intertextuelle Brechung ohne Bezug zur Wirklichkeit des Karnevals gedämpft wäre. Nach Bachtin ist das Grotteske bei Rabelais als Reproduktion der im Karneval praktizierten und produzierten Riten zu verstehen. Aufgrund dieser vorausgesetzten mimetischen Dimension spricht er von "groteskem Realismus". So kommt er zu der These der "Nichtliterarizität" Rabelais' (ibid. 50), die durch die Volkstümlichkeit seines Werkes bedingt wäre.

Die Tatsache, daß er dabei zwischen Autor und Volk, Literatur und Leben, Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit, nicht unterscheidet und den Karneval als Text bzw. den Text als polyphones Echo des Karnevals interpretiert, ist vermutlich verantwortlich für das Interesse postmoderner Literaturtheorie an seinen Schriften. Sein euphorisches Konzept des ungebundenen, entindividualisierten, grenzenlos offenen prozeßhaften Körpers greift ebenso wie sein Konzept des Dialogismus und der Polyphonie der Idee von der Auflösung des Individuums und dem Tod des Autors vor; sein Konzept des Karnevalesken leistet der Idee von der Textualität der Geschichte und der Gesellschaft Vorschub. Julia Kristeva hebt die

Tatsache hervor, daß Bachtin Geschichte und Gesellschaft selbst als Texte betrachtet, zu denen der literarische Text in einem entweder funktionalen oder oppositionellen Verhältnis steht (Kristeva 1969: 83). Doch der Aspekt des funktionalen Verhältnisses überwiegt eindeutig bei Bachtin. Das Verhältnis des Textes zur Wirklichkeit des Karnevals sieht er nicht als ein oppositionelles, sondern als ein mimetisches. Rabelais schreibt nicht, er wird geschrieben. Der Text gehorcht funktional der textualisierten Wirklichkeit. Die Problematik einer solchen Sichtweise soll nun zunächst anhand dreier Thesen illustriert werden.

Nach Wladimir Krysinski ist der Begriff des Karnevalesken unzureichend, um die radikale Art literarischer Transgression zu enthüllen.

Le propre du carnaval, c'est la transgression non transgressive du réel. [...] le roman dévalorise des textes variables dans la diachronie, tandis que le carnaval dévalorise momentanément et cycliquement la culture et l'autorité officielles. Celles-ci étant toujours répressives, le carnaval n'est qu'un rite d'obéissance à rebours. [...] Le carnaval feint l'utopie. Le roman pense l'utopie. (Krysinski 1981: 315f).

Seine Analyse von Thomas Manns *Joseph und seine Brüder*, Witold Gombrowicz' *Trans-Atlantik* und Alejo Carpentiers *Concierto barroco* macht deutlich, daß Bachtins aus Dostoevskij und Rabelais abgeleitete These der «Karnevalisierung» relativiert werden muß, denn alle drei Romane konkretisieren eine semiotische Dialektisierung durch eine ludistische Rhetorik des Erzählens. "L'ouverture du jeu cognitif de l'ironie, c'est la clôture de la fête carnevalesque dans l'espace romanesque" (ibid. 330).

Ähnliche Vorbehalte äußert Bernhard Teuber, wenn er auf der analytischen Trennung von lebensweltlichem Karneval und dem Karnevalesken als literarischem Verfahren besteht und "eine Dialektik zwischen Karnevaleskem einerseits und näherhin Literarischem andererseits" voraussetzt (Teuber 1989: 12). Im Anschluß an Juri M. Lotmans kultursemiotischer Literaturkonzeption unterscheidet er "zwischen einer Textebene des Epistemologischen und einer Komponente der literarischen Stilisierung des dargebotenen Wissensbestandes" (ibid. 142) und begreift die groteske Körper-

lichkeit in Rabelais' *Gargantua* und *Pantagruel* nicht als naiven Reflex des Karnevalischen in der Literatur, sondern als "Modell eines kulturellen Diskurses" (ibid. 142, vgl. auch 155). Rabelais reproduziert nicht einfach den Karneval, sondern er nimmt karnevalische Motive in sein Werk auf, um innerhalb des Literarischen und mittels des Literarischen der bereits in seinem Umfeld beobachtbaren zunehmend repressiven Tendenz zur Entsinnlichung des Körpers und Entsubstanzialisierung der Sprache entgegenzuwirken. Teuber beobachtet eine strukturdeterminierende unaufgelöste Spannung innerhalb der gesamten Pentalogie. Diese Spannung zeigt sich daran, daß das volkstümlich-karnevalische Lachen immer wieder mit den Mitteln der Komik relativiert wird und selbst dem Lachen preisgegeben wird (vgl. v.a. ibid. 160–182).

Frank-Rutger Hausmann, der die karnevalische Struktur bei Rabelais im Hinblick auf deren referentielle Funktionen untersucht hat, weist auf Bachtins Vernachlässigung zentraler Stellen hin, die nicht nur für Rabelais' Wertvorstellungen (wie sie sich etwa in der Utopie der Abbaye de Thélème artikulieren) bedeutsam sind, sondern auch für das Verständnis seiner Einschätzung des Volkes und des Karnevals. Hausmann interpretiert beispielsweise den in der Gestalt eines fliegenden Schweines verkörperten "Mardigras" als eine Allegorie Martin Luthers und beobachtet einen Wandel in Rabelais' Karnevalsverständnis: "Der immerwährende Karneval ist für ihn zum Irrweg geworden, nicht besser als die Unnachgiebigkeit des immerwährenden Fastens und der mönchischen Askese". (Hausmann 1991: 347).

### **Inkongruität und Ironie**

Die zu verschiedenen und widersprüchlichen Deutungsmöglichkeiten führende Spannung zwischen verschiedenen und widersprüchlichen Sinnebenen ist innerhalb der Pentalogie grundgelegt. Sie geht auf ein Verfahren zurück, das Wladimir Krysinski im Hinblick auf Ionesco, Jarry, Apollinaire, Pirandello und Witkiewicz treffend mit "principle of incongruity" beschrieben hat (Krysinski 1987: 138–157). Dieses Prinzip scheint mir als metatheoretische Kategorie für eine Beschreibung des Grotesken heuristisch wert-

voll, weil man damit sowohl "Strategien der Kontradiktion" (Harp-ham 1982), als auch den Geist solcher für das Groteske konstitu-tiver Strategien im Hinblick auf deren referentielle Manipulation auf verschiedenen Ebenen erfassen kann, z.B. auf der Ebene des Mischwesens, der Metamorphose, der sprachlichen Gestaltung, der grotesken Umkehrtechnik in Bild und Sprache (vgl. Illustration).



An unknown British artist. 1789.

Rabelais organisiert seinen Text nach dem Prinzip der *coinci-dentia oppositorum* mit Verweisen auf unterschiedliche Repräsen-tationssysteme und macht wie bei Vexierbildern die Deutung von der Lesart und von der Perspektive abhängig, etwa, wenn er im

Prolog zu *Gargantua* auf eine tiefsinnige allegorische Dimension des Textes hinweist und am Ende die Rätselprophetie von Mellin de Saint-Gelais durch Gargantua als "le décours et maintien de vérité divine", vom Mönch Frère Jean dagegen als "une description du jeu de paulme soubz obscures parolles" auslegen läßt (Rabelais 1955: 186). *L'habit ne fait point le moine*. Die "Abstraktion der Quintessenz" bleibt aufgrund des Prinzips der Inkongruität der jeweiligen Perspektive und Lesart überlassen; die karnevaleske Symphonie der Marktplatzstimmen und der Stimme Rabelais' erweist sich als Dissonanz, eine Dissonanz, hinter der die bewußte Strategie eines Autors steht, der der grotesken Gestaltungsweise nicht magische, sondern komisch-relativierende und kognitiv-stimulierende Funktionen zuerkennt.

Schon zu Lebzeiten Rabelais' wird zwischen Literatur und Karneval unterschieden. In seiner 1558 veröffentlichten *Apologia* stellt Annibal Caro den in seinen Augen grundlegenden Unterschied zwischen Karneval und Dichtung heraus: "l'uno s'è dato alla carne e l'altra allo spirito". (Caro 1974: 182; dazu Kapp 1989: 108). Und Rabelais selbst verweist in seinem Prolog zu *Gargantua* auf die semiotische Differenz zwischen dem grotesken *Körper* und dem sublimen *Geist* des Sokrates.

Tel disoit estre Socrates, parce que, le voyans au dehors et l'estimans par l'extérieure apparence, n'eussiez donné un coupeau d'oignon, tant laid il estoit de corps et ridicule en son maintien, le nez pointu, le regard d'un taureau, le visage d'un fol, simple en meurs, rustiq en vestimens, pauvre de fortune, infortuné en femmes, inepte à tous les offices de la république, tousjours riant, tousjours beuvant d'autant à un chascun, tousjours se guabelant, tousjours dissimulant son divin sçavoir; mais, ouvrans ceste boyte, eussiez au dedans trouvé une céleste et impréciable drogue: entendement plus que humain, vertus merveilleuse, courage invincible, sobresse sans pareille, contentement certain, assurance parfaite, déprisement incroyable de tout ce pourquoy les humains tant veiglent, courent, travaillent, naviguent et bataillent. [...] Et, posé le cas qu'au sens literal vous trouvez matières assez joyeuses et bien

correspondentes au nom, toutesfois pas demourer là ne fault, comme au chant de Sirènes, ains à plus hault sens interpréter ce que par adventure cuidez dict en gayeté de cuer. (Rabelais 1955: 25–26).

Bachtin, der allein die “Marktplatzatmosphäre” des Prologs herausarbeitet (Bachtin 1995: 208–211), unterschlägt die im Bild des Sokrates angekündigte *ironische* Dimension des Rabelaisischen Œuvres. Sokrates ist aufgrund der Inkongruität zwischen seiner äußeren Erscheinung und seinem inneren Wesen und zwischen seinem Denken und seinem Sprechen, sowohl als Urbild der Ironie im klassisch-rhetorischen Sinn zu verstehen, d.h. im Sinne ironischer Verstellung, als auch als Prototyp der Ironie im romantischen Sinn: Ironie ist für Friedrich Schlegel “Form des Paradoxen” (Schlegel 1958f, II: 153), die über die Arabeske vermittelt wird und zeichenhaften, verweisenden Charakter hat (ibid. 323f). “Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos.” (Ibid. 263). Schlegel beschreibt die sokratische Ironie als eine Geisteshaltung, die “aus dem Zusammentreffen vollendeter Naturphilosophie und vollendeter Kunstphilosophie” entspringt und “ein Gefühl von dem unauflöselichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung [enthält und erregt]” (ibid. 160, vgl. auch 152 und X, 460).

Ironisch und geistreich inszeniert Rabelais mit den Mitteln der Groteske die ungebundene Körperlichkeit und weist damit auf die körperliche Gebundenheit des Geistigen hin. *Dà la carne allo spirito*. Ebenso wie Kayser kann Bachtin die Ironie als Meta-Ebene des Grotesken, als “transzendente Buffonerie” (ibid. 152) und “permanente Parekbase” (KA XVIII, S. 85) nicht akzeptieren. Beide gehen von einem magischen Verständnis des Grotesken aus, beide treffen sich darin, daß das Lachen die Funktion der Bannung böser Mächte erfüllt und jede Distanz verhindert.

## Dekomposition und Rekomposition

Die ironische Dimension zeigt sich bei Rabelais auch an der Art und Weise, wie er aus dem vorgefundenen mündlichen und schrift-

lichen Material (Bibel, Antike, Volksbücher, Karneval, Fabliaux, Predigt, Rede, usw.) selektiert, fragmentiert, kombiniert und daraus ein kohärentes Neues, Eigenes und Unverwechselbares gestaltet. Friedrich Schlegel benennt eine solche von einem einzigen Autor vorgenommene intertextuelle oder interdialogische Organisation "Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung" (KA II, S. 172), "schöne Selbstbespiegelung" (ibid. II: 204, vgl. auch 182f), insofern "in immer erneuten Anläufen entgegengesetzte denkerische Standpunkte experimentierend aufgegriffen und die verschiedensten Blickpunkte adoptiert werden." (Behler 1972: 94; zum Verhältnis zwischen Arabeske und Ironie vgl. 71–73). Ebenso wie bei Montaigne, der erste, der seine digressive Schreibweise mit der Gestaltung des Grotesken vergleicht (Montaigne 1962: 181–182)\*, verbirgt sich hinter dieser Ironisierung der Welt im Fragment die Ablehnung jedes Totalitarismus. "Le fragment, c'est le chiffre du multiple et de ce qui ne se laisse pas systématiser." (Krysinski 1984: 579).

Rabelais macht auf der Ebene des Textes dasselbe, was die Meister der grotesken Ornamentik seiner Zeit auf der Ebene des Bildes machen, und dieses schöpferische Verfahren der Groteske läßt sich nicht nur auf Rabelais und seine Zeit beziehen, sondern es ist charakteristisch für das Groteske im allgemeinen, wie im folgenden, zunächst unter Bezugnahme auf kunsttheoretische Analysen, verdeutlicht werden soll. Der Kunsthistoriker Carsten Peter Warncke hat die Bezüge zwischen den innerhalb der begrenzten Periode von 1500 bis 1650 im gesamteuropäischen Raum kursierenden ornamentalen Groteskvorlagen untersucht und die räumlich und zeitlich bedingte je verschiedene Rezeptionsweise der einzelnen Künstler aufgezeigt (Warncke 1979). Warncke stellt fest, daß vorrangig Einzelmotive rezipiert wurden und plädiert

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\* "Considerant la conduite de la besogne d'un peintre que j'ay, il m'a pris envie de l'ensuivre. Il choisit le plus bel endroit et milieu de chaque paroy, pour y loger un tableau élaboré de toute sa suffisance; et, le vuide tout au tour, il le remplit de crotresques, qui sont peintures fantasques, n'ayant grâce qu'en la varieté et estrangeté. Que sont-ce icy aussi, à la verité, que crotresques et corps monstrueux, rappez vous de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuite? [...]"



deshalb für eine am Mischwesen gewonnene Minimaldefinition des Grotesken. Die einzelnen Künstler inspirieren sich an den Vorlagen, indem sie bestimmte Elemente aufgreifen, variieren, parodieren und individuell weitergestalten oder originell umstrukturieren, je nach Lust und Laune, und abhängig von ihrem Talent und dem Kontext, in dem sie sich befinden. Warncke betont neben der beliebigen Fortsetzbarkeit auch die Integrationsfähigkeit der antik legitimierten Renaissancegroteske, die nach und nach in ihr Repertoire Bosch-Brueghel-Drollerien, populäre Schnackemotive, mittelalterliche Fabelwesen, Monster- und Prodigendarstellungen, Motive aus Vexierbildern, aus politisch-religiösen Flugschriften, aus den *Songes pantagruéliques* sowie Arabesken, Mauresken und Arcimboldesken in sich aufnimmt.

Dieser Prozeß der nahezu beliebigen Anwendung von Bildmotiven in neuen Inhaltszusammenhängen führte zu einer Extraktion der alten Bedeutungen und machte neue Begriffsverbindungen möglich. (Ibid. I: 76).

Ebenso zeigen die Arbeiten von Jurgis Baltrušaitis die nahezu unbeschränkte, Grenzen und Kulturen überschreitende Erweiterungs- und Integrationsfähigkeit des Grotesken, das sich im Mittelalter neben der hellenistischen Antike aus der islamischen und fernöstlichen Welt inspiriert (Baltrušaitis 1993, 1988), durch Assoziation transfigurative Verbindungen zwischen Mensch und Kosmos, Kunst und Natur herstellt (Baltrušaitis 1995), und durch die Technik der Anamorphose Perspektiven verzerrt bzw. Altes in neuem Licht erscheinen läßt (Baltrušaitis 1996).

Diese kombinatorische und innovative Kunstfertigkeit kann man auf literarästhetischer Ebene mit intertextuellen und konzeptistischen Verfahren vergleichen. Aus dem Urmaterial wird je nach Bedürfnis, Intention, Geschmack oder Laune ausgewählt, zerlegt, neu zusammengesetzt, eigenes hinzugefügt, und so kann immer aufs neue Überraschung entstehen. "The grotesque [...] possesses a fundamentally proliferative character." (Khouri 1980: 20). Aufgrund des proliferativen Charakters des Grotesken ist es angebracht, anstelle von Kriterien der Aussonderung den dialektischen Bezug des Grotesken im Hinblick auf veränderte Situationen herauszustellen und seine permanente Wandlungsfähigkeit im Blick zu behalten. Sowohl Kayser, als auch Bachtin haben wesent-

liche und charakteristische Wesenszüge des Grotesken herausgearbeitet, die auch heute noch tragfähig sind. Doch beide wollen diese Wesenszüge nur innerhalb der limitierten und fixierten Welt des Karnevalesken bzw. des Absurden sehen. Goethe sprach von einer "Stammtafel der Herkunft" des Grotesken, und in der Tat läßt sich eine solche Genealogie epochenübergreifend verfolgen. Die von Kayser und Bachtin beobachteten Verfahren und Motive der grotesken Umkehrung, des paroxystischen Lachens, der Hyperbolisierung, Metamorphose, Anthropomorphisierung, Verbalinjuriern, Unersättlichkeit usw., lassen sich bei Autoren wie Bruno Schulz, Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Oskar Panizza, Günter Grass, Heimito von Doderer, Jarry, Roger Vitrac, Apollinaire, Genet, Ionesco, Gadda und bei Malern wie George Grosz, Max Ernst, Magritte, Botero in je variierender referentieller Funktion nachweisen.

Das Groteske ist potentiell transgressiv und immer aktualisierbar. Durch Selektion, Kombination, Integration und Innovation werden die Traditionen nach dem Prinzip der Inkongruität immer neu variiert und aktualisiert, nicht nur im Hinblick auf sich verändernde historische Gegebenheiten, auch innerhalb der eigenen ästhetischen Tradition. So erweitert z.B. Luigi Malerbas Erzählung *Il protagonista* (1973) die Tradition des sich verselbständigenden Körperteils (z.B. bei Rabelais, Sorel, Diderot, Gogol, Jasienski) dahingehend, daß ein Körperteil nun von Anfang an völlig hypostasiert ist und sprechend und agierend auf seine kapriziöse Existenz aufmerksam macht. Daß das Groteske als künstlerisches Verfahren weiterhin möglich ist und Aussagekraft bewahrt, zeigt auch der vor kurzem erschienene Roman *Truismes* (Paris, P. O. L., 1996) von Marie Darrieussecq, der schon im Titel die semantische Ambivalenz zwischen Mensch und Tier, Ratio und Instinkt enthält, von der die ganze Erzählung getragen wird. Man kann diese Geschichte typologisch mit Kafkas *Die Verwandlung* vergleichen. Sie handelt von der Metamorphose eines jungen Mädchens in ein Schwein, das in einer zweideutigen Parfumerie arbeitet und sich auf dem Höhepunkt seiner Verwandlung in den eleganten Modeschöpfer Yvan Loup-Y-es-tu verliebt, der sich seinerseits bei Mondschein regelmäßig in einen Wolf verwandelt und seinen Hunger während dieser kritischen Phase zunächst mit Spaziergängern an den Ufern der Seine stillt, als man ihm dann auf

die Spur kommt, bestreitet er seine Mahlzeiten mit Pizza-Lieferanten. Doch die Erzählhaltung in der Ich-Form kann wiederum mit anderen Traditionen und Strategien des Grotesken in Verbindung gebracht werden, z.B. mit ganzen oder partiellen Berichten aus Tierperspektiven (Apuleius, Cervantes, Tieck, Gogol, Jean Paul, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Bulgakov, Oskar Panizza, Günter Grass, Augusto Roa Bastos, Azouz Begag).

Die These der Neutralisierung des Grotesken durch Gewöhnung wird durch die Experimente und Realisationen zeitgenössischer Autoren ebenso widerlegt wie die These vom Tod der Avantgarde. Dies soll abschließend anhand Ionescos Theorie und Praxis des Grotesken deutlich gemacht werden. Ionescos Technik der Groteske ist im oben beschriebenen Sinn ironisch und aufs engste mit seiner Weltanschauung verbunden.

Ce qui caractérise l'homme, a-t-on dit, c'est qu'il est l'animal qui rit; il est surtout l'animal créateur. Il introduit dans l'univers des choses qui n'existent pas dans l'univers: temples ou cabanes à lapins, brouettes, locomotives, symphonies, poèmes, cathédrales, cigarettes. (Ionesco 1966: 84).

Für Ionesco ist Kunst Lebensäußerung; sein subjektives Gefühl der Irrealität des Realen und seine Suche nach Authentizität und Sinn vermittelt er, indem er die Fremdheit verfremdet, ihr groteske Gestalt gibt. Als Schöpfer des Grotesken gestaltet er die Ängste und Visionen, die ihn bedrängen, indem er sie ästhetisch über das Medium des Theaters exteriorisiert.

Tout est permis au théâtre: incarner des personnages, mais aussi matérialiser des angoisses, des présences intérieures. Il est donc non seulement permis, mais recommandé, de faire jouer les accessoires, faire vivre les objets, animer les décors, concrétiser les symboles. (Ibid. 63).

Das Groteske als aggressive Dramaturgie des Paroxysmus, als Konkretisierung, Materialisierung und spektakuläre Inszenierung von Metaphern, Symbolen und Abstrakta ist eine Möglichkeit, den Zuschauer wachzurütteln, ihn aus der Macht der Gewohntheit herauszureißen.

Pour s'arracher au quotidien, à l'habitude, à la paresse mentale qui nous cache l'étrangeté du monde, il faut recevoir comme un véritable coup de matraque. Sans une virginité nouvelle de l'esprit, sans une nouvelle prise de conscience, purifiée, de la réalité existentielle, il n'y a pas de théâtre, il n'y a pas d'art non plus; il faut réaliser une sorte de dislocation du réel, qui doit précéder à sa réintégration. (Ibid. 60).

Ionesco wollte nicht als Autor des Absurden gelten (Ionesco 1989: 13), der sich im geschlossenen Kreis einer festgelegten Weltanschauung bewegt und die absurde Welt als eine auf ewig fixierte unabänderliche und unentrinnbare Gegebenheit betrachtet: er glaubte an die erneuernde Funktion avantgardistischer Kunst, die er in seinem *Discours sur l'avant-garde* mit den Begriffen "création, nouveauté, opposition, rupture" charakterisiert (Ionesco 1966: 76–91). Das Groteske ist das diachron und synchron Konstante kreativer, transgressiver, digressiver, integrativer, kombinatorischer, deformierender und transformierender ironischer Verfahren in Kunst und Literatur. Ionesco verweigerte sich der "realistischen" Nachahmung der "Wirklichkeit". Das Groteske ist ein Mittel des aggressiven *Widerstands* gegen das Absurde und eine Möglichkeit, zur Ursprünglichkeit und Erneuerung der durch Gewohnheit und Trägheit eingeschränkten Wahrnehmung zu finden.

Wie Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of scientific revolutions* sagt, ein Paradigma ist immer "open-ended". Die Dynamik der Kunst und Literatur am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts bestätigt die Lebensfähigkeit und das kognitive Potential des Repräsentationsprinzips des Grotesken. Ob in der Malerei von Giorgio de Chirico oder Francis Bacon, im Theater von Tadeusz Kantor oder Carmeno Bene, im Roman von Samuel Beckett oder Gabriel García Márquez, in der Lyrik von Henri Michaux oder Zbigniew Herbert, die Metamorphosen des Grotesken hören nicht auf, das Prinzip der definitorischen und denotativen Identifizierung in Frage zu stellen, sowohl im Hinblick auf die Theorie, als auch im Hinblick auf die Repräsentation von Wirklichkeit. Das Groteske funktioniert also als heuristisches Prinzip bei der Entdeckung des Wirklichen und als metakritische Vermittlung, durch die der Bereich des Repräsentierten ironisch und auf kognitiver Ebene

destabilisiert wird. Als solches herrscht das Groteske seit jeher immer ironisch relativierend am Rande der Kunst und des literarischen Diskurses (nicht nur in den mittelalterlichen Marginalien), jenseits des vielbeschworenen Endes der Kunst. Das Groteske wäre also dieses unendliche Prinzip der negativen Dialektik, das sich mit keiner Endlichkeit zufriedengibt.

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## The Modern Grotesque — the Mystery of Body and Language

INGEMAR HAAG

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The grotesque ornament, excavated in Rome at the end of the 15th century, is hardly the starting-point of the history of the grotesque,\* but nonetheless the revelation of this design is of vital importance to the modern or modernist conception of this strange hybrid.

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) Wolfgang Kayser identifies the history of the grotesque with the history of the *word*, obviously ignoring the fact that — as Leo Spitzer puts it — “there were grotesques before the name was invented, that is,

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\* Several critics have asserted that the grotesque ornament is but one expression of a vast tradition, stretching back into and beyond the cradle of Western civilisation. This is the path taken by Karl Flögel, Thomas Wright, Heinrich Schneegans and not the least Mikhail Bakhtin. Neither of them has paid any significant attention to the revelation of the grotesque ornament at the end of the 15th-century; instead — at least Flögel and Wright — they emphasize the primordially of the grotesque by extending its history far beyond the coining of the word. According to Karl Flögel: “Man’s affection for the grotesque-comic or caricature is as old as any branch of the comic; indeed, it is likely that it surpasses all others in age. Before man has become civilized to the extent that he can invent the high-comic or find pleasure in it, the pleasure in exaggerations and low-comic has preceded it, since the pleasure in the low-comic corresponds with the crude manners of unrefined Man and certainly originate from these.” (Flögel 1914: 1).



before the Renaissance”.\* However, the grotesque ornament constitutes not only a mere reflection of the immense world of grotesqueries, but adds something to this concept, or rather modifies its aesthetic function — it signals the displacement of the conventional marginal position of a design to a more central one (Bakhtin 1984: 32–33).\*\* This displacement is of fundamental importance when you consider the modern, or modernist, version of the grotesque. As long as the grotesque is identified solely as an expression, genre or element embedded in a sphere of low-comic, it is quite harmless, but as soon as this challenging form begins to invade the accepted, relatively stable and prevailing genres — indeed disintegrating the whole system of genres — it becomes a challenge to be counted with. Obviously, this was a problem already in antiquity, when grotesque designs *avant la lettre* were applied to official buildings, designs rupturing the concept of *decorum*. The Augustan architect Vitruvius complained about these horrible designs in the following rhetorical manner: “how can a reed actually sustain a roof, or a candelabrum the ornaments of a gable? or a soft and slender stalk, a seated statue? or how can flowers and half-statues rise alternately from roots and stalks?” (Vitruvius 1934: 105). These designs represented things that “neither are, nor can be, nor have been” (*ibid.*), alienated as they are from the aristotelic demands for versimilitude, rather entering into a sphere of improbability, in other words, touching upon that elusive concept which once again is evoked from the dark abodes of aesthetics and nowadays haunts modern theory: the sublime, that

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\* See Leo Spitzer’s review of Wolfgang Kayser’s *Das Groteske. — Das Groteske in der Dichtung*, ed. Otto F. Best, Darmstadt 1980, p. 53 (“es gab auch Groteskes, bevor dieser Name erfunden war, d.h. vor der Renaissance.”). (Spitzer 1980: 53, originally published in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 1958, p. 95–110).

\*\* Bakhtin’s attitude towards the grotesque ornament is somewhat ambivalent. Even though he describes it as a mere “fragment of the immense world of grotesque imagery which existed throughout all the stages of antiquity and continued to exist in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance”, he admits that “The fragment reflected the characteristic features of this immense world, and thus a further productive life was ensured for the new term, with gradual extension to the almost immeasurable sphere of grotesque imagery.”

which exceeds all limits of proportion. Of course, the sublime has at this stage, in Vitruvius' highly pragmatic text, nothing in common with the subversive interpretation of it during Romanticism, but this connection with the sublime, vaguely anticipated in the polemic text of the Roman architect, will be the outstanding characteristic of the grotesque when it is renewed during the romantic era, a period to which the modern conception of the grotesque is indebted.

The increasing interest in the sublime during the 18th-century was reflected in Edmund Burke's epoch-making study, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Dominated by a psychological approach Burke's study identifies the foremost passion aroused by the sublime with fear, a passion very often connected with the grotesque. Burke asserts that: "No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear; for fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too" (Burke 1801: 78). However, the difference between the sublime and the grotesque is infinite when Burke penetrates deeper into this issue. He suggests that the sublime is revealed to us through a sense of obscurity, which gives poetry a definite priority over the transparency of painting. Quoting a passage from the Bible he concludes that when fear appears it is "wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness, more awful, more striking, more terrible than the liveliest description, than the clearest painting, could possibly represent it. When painters have attempted to give us clear representations of these very fanciful and terrible ideas, they have, I think, almost always failed." (Ibid. 88). Consequently, the striving for clarity and the intense focusing on details, refusing to leave the unprecedented unnoticed, undermines the sublime:

insomuch that I have been at loss, in all the pictures I have seen of hell, whether the painter did not intend something ludicrous. Several painters have handled a subject of this kind with a view of assembling as many horrid phantoms as their imaginations could suggest; but all the designs I have chanced to meet of

the temptations of St. Anthony, were rather a sort of odd wild grotesques, than any thing capable of producing a serious passion. (Ibid.).

This distinction is very important and quite clarifying, pointing not only to the irrefutable discrepancy between the sublime and the grotesque, but also to a formalization of that difference — the difference between obscurity (the sublime) and transparency (the grotesque). It is as if this painful clarity reveals a failure, the failure of reaching the spheres of the unsayable. This transparency and clarity which Burke finds at the heart of the grotesque is undoubtedly a very distinctive feature of this once ornamental design, but in spite of this clarity of form we often experience a taxonomical confusion, the impossibility of incorporating the grotesque image in a system, in other words, of classifying.

Sturm und Drang and Romanticism in general were to be a complete outbreak of studies discussing the grotesque ornament, finally elevating this low-comic and caricaturing subject to the heights of the sublime and embedding it in the domains of aesthetics. The traditional conception of the grotesque — that is, as an ornamental form framing a central picture — was contested by the art-historian Fiorillo, who insisted on the free play of the imagination instead of a mechanical filling up of empty space (Fiorillo 1791).<sup>\*</sup> One year before the publishing of Fiorillos tract a major philosophical work had seen the light of day, for ever changing Western thought — Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Kants aesthetics maintains that for an object to be truly beautiful it must not depend on any concept determining its beauty, and in his discussions on free beauty within the arts examples from the ornamental domain are put in circulation. But when he mentions the grotesque (once) it is as if this concept is almost out of reach, being beyond all possible taxonomy:

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\* Fiorillo's tract focused on three main issues: to separate the grotesque from the arabesque (which Goethe obviously did not, according to Fiorillo); to revalue the aesthetic purpose of the grotesque, emphasizing its superiority; to free the concept from its strictly ornamental function. See Frederick Burwick's chapter on Fiorillo in *The Haunted Eye: Perception and the Grotesque in English and German Romanticism*, Heidelberg 1987.

But where all that is intended is the maintenance of a free play of the powers of representation [...], in ornamental gardens, in the decoration of rooms, in all kind of furniture that shows good taste, etc, regularity in the shape of constraint is to be avoided as far as possible. Thus English taste in gardens, and fantastic taste in furniture, push the freedom of imagination to the verge of what is grotesque — the idea being that in this divorce from all constraint of rules the precise instance is being afforded where taste can exhibit its perfection in projects of the imagination to the fullest extent. (Kant 1989: 88; 1990: 162).

It seems as if the grotesque is a category which is all together impossible; despite this “divorce from all constraint of rules” the grotesque is just out of reach, leading its existence outside the grips of imagination. So, what is this form? Exceeding even the limits of imagination it has a slight affinity with the sublime, that experience which cannot be harboured by the human subject. Probably bearing this celebration of the imagination in mind Friedrich Schlegel set out to conjure a vision as inspiring as it is original. Even though Kant pointed out the free play of the imagination he still, to some extent, remains within the confinements of the classical period. For what are English gardens and Baroque furniture but a castigated form of beauty and freedom. Schlegel shows no signs whatsoever of being in the least restricted by the classical dogma. In pleading for a “new mythology” — rejecting the old one as a mere technique, no longer in contact with antiquity, from which it once developed — he puts the concept of “arabesque”, an ornamental form akin to the grotesque, in the foreground. In *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800) he describes the arabesque as follows:

that artfully regulated confusion, that charming symmetry of contradictions, that strange and constant alternation between irony and enthusiasm present even in the smallest parts of the whole, constitute a kind of indirect mythology. The organization is identical with that of the arabesque, which represents the oldest and most primitive form of the imagination. (Schlegel 1967, II: 318).

Whether or not Schlegel made distinctions between the arabesque and the grotesque has been discussed by several critics (Kayser 1981: 41).<sup>\*</sup> Although there are deflections in the conceptions about the grotesque and arabesque, there is nonetheless a great deal of agreement. Discussing the grotesque in Edgar Allan Poe, G. R. Thompson asserts that the psychological connotations of these terms coincide; they seem to be engaged in a restless movement towards the unsayable and constitute “a carefully patterned union of ironic opposites giving rise to a transcendent vision of the true state of things /.../ Both suggest the struggle to understand the incomprehensible (Thompson 1973: 109). This level of incomprehensibility is what Schlegel throughout his work labels “die unendliche Fülle”, that which remains unattainable — although we can receive an indication of it through the arabesque and the grotesque (Schlegel 1967, XVI: 119). Facing this “unendliche Fülle” we are truly exposed as human beings, experiencing the inevitable lack which characterizes our predicament, for we are unable to fully understand this category — the closest we can get is an “indication”. “Die unendliche Fülle” is also a challenge, threatening to annul the conception of the subject: the indication of infinite fullness is connected to enthusiasm, to the abolition of subjectivity [Ichheit]. Once again we are pushed into the sphere of the sublime while discussing the grotesque; but more important, we sense that the grotesque is at the core of humanity. When Schlegel says that “All human beings are somewhat ridiculous and grotesque, since they are human beings” (Schlegel 1967, II: 271), he touches upon that profound sense of humanity which strikes us in beholding the grotesque image; it is not just a matter of art, but

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\* Wolfgang Kayser asserts that the grotesque and the arabesque generally were treated synonymously during the early stage of Romanticism. Similarly Mikhail Bakhtin treats these concepts as synonyms when he says that Schlegel “usually calls it /the grotesque/ ‘arabesque’ and considers it ‘the most ancient form of human fantasy’” (Bakhtin 1984: 41). Frederick Burwick has made great efforts to separate the grotesque from the arabesque in Schlegel’s oeuvre, asserting that whereas the former refers to an instance of the text, an individual appearance, a contradiction between form and materia, the latter refers to a broader frame, an overall narrative form. (See Burwick 1987: 89, 91).

life itself in its deepest sense. In a similar way the art-historian John Ruskin leads the grotesque into the domains of the sublime and describes it as the inescapable sense of insufficiency, in which the mind will reside after contemplating boundless phenomena:

Now, so far as the truth is seen by the imagination in its wholeness and quietness, the vision is sublime; but so far as it is narrowed and broken by the inconsistencies of the human capacity, it becomes grotesque; and it would seem to be rare that any very exalted truth should be impressed on the imagination without some grotesqueness; in its aspect, proportioned to the degree of *diminution of breadth* in the grasp which is given of it. (Ruskin 1904: 181).

Man's incapability of transcending his limits is the principal constituent of the grotesque image, according to both Schlegel and Ruskin. His striving for the sublime, that which exceeds his limits, will inevitably result in the grotesque. Remaining within the confinements of man and at the same time challenging these limits in striving for the sublime, the grotesque image thus involves a moment of *recognition* as well as *confusion* and *alienation*, in George Santayana's words: "if the confusion is not absolute, and we have an *inkling* of the unity and character in the midst of the strangeness of the form, then we have the grotesque" (Santayana 1955: 257; my italics — I. H.). The grotesque could be characterized as an intermediate form, referring to *recognition* as well as *confusion* and *alienation*, the familiar *and* the unfamiliar. And what can be more familiar than the human body, at least we tend to regard it as our "dwelling-place". However, the human body has been a marginalized phenomenon in many ways, at the worst the embodiment of sins, at best the container of the soul, but never regarded, or at least very seldom, in its own right. Certainly, in the "lower" genres, in comedy and parody, it has been allowed to occupy the central spot, but in those cases its presence is legitimated by an appeal to "lower" genres and never regarded as a serious matter of poetry.

If the body, then, is conceived of as a mere ornament of the soul, as the material hindrance that prevents the soul from ascending to sublime spheres, this situation is definitely changing

at the end of the 19th century. The most prominent exponent of the revival of the body, with profound philosophical and not the least aesthetic implications supporting his theory, is Friedrich Nietzsche. According to him the marginalization and rejection of the body were wholly the responsibility of Western and Christian metaphysics, “stuffed” with values that conveyed “That contempt has been taught for the primary instincts of life; that a ‘soul’, a ‘spirit’ has been *lyingly invented* in order to destroy the body; that one teaches that there is something unclean in the precondition of life, sexuality” (Nietzsche 1992: 102), in short, a turning-away from life itself. Focusing on those areas of the body where inner and outer worlds might converge — that is, the areas Bakhtin considered to be essential in forming grotesque images, all bodily openings and all protruding parts — Nietzsche generates a fascinating pattern of grotesque images, rejecting the cerebral and idealistic Western tradition by making the salvation of Man depend on physiological conditions: “I am interested in quite a different way in a question upon which the ‘salvation of mankind’ depends far more than it does upon any kind of quaint curiosity of the theologians: the question of *nutriment*.” (Ibid. 21). In *Ecce Homo* he develops a complete gastronomy and a metabolism which is intimately connected to the realm of aesthetics, discussing among other things the constipating effect on genius troubled by slow metabolism, prescribing dry air and a clear blue sky to increase the digestive speed. At the basis of these physiological references in relation to genius lies Nietzsche’s insistence on the fact that “aesthetics is nothing but applied physiology.” (Nietzsche 1969, VI, 3: 416).

How shall we interpret these enigmatic formulas — literally or figuratively? It seems as if Nietzsche really wants to obscure this partition between figurative and literal by juxtaposing a spiritual and physiological interiority: “I possess a perfectly uncanny sensitivity of the instinct for cleanliness, so that I perceive physiologically — *smell* — the proximity or — what am I saying? — the innermost parts, the ‘entrails’, of every soul.” (Nietzsche 1992: 18). This process of detecting the soul through the senses is quite parodying, as if the depth of the soul were attainable in the concrete aspect of perception. However, it remains “as if”; there is no possibility of making a final decision — the boundaries between image and reality, intellect and body, interiority and exteriority, are

obscured: "Everything is in the highest degree involuntary but takes place as in a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity... The involuntary nature of image, of metaphor is the most remarkable thing of all; one no longer has any idea what is image, what metaphor, everything presents itself as the readiest, the truest, the simplest means of expression." (Ibid. 73). This statement has enormous consequences for linguistics and semantics. When the markers of fiction (rhetoric) have turned into, if not facts, then at least non-fiction, what happens to the idea of substitution in metaphor — there is no substitution, there is only metaphor. Furthermore, the result is that metaphors are conceived of literally, as if these figurative expressions conceal a literal core, an idea that Heidegger fully embraced. This concretization and literalization of metaphor might indeed generate grotesque images. From the Finnish-Swedish modernist Elmer Diktonius I choose the following astounding example, which in addition reveals the intense preoccupation of modernism with linguistic issues: "What if I, when life was pressing and I *expressed*, exposed my intestines and other things. I had to — and that is the way I am." (Diktonius 1922: 31). Diktonius is here taking advantage of the concrete depth of the abstract concept "expression", out of which he generates a truly grotesque image, implicitly referring to Nietzsche's confusion between literal and figurative, and exploiting the modernist notion of the materiality of medium, that is, realizing that for example words and paints are not just vehicles of signification but also something in its own right, a corporeal entity.

Despite Nietzsche's degradation of everything metaphysical and ideal there are connections to another kind of sublime discourse, a textual one, in which there is no *denotation* but always *figuration*. Beyond the figurations of language there is an unattainable chaos, of which only the body can be a figure. The body is the intermediate locus between the absolute chaos of the world — the utmost ground which remains concealed — *and* the simplifying practice of the intellect; it is the locus of interpretation: ingestion, digestion and the expulsion of excrements are indeed metaphors for interpretation — an ingestion, a digestion and a creation of the world, but this procedure is but an image, a figuration, a perspective. These bodily images constitute the basis of the imagery in expressionism, an imagery partly mediated by



Nietzsche. Therefore the body in 20th century modernism tend to be opened, swallowing the world or pouring out interior substances in a constant interpretation of the world.

When language no longer is the reliable instrument for depicting the world, modernism — or let us say, parts of modernism — tries to bridge the gap between the world and language, filling out this empty space by materializing the abstract character of language, and — not the least, abolishing the hierarchy between figural and literal language, no longer considering the figural level as a mere ornament, but as the inevitable outcome of the production of language. The former is a serious attempt to really bridge this gap, an attempt which at the outset is doomed to fail; the latter is aware of the impossibility involved in this project. At the crossroads of these two strategies lies the grotesque, displacing both body and figurative language to the centre; the grotesque might be described as the ultimate failure of a language unable to depict the infiniteness of the world, reduced to multiple meanings in the grotesque image. “‘Grotesque’ is a word for this paralysis of language”, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham says Harpham 1982: 6), and finally reverting to the ingenious Friedrich Schlegel: “All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art.” (Schlegel 1967, II: 324).

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## The Polyglot Grotesque

JÜRI TALVET

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The three definitions of the grotesque as “art of transitions from one form of life into another” (Pinski 1961: 119), as “an inexhaustible vessel of death and procreation” (Bakhtin 1965) and as “a world vision”, rather than a mere a set of artistic means (Gurevich 1981: 322) form our conceptual starting triangle for the present discussion.

We may add other cues, such as “laughter”, “irony”, “satire”, “body”, “lowering”, “ugliness”, “ambiguity”, “relativity”, “alienation”, “contrast”, “paradox” “contraposition”, “deformation”, “exaggeration”, “aberration”, “phantastic”, “unnatural”, “bizarre”, etc., which all have been employed to characterize the complex and ever vital phenomenon of the grotesque.

When does the grotesque appear? In 1995, the fourth year of the regained political independence of Estonia and Latvia, two small Baltic states, after having shared for centuries a common historical goal and opposing likewise the suppression and occupation of their mightier neighbours, suddenly found themselves in a bitter political clash. As Latvian fishing vessels had entered Estonian territorial waters, Estonia sent its armed coast guard boats — bearing frightening names like *Thunder* and *Storm* — to drive the Latvians away. The Latvian fishing vessels, as far as I remember, had rather lyrical female names.

Life has thus provided us a postmodern grotesque situation par excellence. Two tiny states clashing on the sea appear ridiculous against the background of both Nature and History. They are Lilliputians watched by Gulliver (the sea/the Nature). The

Lilliputian Estonia is especially (self-)ridiculed by the exaggerated names it has given to its boats, by the assumption of being “a thunder of the seas”. This forms an abysmal contrast with Estonia’s almost nonexistent military force. It is probably a general rule that especially in historical “border situations” contrastive non-correspondences between appearances (including their linguistic sign) and essences are revealed.

Erotic connotations are not missing in the situation, as Estonia pretends to be the great “macho” of the Baltic, imposing his sexuality on the tender and womanly Latvia. The sea “idyll” of the Warrior and the Maid, however, is sadly contrasted by the prosaic economic reality, the everyday need which in the new “market” conditions makes even friendly neighbours quarrel. I would call the grotesque postmodern, since against the background of the deconstructed ideological systems in Europe at the end of this century, political borders themselves and their pathos are made an object of satire.\*

It is most likely that similar grotesque preambles have abounded in all ages. They were always intensely felt, for instance, under the recent Soviet totalitarian rule. There they found their expression in a huge number of political anecdotes — the “popular culture” of those times — circulating semi-officially in all spheres of the society, and also in literature, especially in the prose work of some of Baltic authors (like the Estonians Arvo Valton and Mati Unt). Though, it must be added, the grotesque language of that period was considerably curbed by the mighty presence of the “third” (the “super-addressee”, as Bakhtin has called it; Bakhtin 1976) or, a special type of the “implicit reader”, if we adapt the modern term of reception theory to the political and literary censorship of the large Soviet period.

Even so it can be observed that the grotesque in its most expressive forms has nearly always materialized in art and literature at some critical points in history. Though admitting Bakhtin’s enormous merits in his radically innovating treatment of medieval popular culture, another Russian scholar Aron Gurevich has at the same time strongly criticized Bakhtin for exaggerating

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\* Luckily, in 1996 an agreement was reached between Latvia and Estonia, resolving the fishing dispute and the grotesque it had engendered.

the role of the carnival and laughter and for too robustly separating the two poles of the same system, the “official” and the “popular” (Gurevich 1981: 274–276).

Yuri Lotman describes the “border situation”, in which the ambiguities of the language become especially accentuated, whereas an “explosion” and a subsequent “leap” to a radically different system is prepared (Lotman 1984; 1992). This should be taken into account when we read Bakhtin’s works (and those of many other outstanding Russian scholars of the Soviet period). Bakhtin (as later Lotman himself) wrote constantly in a “border situation”. To break through the wall of the dogmas of the Soviet ideology, he had to use the language *they* (the “super-addressees”, or the official ideologists themselves) spoke — the language of “materialism”, of the healthy and fertile popular culture, of “historical optimism”, of realism, etc. However, it was by means of a tremendous, almost a grotesque exaggeration of the materialistic “body” that Bakhtin could effectuate his “leap” to a substantially new quality in the interpretation of the grotesque and other cultural phenomena of the “border” between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The grotesque really seems to be an ambiguous, polyglot “border language”. Lotman has efficiently meditated about the “factor of casualty” in the history of culture (Lotman 1989). It is in the “border zones” of culture where casual factors exercise their greatest impact. Although there is no regularity in the logic of the “casual”, it is obvious that the probability of the creation of a “border language” is greater in temporal “border zones” or “peripheries” of culture than in the periods dominated by “centralizing” tendencies.

Gurevich, whose “border situation” of writing at the beginning of the 1980s was certainly somewhat more relaxed than that of Bakhtin in the 1960s, could afford levelling Bakhtin’s exaggerations. He is right in pointing out that while speaking about medieval popular culture, Bakhtin really treats almost exclusively the late Middle Ages or even the Renaissance (as in the case of Rabelais) and the urban culture. The main medieval centuries and the “great popular majority” of those times, i.e. the peasantry, are neglected (Gurevich 1981: 274). He goes on to argue that the opposition of the “body” and the “soul” and, at the same time, the

duality of the "high" and the "low", which is characteristic of medieval culture as a whole, makes the grotesque a dominant aesthetic feature, in fact, a "world vision" of the Middle Ages, and that the medieval grotesque does not contradict the "sacred" (Gurevich 1981: 279, 321, 322).

Here I must express my doubts. I am not sure at all that the grotesque can be a fundamental feature of a centralizing system. The aesthetical-historical experience shows, on the contrary, that the greatest works of the grotesque belong to the "border areas" of history. Gurevich himself admits that the medieval visionary grotesque culminates in Dante's *Comedy* (Gurevich 1981: 186). Dante elaborates the highly grotesque visions of his *Inferno* on the frontier between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where the balance of the medieval code or language becomes seriously disturbed. The "body" remains the basis of the grotesque, but the great "leap" is effectuated, as the "body" becomes historical. History inevitably individualizes the "body" by providing it with differentiating signs. The new individuality forms a part of the philosophy of the age of transition. The language of the grotesque, however, remains ambiguous, as it embraces both the values of the Middle Ages and the beginning new era. The grotesque in Dante, thus, is a polyglot body, a "translator" speaking two different languages of two different ages.

The same can be said of François Villon, in the middle of the 15th century. His time provides the medieval "periphery" for France, a temporal "border zone" filled with tensions and horrors. The "death dance" is the great cultural phenomenon of his century which had already acquired historical conscience, but under the influence of devastating plagues and wars it must have felt like gliding back into the chaos of inexistence.

As "death" was almost a taboo sign (contradicting the device of "historical optimism") in the official Soviet philosophy and aesthetics until the 1980s, it is no wonder that even the top scholars like Bakhtin and Pinski, treating the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, neglect the *danse macabre* phenomenon. It would have strongly contradicted Bakhtin's assertion that the laughter deriving from popular sources is always affirmative or birth-giving.

On the contrary, the laughter of the dancing death, though deeply rooted in the popular conscience, is never completely merry. It is mostly ironical-satirical, sarcastic, malevolent or cynical. Though Gurevich does not speak expressly of the "death dance", he is quite right when rejecting Bakhtin's claim that "frightened thinking" was only characteristic of the "official" medieval society, while the popular conscience was quite alien to any fear of death (Gurevich 1981: 170).

The grotesque in Villon's poetry follows the pattern of the "dance of death". It is at the same time laughter and bitterness, grinning and pain. While the rough physiological detail reminds us of the satirical poetry of earlier times (Rutebeuf, Juan Ruiz), Villon, on the one hand, individualizes his "testaments" by introducing abundant historical (though local) details, and on the other, to a far greater extent than Dante, making himself a participant in the "death dance". On the one hand he identifies his viewpoint with that of death (cosmic inexistence that absorbs both human generations and individual lives, i.e. a vision from "outside") and, on the other, with that of death's individual victims, including himself (a vision from "inside"). The process of earthy disappearance is funny and merry, when observed from a cosmic distance. It may be a comfort when confronted with social injustice, even revenge — as even the mightiest have to die —, but this does not remove the essential anguish of death (as death, seen from this world, always remains individual).

The interiorization of death is the new shade the grotesque acquires with Villon. I think it would be completely out of place to argue, in the vein of Bakhtin, that this means a gradual loss of the earlier integrity of popular laughter. Like in the *danse macabre* in general, laughter retains its magic and ambiguity, but gains in psychological depth, based on a scrutiny of individual conscience.

If we are to abandon Hegel's concept of a gradual perfectibility of the spirit, autonomy should be granted to any historical segment. Though Bakhtin may not have been right in adapting some of the conclusions of his Rabelaisian grotesque model to medieval popular culture as a whole, he was extremely successful in spotting the great "leap" in the transformation of the grotesque. His detailed analysis of the images deriving from the "body sequences", as he calls them, and the carnival concept of reality transmit powerfully

the great change in the relation between Man and Nature that took place, above all, during the 16th century.

There is one point that could be argued — the nature of the temporal periphery in which Rabelais is placed by Bakhtin. The same point could explain, to a certain extent, the controversy between Bakhtin and Gurevich.

Although peripheries interlap in time and space, and the “border” itself forms a characteristic nucleus or centre of any periphery (opposing the “real” centre), one could distinguish between “post-peripheries” and “pre-peripheries”. It might be argued that while Villon was in the “post-periphery” of the Middle Ages, Rabelais belonged to the “pre-periphery” of the Renaissance.

A temporal “pre-periphery” is, in fact, something prepared not so much by the past or the present than by the future. While for an author creating his texts in the “post-periphery” the centre, however relative, is in the past, and he may be quite conscious of not accepting its signs, the notion of the “pre-periphery” itself means that the “centre” is not yet ready. A “pre-periphery”, therefore, is a battleground in which the nature of the future “centre” is determined.

In fact, in the case of Rabelais, we could even speak of falling out of the “periphery” itself. His work coincides with the temporal “centre” of the European Renaissance in Italy and Spain and is very close to that even in France itself. The “border mentality” of his work produces an “explosion”, as it introduces a carnivalesque confusion and an ambiguous sense of relativity to the very “centre” of the Renaissance. In this sense, Erasmus, for instance, occupies a far more “natural” position in the transition zone. The witty grotesque of his *Encomium Moriae*, in spite of being a direct “pre-text” for Rabelais’ philosophical satire, does not bring about any cultural “explosion”, even though it undoubtedly contributes to it. Rabelais does not only distance himself from the medieval “post-periphery” but also from the new Renaissance aesthetical-philosophical “centre”. His materialistic and bodily telluric philosophy and the abundant signs he invents to convey them collide with the platonic and idealizing cultural concept of the Renaissance “centre”.

The “peripheral” nature of Rabelais philosophy is supported by his poetics. In the literary-generic context of the Renaissance



Rabelais' work also looks "peripheral". Bakhtin does not sound quite convincing in making Rabelais a part of his "novel chronotope". The "centre" of the novel chronotope at that time was the chivalric novel. With his emphatically crude carnality and "body" imagery Rabelais does not only create his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as an open parody of the novels of chivalry, but by introducing abundant fantastic images and abandoning a mere narrative scheme contradicts also the type of the realistic novel that was taking shape during the second half of the 16th century.

In fact, as a lecture from the following times would confirm, Rabelais wrote a utopian allegory rather than a novel. Even if socio-ideological images started to penetrate into the novel during the 16th and 17th century, the generic "centre" of the novel remained firmly psychological. It was supported by an active narrative "plot" which has remained, despite all deviations, a dominant feature in the fictional prose till our days.

Both the narrative plot and psychology receded mainly in those prose works which were not so much destined to convey a "story of real or invented lives", but had their first objective in analysing either a real society or presenting a project or a vision of an imaginary (ideal) society. Thus, Erasmus' *Encomium Moriae* and Thomas More's *Utopia* itself can hardly be defined as novels. Even in the case of the picaresque novel some scholars have pointed out the fact that their authors in many cases were not novelists as such, even not writers (as, for instance, the author of the most influential Spanish picaresque novel, Mateo Alemán), but socially alert intellectuals who presented their ideas in fictional or semi-fictional literary forms, mostly for satirical purposes. Neither was Rabelais himself a "real writer". As soon as the "real writers" start to employ the same literary models, psychology and an active plot reappear (as in the case of Lesage and Defoe, not to mention Thomas Mann).

The Baroque is a cultural "border area", a "periphery" par excellence. For a long time it was denied an autonomy as an historical type of culture, and even after the work of Wölfflin, Hauser and many others, it is still often regarded as a culture without its own theory — thus, a culture that is not conscious of itself.

It is no wonder, then, that within the boundaries of the Baroque the grotesque makes a flourishing appearance. Sometimes the notions of the "Baroque" and the "grotesque" have even been seen as synonymous. Both tend to extravagance, to something "beside or beyond the norm"; both have often been defined as "irrational". Baroque literature is full of paradoxes and puns which appear as a result of a play with extremes and oppositions. The paradox is the most important means by which Gracián's famous *agudeza* is produced.

However, although there is a notable inner affinity between the grotesque and the paradox (Pinski 1961: 120), a simple opposition or paradox is hardly sufficient to produce the effect of the grotesque. The latter requires almost an explosive exaggeration, a powerful distortion of the balance within the opposition itself. It is one of the reasons why medieval culture, with its dominant "centrality" and carefully balanced oppositions, hardly produces philosophically shocking grotesque images. On the contrary, the Baroque as a "border culture", characterized by aesthetic hybridization, forms almost an ideal ground for multiple manifestations of the grotesque.

Both in Pinski's and Bakhtin's writings one can find repeated claims that during the 17th century and later the grotesque abandons its "positive" comical character, becoming fragmentary and almost exclusively satirical when compared with the healthy and robust laughter of Rabelais.

In part this is true, but one may doubt if the grotesque really is something that characterizes the "centralized" system of an age. Rabelais is a great exception in Renaissance literature. Even in the Baroque, Quevedo's grotesque deformations fall out of the main current of the literary process. Besides, the grotesque hardly acquires "efficiency" without a strong and deeply individual philosophy as its basis. The grotesque language of Quevedo may be radically different from that of Rabelais but this does not mean at all that the grotesque in his work becomes "narrower", "less positive", etc. On the contrary, one could argue that in Quevedo's Baroque grotesque Rabelais' Utopian thinking model itself is made an object of parody. Just in the same way today, in post-Communist societies, the Marxist-type Utopian materialism is

being ridiculed by the “real” materialism of capitalist market economies.

The naturalistic tendency of the picaresque novel itself is turned into an ironical pastiche in *La vida del Buscón*, while the Renaissance body-enthusiasm is definitely curbed in Quevedo's *Sueños* and satirical poetry which reveal pitiless relativity in all things on earth. Quite contrary to Bakhtin's assertion that before and after Rabelais, death in (Symbolist as well as Romantical) literature is separated from the life sequence and regarded as a “boundary-post” between life and inexistence (Bakhtin 1987: 137), for Quevedo his own life and, in alike manner, all lives, are but “*presentes sucesiones de difunto*”.

Nevertheless, even the most radically pessimistic grotesque philosophy, like that of Quevedo, hides in itself a positive nucleus. To alienate, there must necessarily be something in reference to which alienation is produced. For Rabelais, it is the biological and telluric integrity of life. For Quevedo, it is the Stoical integrity of the soul and the spirit. However, in the case of Quevedo, the grotesque language becomes even subtler, as he constantly deviates from the Stoical serenity. A stable view “from inside”, as well as “from outside”, is abandoned. The author's point of view fluctuates: now it ridicules a healthy body, a symbol of power; now it turns its sarcastic laughter against the Cultist style in literature (mind games or intellectual sophistication, as found in Góngora).

It is certainly an impressive grotesque image, when in one of Quevedo's satirical sonnets — a parody on the Cultist style — a beloved lady's eye is compared with the anus, and the pupil (of the eye), with what the anus produces (*Que tiene ojo de culo es evidente...*). The eye and its pupil, symbolizing the highest perfection of life for poets of all times, are degraded to life's lowest parts, in fact, to life's direct opposition, excrement, or dead life.

Quevedo's scatological imagery shocks by its blasphemous grotesque. However, in a broader cultural and critical context Quevedo's grotesque seeks to re-establish life's violated balance. The only difference, compared with Rabelais, is that life's positive nucleus becomes much more hidden. It is revealed only in the totality of Quevedo's texts. In newer times, Poe and Kafka follow the same line of the highly ambiguous, skilfully camouflaged grotesque imagery. Dehumanization of the image reaches the point

at which an unsophisticated reader may have the impression that the image has "absorbed" the author.

One more aspect could be pointed out. The grotesque, especially in its extreme forms, as in Quevedo, means a powerful break-through in the accepted literary language. It permanently violates the literary "norm", expanding the permitted boundaries. As its imagery transcends strictly "cultural" layers, i.e. what has been admitted as a cultural "norm", it nearly always means a broadening of the literary text towards a greater social awareness. The expanding "low" reality in the 17th-century Baroque literature (in the picaresque novel, for instance) has often been characterized by the far more modern term of "Naturalism". Yet the grotesque prevailing in the cultural "border area" of the Baroque seldom resembles the fiction of Zola or the followers of the Naturalist school of the 19th and the 20th centuries. The laughter of the grotesque makes the "body" ambiguous, preventing its submission to a direct rational and positivist scrutiny. A part of the late 19th-century fiction itself (e.g. some of the mature work of Pérez Galdós and Clarín) is saved from the Naturalistic dictate of scientific seriousness not only because of its ubiquity in the Positivist "post-periphery", but also because of the revived presence of some of Baroque intertexts (especially of picaresque prose which, on the other hand, matched the ever more powerful "realistic" pattern).

By means of its explosive images the grotesque, thus, has invaded "extraliterary" or "extra-aesthetical" territories, making phenomena hitherto considered "alien" form part of the dialogue with reality in literature and art. It has "gained" for literature and art both social and socio-psychological space.

Goya's work is located in the "border zone" between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. His subtle ambiguity derives from his oscillation between the late "post-periphery" of the Enlightenment and the Romantic "pre-periphery". If we translate his famous *capricho* "*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*" simply as "the sleeping reason produces monsters", we place Goya violently and against his will into the "centre" of the Enlightenment. But if we understand the symbol as "the reason's dream producing monsters", as Valeriano Bozal does (Bozal 1994: 116), the stress shifts to revealing the "the obscure side of reality", where the

human conscience is deeply intertwined with the sexual and the telluric.

Goya discovers for Kafka the logic of dreams and its contrast with the "daily" logic as an inexhaustible source of grotesque ambiguities. He conquers for modern times the space of dreams and of the subconscious.

The difference between the "pre-peripheral" Goya and the "central" Hugo in the Romantic period would be that while in the "centre" the scale of values becomes relatively fixed, in the "periphery" it is "floating", "blurred". The famous contrasts in Hugo and, in fact, his highly fruitful meditations on the meaning of the grotesque, however, tend to establish a permanent scheme which, as it is carried from one work to another, brings about a certain simplification in the image. The author's point of view is too manifestly linked with one pole of the antagonistic opposition, that of the "good".

The grotesque imagery becomes "blurred" once again in the "post-periphery" of Romanticism — in the prose work of Edgar Allan Poe. At the same time it belongs to the "pre-periphery" of Positivist thinking and Naturalism. Even if Byron, for instance, could sign the introduction to his *The Vision of Judgement* with the pseudonym "Quevedo redivivus", and, in fact, conforms, among the Romantics, closest to the pattern of the existential grotesque, there is still a big philosophical gap between him and Poe. Even if we imagine Byron's Childe Harold nearer in time to Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym (in fact, only some 15 years separate Poe's grotesque "visions" from Byron's death), it is unlikely that Byron's *alter ego* even in an analogical existential "limit situation" (cf. the distress scene in both works) would have taken part in the cannibalism of the "crowd", like Pym does in Poe's grim story.

The "conquered time" in the grotesque would be another theme for discussion in the future. It is quite evident that a good part of the grotesque is effectuated by exaggerated imaginary "leaps" to the time that "is not yet". Therefore in Mary Shelley and Poe and of course in many newer followers of the same pattern the grotesque becomes mingled with "science fiction". However, the phantastic image, located entirely in the future, seldom produces the effect of ambiguity in the grotesque. The grotesque requires transitions. A body that is entirely separated from the historical

body is nearer to an allegory in which the characters are not made of "flesh and blood", but become mere abstractions.

I shall now make a big "leap" over several chrono-cultural "centres" and "peripheries" and add only a few words about the latest stage of postmodernism. It is not yet "ready", so we cannot determine whether we are in a "centre", in a "post- or pre-periphery". We may only guess that this *fin-de-siècle* with its imaginary border may coincide with another chrono-cultural "border zone". The basic change in the postmodern context of the grotesque seems to be, after the collapse of communism, the growing absence of ideological or ideal constructions. Dalí's languid, mutilated, gelatinous and amorphous bodies may be seen as the forerunners of the postmodern deconstruction and lack of interest in erecting any new "total grasp" paradigms. The Postmodern putrefaction of the body seldom produces laughter. The ambiguity (or double significance) is shortlived, as basic nothingness (lack of signification) often forms a solid metatext to which the apparent fluidity of texts is projected.

However, there may be exceptions. Tõnu Õnnepalu, a young Estonian writer whose novels recently have deserved international attention, has successfully employed "grotescoidal" if not "genuinely" grotesque associations in *Hind*, his latest fiction work (1995). The mechanisms of power and "official" culture are ridiculed from the perspective of cosmic nature. Then, suddenly, the perspective itself becomes defective, as the radical "otherness" is not accepted even by nature itself. It is once again a mixture of ironic laughter and bitterness, as were Villon's grotesque images, in the medieval "post-periphery".

The language of the grotesque is in a perpetual modification. Whatever its codes in different epochs, it has always been a powerful means of art and literature in revealing the "other" side of reality, both in time and space.

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## Characters, Situations and the Grotesque: Interpreting Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

ANNE LILL

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### 1. Principles of Grotesque and the Classical canon

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* on the basis of the concept of the grotesque which may be one of the key elements to its understanding.

As compared to modern literary criticism, classicists have been quite reluctant to accept new concepts. This conservatism originates from ancient critics who formed our understanding of the literary excellence of a correct style. From the time of the Alexandrian philology during the Hellenistic period, literature was evaluated mainly from the point of view of 'pure' literary genres: epic, lyric, rhetoric, tragedy, comedy, prose works of the historical or philosophical content. The division of styles together with a correct use of language and figures according to different types of literary work was established and considered a norm. It was considered a lack of skill and good taste to break the boundaries between the high, ordinary or low style, to mix the figures, to confuse the dignity of epics with the obscenity of comedy or the argumentative force of rhetoric with the suffering of tragedy.

During the last two decades, however, an attempt has been made to reconsider the traditional approach. With this, also concepts like the Bakhtinian dialogue and carnivalized literature,



among others, entered the classical scholarship\*. Most often the Aristophanean comedy gave here an appropriate material (Platter 1993: 202–204; Freidenberg 1973: 492–95; Suarez 1987: 105). Redefining the classical approach belongs mostly to the 1990s (Segal 1994: 87–89).

The grotesque has been only occasionally mentioned in connection with the ancient novel, though the origins of this idea in connection with comedy and Menippean satire are found in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. As for the *Metamorphoses*, Bakhtin did not discuss it from the point of view of his serio-comic approach. For him this novel was rather an adventure story with the idea of sin, suffering and redemption. My aim is to demonstrate how the elements of carnival and grotesque contribute better to the understanding of this novel.

## 2. Reconsidering the Ancient Novel

Inside the classical literary genres, the Roman and especially the Greek novel have been difficult to fit into the limits of the classical canon. In the novel, the demands of the correct style were often disrupted while situations and characters were untypical to the norms of classical literature. This was accompanied by the stylistic diversity on the linguistic level which was explained and evaluated as a mixture or degradation of the 'pure' literary genres such as the epic, historical prose, erotic poetry, etc. This understanding lasted through centuries and had an authority even in the 1960s and 70s. Only in the 1980s the ancient novel became a respected genre in itself with its own strategy (Morgan 1996: 63–65; Nimis 388–90).

Using the theory of poststructuralist narratology brought a new viewpoint to the ancient novel in general and to the *Metamorphoses* in particular. What was earlier considered a flaw and an inconsistency of the literary text was later reinterpreted as an inner strategy proper to the novel. These changes are connected with the name of John Winkler whose analysis of the *Metamorphoses* put

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\* One of the significant markers was the special edition of *Arethusa* 1993, vol. 26, no 2: *Bakhtin and Ancient Studies: Dialogues and Dialogics*.

into the foreground concepts like playfulness, surprise, novelty and openness. On this basis, the principles of the grotesque could provide a new opportunity for widening our understanding of the *Metamorphoses*.

Until now, the *Metamorphoses* has not been discussed specifically from the point of view of the grotesque. Nevertheless, it seems to be the *Metamorphoses* where the principles of grotesque have a special appeal.

### 3. The Story

The world created by Apuleius is an absurd one as compared to the ordinary logic of everyday events. The story is told in the first person narration of a young man Lucius who was transformed into an ass instead of a bird he wanted to become. It was an accidental error of his mistress. Then follow the adventures of this human ass. He has preserved his human reason and a way of thinking characteristic to an intelligent man and, above all, his curiosity. He is eager to observe people and study their customs. At the end, he escapes from his ass-shape and turns again into a man by a miracle of the priest of Isis.

The structure of the work contains, first, the main line of action: the adventures of a young man, Lucius. He is travelling through Greece looking for an extraordinary experience and trying to get familiar with witchcraft. He succeeds in it completely — he himself becomes a victim of magic. This is the subject of the first thematic part of the story (books 1–3). The wanderings of Lucius after his transformation into an ass are described in the following part during the next seven books (4–10). The last book, the eleventh, describes how Lucius becomes a man again and begins his service as a priest of Isis.

Inside this frame the so-called Milesian tales are interwoven and form another level of the narrative. These are short stories which are told by different people of various unusual events, sometimes funny, sometimes horrible but most often as a mixture of horror and fun. Finding the link between these stories and the main action is one of the key problems in interpreting the novel.

#### 4. Trying to Interpret the Story of an Ass

All events in the *Metamorphoses* have been interpreted from two contradictory points of view, first, as an allegorical story which has a serious didactic and religious message, and, second, as a pure entertainment without deep inner meaning. Very different themes have been thought to be the leading motives — curiosity, the uncertain play of a blind Fate, sin and punishment. To determine whether the story teaches a moral lesson (allegorical theory) or simply tells funny and exciting stories (entertainment theory) means also to decide to what extent the language of the grotesque enters the analysis of the *Metamorphoses*.

According to the older understanding, the sufferings of the ass-hero must be understood as a punishment caused by his unhealthy curiosity and erotic desires. The main hero is freed from his ugly animal shape and miserable fate only after undergoing a religious purification. This has been the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* during several centuries, and this is how the first translators of the book into English and German in the 16th century understood the story\*.

The allegoric theory seems to have strong support based on sound moral reasoning. From the 16th century onwards there has been a constant attempt to find a religious undercurrent beneath the fun. The prevailing opinion has been in this context that the novel, as a moral story, is meant to tell how a soul of a mortal man must suffer when governed by the lust of his flesh and beastly pleasures that makes a man lose his reason and virtue. The end of the novel must teach how virtue could be restored after the hero's long wandering, calamities, misadventures, how through misfortune, with the aid of God, we can find peace and happiness and reach the *portus Quietis* — the harbour of peace. This approach makes the novel of Apuleius a type of *Bildungsroman*, a path of a young man to the final exaltation. To this the elements of the adventure and

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\* William Adlington offers an allegorical reading in his introduction to the English translation in the 16th century, claiming that sensual lusts and beastly pleasures make us lose our reason and virtue and force us to play the part of a beast (XVI–XVII).

suffering can be added — this is how M. Bakhtin interprets the novel (Bakhtin 1979: 188–190). He accepted the traditional interpretation as a redemption through sufferings, a crisis and rebirth. Thus, metamorphosis becomes a vehicle for conceptualising and portraying individual fate cut off from both the cosmic and historical whole (Bakhtin 1985: 114). The carnivalesque elements have receded to the background and the moralising tendencies have been brought to the fore.

The allegoric interpretation continued to dominate until recently. We can learn from an influential literary history that the *Metamorphoses* are not simply an exciting story but is a fable with a religious moral (CHCL II 1982: 780). The sufferings are caused by a sin which is either curiosity or lasciviousness or both. According to this, Apuleius follows the Platonist route and the important characters and situations are generally understood as a Platonist allegory (Walsh 1988: 80–85). The moral would be that the sins of Lucius, his obsession with sexual lust and magic are punished and a full knowledge of the reality is gained not by magic but by the contemplation of divinity (Walsh 1970: 142, 184). The sin-theory has been developed later on a wider basis. Lucius' peregrinations would indicate then a general human search for truth, accompanied by a crisis of values, on the ground of a fundamental religious theme (Shumate 1988: 36, 58).

Now turning to other ways of understanding the novel, we may begin with the prologue: there Apuleius promises the reader that the story will offer surprise and entertainment\*. This seems to indicate the opposite idea and leaves us little hope for a serious moral. There will be simply nice and funny stories, nursery bedside tales or *aniles fabulae* as Macrobius has put it\*\*. Apuleius prepares the reader for a pleasant chat (*lepedo susurro*, *Met.* 1.1). The allegoric approach warns against believing the author's words. Funny stories would be not serious enough — they make both the author and the reader too frivolous and even wicked in his thoughts. When something goes wrong it must be because of some

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\* Ut mireris — so that you will wonder; Lector intende, laetaberis — reader, notice, you will have a fun (*Met.* 1.1)

\*\* Macrobius, *Somnium Scipionis* 1.2.8

sin and when we have improved our moral side a reward must follow.

This simply-a-nice-story theory was accompanied quite often by the underestimation of the value of the novel.

Even though *The Golden Ass* is easily read as an elaborate multi-tiered theological allegory, however, this metamorphic comedy subverts whatever pieties *The Golden Ass* as a mere adventure story has not a reputation of a high literature. It is considered as a kind of horrid nightmare, with stories of the Decameron kind but infinitely worse told; there is no study of character, it contains much wantonness and brutality being a sad picture of vice and folly (Farquharson 1951: 99).

At the beginning of this century this theory was followed by B. E. Perry who argues that the *Metamorphoses* is a collection of loosely connected tales without sustaining any single idea (Perry 1923: 196–200). Further, there can be found close parallels to the picaresque novel of modern times: the opposition of the hero to the environment, a continuous change of scene and social surroundings, a change of masters, the openness of the ending (Heine 1978: 24–28).

Even though the *Golden Ass* is easily read as an elaborate multi-tiered theological allegory, however, this metamorphic comedy subverts whatever pieties may be presented as the normative judgements of the text, and undermines its allegorical dimensions as it constructs them (Clark 1988: 14).

How must we understand then this ass lecturing us on philosophy? (*Ecce nunc patiemur philosophantem nobis asinum*, 10.33). Apuleius addresses this question to his reader but gives no answer. For the start, it seems reasonable to accept this peculiar world as it is. We may assume that the asinine form of Lucius does not symbolise anything but that he was just an ass. To the objection that in real life it does not happen there is an answer — so what? With this we have entered the realm of the grotesque where the unmatching opposites create the world of their own.

## 5. The Conditions for Creating a Grotesque World

In ancient authors, some slightly palpable elements could be found which come close to grotesque description from the earliest times. It could be observed even in the heroic epic of Homer, e.g. the character of Thersites (*Ilias* 2.212–71). Also, the comical epic poem of the war between mice and frogs (*Batrachomyomachia*) and the Attic comedy provide examples, as also do the works of ancient satire. But it is a different question when we begin to look at grotesque as the underlying principle of the whole literary work in the novel.

Turning a man into an lower animal is a curious fact by itself but as it happens, additional colour is added by the fact that Lucius became an ass instead of a bird which he wanted to become. This is not the only embarrassing mistake which happens to Lucius. It is preceded by another joke: Lucius is made a fool in the Festival of Laughter. He is tried in a mock trial which he takes seriously. He is made a butt of a joke without him understanding his situation.

A grotesque representation of events which connects high and low emotions, the tragic and the comic, the fantastic and the realistic, the ridiculous and the serious is exactly what we meet in the *Metamorphoses*. The dynamics of the main action of transformation carries a grotesque idea in itself. It brings together the opposite poles of existence — animal, human and divine. Human metamorphosis means a loss of identity, a loss of face (*persona*) and is accompanied by humiliation. The animal world is combined with the human one — the outer shape of an ass contradicts the inner reasoning of a man. The same person, the main hero goes through three stages. In every stage there remains something from the other sphere. As a human being he longed to learn about the superhuman realm. As an animal, he begins to understand people and becomes an observer of others' life. As a priest, he has problems with giving up human pleasures. From these three stages, the richest opportunity for the grotesque representation can be found in the animal stage. This is the stage which the greater part of the novel deals with. But against this fantastical background realistic images of people, places and events appear. The novel

gives sometimes quite a realistic picture of social and economic relations, bringing us close to the communal life of a Roman province (Millar 1981: 63).

Lucius wants to experience some uncommon and unnatural event. He believes in witchcraft and is eager to have a closer look at it. The witchcraft works but in quite an unexpected way — he becomes an ass himself, not simply an animal but a lower one who could be used and abused by a human. In a strange way, for depicting a grotesque picture of the world, this kind of transformation has some advantages. It is an ass who gives human opinions of people and of social values such as compassion, justice and friendship. As a man, Lucius had inadequate feelings and opinions of events and people. The results of his actions were contrary to the expectations.

His transformation into an ass makes him understand human dimension and values more clearly. The animal shape gives him an opportunity to become an outside observer among men. Lucius obtains an unexpected liberty to follow the events unnoticed by other characters. In this sense we meet in Apuleius the same type of outsider which is found in the works of Swift, Rabelais, Voltaire. The carrier of critical opinion must be someone from another planet, from another culture or from another living species (Lotman 1996: 122). They all have similar roots and resemble a fool from folklore. Apuleius has made full use of this approach and his ass becomes a witty and sceptical observer of the human world. He speaks out his asinine truth which is often more human than what human beings can offer.

When finally Lucius becomes a priest of Isis he is again detached from the human world which his asshood had temporarily symbolised (Massey 1976: 44). These transformations confirm the statement of the author at the beginning of the novel that the story will show changes in men's forms and fortunes so that the reader will be amazed (*Met.* 1.1). Creating amazement is the main strategy of the author and leaves him ample opportunity for using all possible means of the grotesque to this purpose.

## 6. The Principles of the Grotesque in the *Metamorphoses*

The aesthetic impression which is created by using the grotesque takes the world as absurd and ridiculous. The grotesque is a strong and almost angry tool for describing people and events. Surprise is the emotion that must be created by this representation where the contraries are put together by roughly mixing different aspects of life. The result is not only comical but mostly paradoxical — the normal state of affairs is turned into an exaggerated caricature.

It is this openness to the various interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* which has made it popular from the ancient time to the present. Clergymen could read it as an allegory, some other free-minded group of people — as an entertainment. They all did it according to their needs, fantasies and the level of their virtue. For some, it would be a serious confession of the author himself or the main hero of the book, Lucius. For others, a collection of bawdy tales which are but slightly relevant to the frame theme — the story of the man-turned-ass.

### 1) The Function of the Narrated Tales in the *Metamorphoses*.

Fifteen second level tales are heard by Lucius from fellow wanderers and from various strange people he meets on his way. The elements of the grotesque become evident especially in these tales which deal with magic and fantastic events. These tales, meant to amuse and entertain the reader, often go *ad absurdum* (*ut mireris*, 1.1). Having promised to tell different stories (*varias fabulas*) which caress the ears and delight the reader, the author does it with great enthusiasm. The stories run as follows.

In the first book: the story of Aristomenes about the sufferings of his friend Socrates, his unfortunate meeting with the witches Meroe and Panthia and the death of Socrates (1. 5–19).

In the second book: foreteller and swindler Diophanes (2. 11–15); Thelyphron as the watchman of the dead and his loss of his nose and ears (2. 19–31).

In the fourth book: comic tales of three inept robbers (4. 6–27).

In books four, five and six: the fable of Cupid and Psyche (4. 28–6. 24).

In books eight, nine and ten: nine tales of adultery.



In the ninth book: a tale of a social injustice (three brothers and a mean rich man) (9. 35–38).

The tales narrated in the *Metamorphoses* differ in their content but add in various ways some colour to the adventures of the man-ass Lucius. Sometimes these tales could even have a fable-like quality. There is a similarity between the functioning of the fable in the wider literary context (intertextual function) and the functioning of the tales in the ass-story. It is connected mainly with the compositional and structural function which creates the unity of the text, i.e. they somehow anticipate the end (Van Dijk 1996: 538).

In this sense the tale of Cupid and Psyche could be looked at. It covers almost a third of the novel and is found exactly in the middle of the novel. Several leading themes from the whole story echo on this tale-level (curiosity that leads to disaster, happy ending, including joining with the divinity). In the other tales the themes of witchcraft, perverse sexuality, adultery also have a link with the main story.

The inserted fairy tale of Cupid and Psyche, a beautiful story of love and trial with the merry wedding at the end, is distorted and spoiled, the elevated emotions are destroyed by putting the tender story into the mouth of a drunkard, a half-witted crone sitting in a robber's cave. On this background the arguments for taking the tale seriously as a prediction or symbol of the fate of the main hero seem dubious.

In the first half of the story, Lucius hears the tales of men who let themselves be fooled. At the same time this happened also to himself. In the middle part as an ass, he watches and hears from the side how similar misfortune struck a number of other characters. In the case of adultery and sexual perversions he tries to reveal the dirty deeds and to reveal the falsity of the guilty party (e.g. the story of the adulterer under the wicker cage, *Met.* 9.24–25, the pervert priests, *Met.* 8.26–29, the rescue of a girl from the robbers, *Met.* 6.29–29). The ass becomes a defender and the fighter for just and decent human behaviour while the humans he meets and of whom he hears represent brutal beastly habits.

The inserted tales in their variety are the major obstacle to taking the *Golden Ass* as a unified moral history. Even if we can find a theme of moral improvement in the main line of activity (Lucius becomes a priest), the short stories do not contribute to any

growth of virtue. It is quite evident that Lucius the Ass learns nothing from the examples of the tales. We must agree with Apuleius who once mentioned that these tales resemble nice old wives' tales (*lepidis anilibusque fabulis, Met. 4.27*).

## 2) Characters and the Grotesque.

The connecting link throughout the story is Lucius who undergoes a metamorphosis. In the first three books he is a young man and a traveller. At end of book three he is transformed into an ass. He escapes from this animal shape in the last, eleventh book. To let an intelligent, nice young man become an animal puts together the contrasting principles of life: sophistication and brutality, nice appearance and ugliness, human feelings and animal instincts. At the beginning of the second book there is a warning that everything can change. The outer look does not coincide with the inner character. The connection between deformity and intelligence is accompanied by the connection between stupidity and normal appearance. This becomes especially evident concerning characters who experience witchcraft and magic.

In the first book a story is told about the unhappy fate of a man named Socrates. He has fallen into the hands of woman-witches and is made by them into a living dead. His heart is cut out but he still lives through witchcraft. In this story the suspension between natural and unnatural is created. Both the narrator and the reader do not know which is a dream and which is reality. Together with the general atmosphere of uncertainty there appear contrasting emotions, surprising changes in the roles and situations.

The essential problem of life and death is made burlesque and absurd in this story. The tragic and the comic, horrible and amusing emotions are mixed: a man falls under the influence of a cruel witch who has the appearance of a nice woman. In an attempt to escape from her, Socrates is caught together with his friend Aristomenes who becomes a witness of how the witches cut out the poor man's heart. The situation of murder is described in the manner of utter grotesque (laughter and tears, fun and horror are mixed together:

I had just fallen asleep when suddenly the doors were opened with a violence far greater than any burglar could have produced. In fact, the pivots were broken

and torn completely from their sockets, and the doors thrown to the ground. My cot, being low, lame in one foot, and rotten, collapsed from the force of such assault, and I likewise was rolled out and hurled to the ground. The cot landed upside down on top of me, covering and hiding me.

At that time I experienced the natural phenomenon in which certain emotions are expressed through their contraries. Just as tears often flow from joy, so also in my excessive fear at that moment I was unable to keep from laughing, as I saw myself turned from Aristomenes into a tortoise (Met. 1.11–12).

Aristomenes, not able to find refuge from the terrible situation, tries to hang himself. The situation continues in a grotesque way when he finds that he has only one lethal weapon at hand — the same old and rotten bed. He addresses the bed in the kind of tragic monologue

... since Fortune provided me with no other death-dealing weapon than my little cot, I turned to it: "The time is now, my little cot," I said, "my hearts dearest cot, you who have endured so many tribulations with me, you who know and can judge what happened last night, you who are the only witness I can summon in my trial to testify to my innocence. I am in haste to die: supply me with the weapon that will save me." With these words I set to work unravelling the rope which was laced into the cot-frame (1.16).

Even the attempt of suicide is turned into grotesque with the rope breaking and the man falling on his supposed-to-be-dead friend. Socrates as the victim of witchcraft and his friend Aristomenes who involuntarily becomes a witness of a terrible event represent both the mixture of serious and comic behaviour. They both resemble the comic *stupidus*. From a linguistic point of view, their names allude to contrary traits of character. Socrates, as a namesake of the famous philosopher, must be a clever man. The Greek meaning of Aristomenes' name makes us expect a brave warrior spirit. In fact, just the opposite is true. Thus, the linguistic

side in the use of names helps to create a grotesque atmosphere (Hijmans 1978: 116–17).

Among the characters of the narrated tales nobody looks more stupid than Thelyphron from the third tale. He tells himself a story of his unfortunate job as a watchman of the dead. He starts work in his new job with all seriousness and eagerness, happy to earn good money, but ends with his nose and ears cut off by the witches who come to steal parts of the dead man. After waking up he does not know what has happened and thinks that everything is in order. The absurdity of the situation is stressed by the way the story is told: Thelyphron poses as a great rhetorician while telling his miserable story.

Thelyphron cannot adequately judge the situation. He over-estimates his skills and under-estimates his adversary — witchcraft. As a result, he is mutilated and loses his nose and ears\*. In this, he resembles the Grotesque Fool or *stupidus* of the mime (Winkler 1985: 289). He has to suffer the sad consequences of his foolishness when for the others he becomes an object of ridicule. In this he resembles Lucius' misinterpretation of the situation before and during the Laugh-festival and the mock-trial. Lucius has been made a fool in his fight with wine sacks in which he considers himself a hero. Subjective opinion and objective circumstances differ drastically in both cases. In the narrative sequence, the story of the unfortunate dead-watch is followed immediately by the foolish mistake of Lucius who is not physically but morally humiliated. But the insult to his self-respect and honour precedes a more severe disgrace — toward the end of the same third book he is physically degraded by having to assume the shape of an ass. In this respect the tales of Aristomenes and Thelyphron do predict the future fate of Lucius. The other question is why he is not able to learn a lesson beforehand in order to avoid his later sufferings. With this failure to learn he becomes a grotesque character first

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\* Cutting off nose and ears means to humiliate and ridicule a character. In Homer one of the suitors of Penelope resembles a grotesque figure (Od. 18.1 ff.). Iros had a huge body but little strength and he was an insatiable eater. Odysseus defeated him in fighting. The most arrogant of the suitors Antinoos threatened to cut off Iros' nose and ears (Od. 18.86).

morally and later physically. As an ass he combines in himself two poles, serious and comic, being both an ugly and despised lower animal and a witty observer of the events. He is the Grotesque Critic and the Grotesque Fool at the same time.

Among the people whom Lucius meets, both as a man or as an ass, there is a number of grotesque types. The pervert priests of the eastern goddess Cybele with their effeminate appearance and ecstatic behaviour cheat money out of simple-minded people. Robbers speak of their heroic deeds and the drunken old crone in the cave makes a striking contrast to a beautiful young girl there who was captured in the hope of getting ransom money. Adding to this company an ass with human reason we get a really colourful mixture of grotesque characters. Even the gods do not escape from some grotesque exaggeration. The respect to the goddess of charm and love, Venus, is hardly serious when she is shown raging and screaming in a very undignified manner (*Met.* 4.30).

The mixture of parody and seriousness is especially felt in female characters. Women are both dangerous (witches, cruel step-mother, a wicked baker's wife), deceitful (in the adultery tales), desirable (Photis), divine (Isis) and virtuous (Charite). One can not predict which kind of women you have to deal with next. For the travelling ass they provide a number of examples for a discussion of human nature.

### 3) Situations and the Grotesque.

Unnatural, absurd situations appear during the whole narrative. Grotesque situations frame the whole novel. The very idea of a metamorphosis includes the core of the grotesque when the fantastic element is contrasted with a realistic description of people and places. In this, human and inhuman, high and low poles in the social relations lose their ordinary limits.

A wandering ass offering philosophical remarks and commentaries to the events acts like an embodied conscience. He offers opinions on moral questions and justice. His protests are useless while he is not able to express himself in words. His asinine lips can only give out an animal cry (*Met.* 3.29, 7.3) which nobody can understand.

In different stages of the narrative, one after another, grotesque situations are created. Some of them are connected with stories of

adultery. Licentious women cheat their husbands and get away with it. A striking example here is a married woman having sex with her lover on the wine keg in the presence of her husband while the latter is cleaning the same keg from the inside (*Met.* 9.7)\*.

Grotesque situations abound throughout the whole story. Lucius fighting with the wine sacks, a witch turning her former lover into a frog who then croaks in the dregs of the wine (1.9), an ass rescuing a girl and trying to kiss her legs (6.28–29) etc. A good example is also a market scene with the hungry Lucius buying himself some fish for food. His old friend, acting as a guardian of a public order at the place, wants to punish a stallkeeper who has charged too highly for his fish. He finds a peculiar way of doing it and leaves his friend finally without any food.

#### 4) Language and the Grotesque.

One of the most striking means by which Apuleius creates an atmosphere of an absurd world in the ass story is his use of language. Next to creating grotesque characters and situations it reminds the reader almost in every page that nothing is impossible in this metamorphic fantasy.

The metaphors, personifications, not to mention comparisons (all contribute to the grotesque impression. The ass, running away from the robbers with the girl on his back is compared to the mythical heroes of the legendary past such as Arion and Phrixus (*Met.* 6.29). The description of the robbers is accompanied by phrases commenting on the dignity of robbers and their mild nature (*Met.* 6.31). The robbers have even a fiscal counsellor of their own (7.10). A special effect is reached by using legal terminology in coarse scenes and with vulgar people. The dragging along of the ass is compared to having a legal quarrel on an argument concerning a boundary dispute over the hereditary possession of the road (*causa finali de proprietate soli, immo viae heriscundae contententes*, *Met.* 6.29). The beating of a man is called the violation of his civil rights (*Met.* 7.25). The legal metaphors which contribute most to the grotesque impression are specific to Apu-

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\* This motive is used by Giovanni Boccaccio in *Decameron*, where it is a second story told in the seventh day.

leius. His use of them is often original without parallels from other authors (Bernhard 1927, 194–95).

Special effects are created by using literary parodies of well-known works of ancient authors. More than once the paraphrase of Cicero's speech against Catiline is used when speaking about attacks on the ass, e. g. by a stable boy (*Quousque tandem, Met.* 3.27). This eccentric use of language has been considered a lack of a good style but looking at it from the point of view of the grotesque it has its proper function in this work.

## 7. Grotesque as the Principle of Viewing the World

Accepting the concept of the grotesque in the story, all infinite errors, miracles, strange and sudden changes in the plot will be explained away. Then the whole story containing mis-takings, mis-readings of a situation leading to fatal mis-steps is in complete harmony with the rules, or rather, lack of rules, of the grotesque world.

We can take the ass-philosopher as he is — a strange mixture of different views. There is no need to discuss the pure philosophical point whether he is a Platonic, Isiac, Eleusian, Stoic, Cynic or Epicurean. The narrative trickery of the author is what counts. The metamorphic fiction of *Asinus* contains such an amount of inappropriateness and misappropriation that it makes it hard, if not impossible, to find for them one thematic thread (Lill 1991: 952–53).

In the *Metamorphoses* we find characters, situations and the whole structure of the work exaggerated and paradoxical. Behind the narrative we recognize an extravagant author who does not hesitate to disfigure, deform his characters and to represent a monstrous and distorted world in which very unusual events take place and horrible creatures appear. But in addition, the reader never can be sure when the author tells his story seriously and when he is having fun. The ironical attitude of the author toward his heroes, his reader and, finally, toward himself is strikingly evident in every stage of the narrative. He remains sceptical and ironical and in this differs from other authors of similar narratives, e.g. from Petronius (Dowden 1982: 423–24). Not only are the

characters mocked but even the reader may at times realise that he has been fooled. Together with the ass he has waited for a wrong thing to happen. All this creates a sense of shock where laugh is mixed with fright.

The elements of the grotesque contradict the allegoric understanding. The strange mixture of fun, horror, adventure and romance given in a highly artistic way makes it almost impossible to find any steady moral. When all is so effectively disguised we can not be sure even at the end that the hero, becoming a priest, is really converted. He is tired and exhausted from his troublesome adventures but he has most probably remained as curious and vain as ever.

Thus, the last, eleventh, book, where Lucius assumes a human shape again and is initiated as the priest of the cult of Isis, leaves a big question mark at the end. If it must be understood as a wholly serious event then why sudden comments from the hero about the price of conversion, why it must be done three times instead of one solemn religious ceremony. Why is the priest named Asinus (the ass? In the last scene when Lucius is walking proudly in the streets showing off his bald head we must remember that baldness is, besides being the sign of an Isis priest, also the sign of a buffoon. Here we will recall the eighth book with its effeminate and perverse priests of Cybele. One of them is also almost bald (*calvus quidem*) with small amount of grey hanging hair. To the negative, odd and repellent appearance we may add the grotesque appearance of their habits, garments, their ecstatic mad dance, their quackery which leave an unpleasant feeling toward the worshippers of the eastern Goddess. Is Cybele then very different from Isis? One must remember only the beginning of the eleventh book where several names and forms of Isis are given (Cecropeia Minerva, Venus Paphia, Diana Dictynna, Proserpina Stygia, Ceres Actaea a.o.) and among these names we meet Pessinuntia mater deum, i.e. Cybele. If the Syrian God Mother hides in the multiform Isis, how different are then the earlier described ridiculous and despicable sodomite priests from the priest of Isis? The last word in the novel indicates the continuous movement of walking around (*imperfectum — obibam*). This suggests an open end and a final answer is absent. It is rather a picaresque way of describing a hero at the end of the novel.



## 8. Conclusion

The concept of the grotesque will help us understand Apuleius' technique in telling the story of a man-turned-ass. Both the events and the language in which these events are told often contradict the sound judgement of everyday logic. We meet characters who are fantastic, ridiculous and absurd. This is a world where the reality is mixed with fantasy and the line between the tragic and the comic is hard to draw. There, in the world of the journeying ass, things and people appear upside down and the contrasting sides of life are brought together. Fantasy is mixed with reality, human and animal features are joined in a new kind of whole, tragic circumstances are shown in comic light. It is not a didactic purpose that governs the novel — nobody learns anything from their misfortune — but we are made alert and ready for any surprise. This could be a useful life experience which the grotesque can provide.

Unlike in allegory, in the grotesque the ass can take multiple faces and in the end we are left with the question of what was the meaning of all this. We must conclude that to surprise, even to shock the reader, is part of the ironically sceptical world view of Apuleius. Nothing in his world is steady, trustworthy and stable. In this sense the grotesque is not only fun or a game of fantasy but a message. There is even no certainty about who is telling the story and who participates in it — the author plays hide-and-seek with his characters and also with the readers. It seems as if the elusive author/actor is a means to create a puzzle which makes this messy ass-world hard to grasp.

For a serious philosophical-religious treatment of man's fate, the ass-story is too full of contradictions and the author enjoys too much fooling around with the fantastic and bewildering events. Apuleius does very little to help the reader find the true meaning of his story. Hinting at one direction, he leads, in a moment, our thoughts to the opposite direction entirely. Despite the protests from the seekers of the one and serious moral message, this cunning and shrewd ass has escaped most attempts of forcing him into a nice mould of one moral idea. Shock prevails and black humour puts an end to any moralising.

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## Grotesque Images in Dante's *Inferno*: the Problem of the Grotesque Overcome

ÜLAR PLOOM

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1. The discrepancy between the current usage of the notion "grotesque" and the original technical meaning of the term is huge. The latter, indicating a type of decorative ornament consisting of medallions, sphinxes, foliage, rocks and pebbles (*The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* ed. by J. A. Cuddon: 393–394; Kayser 1981: 19), found in the caves of some excavated dwellings from late 15th century Rome and therefore called *grottesco*, is purely denotative. We have a composition of diverse elements with nothing suggested about the way in which the human psyche will perceive it. The word "grotesque" (either noun or adjective) has acquired connotations through its application in various art forms where it reveals its most characteristic feature — that of the contradictory, irreconcilable and paradoxical nature of intermingling elements. It is actually through a myriad of connotations that the word "grotesque" has acquired the qualities of an independent term which has entered the vocabulary of literary terms. We may say that it represents a wide range of diverse, even incompatible signifiers brought together under the same signifier. That something is grotesquely incongruous does not, strictly speaking, proceed from the elements themselves, but from what is understood as incongruous and perceived as such. The simplest notion, or the classical idea of the grotesque is of a subverted natural order resulting in monstrous forms and themes of an intermingling human, animal and vegetable world, from which develops a strong tendency of dehumanization. Therefore the

feeling of the bizarre, the unnatural, the estranged is created. The incongruity between the perceived image and its juxtaposition to the natural world is such as to cause a mixed feeling of contradictory sensations: amusement and fear, awe and disgust, fun and terror, the comic and the tragic, the base and the elevated.

1.1. The understanding of the incongruous aspects of the world is by no means a modern invention and goes back far beyond the discovery of the *grotteschi*. Curtius (1953: 95) mentions the concept of *adynata* (*impossibilia*) already in connection with Archilochus and the famous eclipse of the sun in 648 B. C. Through Virgil, the *adynata* were also well known to the medievals, being a common *topos* of Latin mock songs (e.g. *Carmina burana*) and the troubadours (e.g. Arnaut Daniel). What is, of course, of primary importance is the interpretation of the incompatible phenomena (the topsy-turvy world) within a larger system and this varies with space and time. Therefore the modern "grotesque" is of a different nature compared to the ancient or medieval *adynata*. It is probably because of the difficulty of collocating a single notion into a clearcut cell within a general structure that scholars have never entirely agreed upon its definition. For example Kayser (*op. cit.*) stresses the overwhelmingly uncanny and unfathomable nature of the grotesque which should distinguish it from the sensation of the coarsely comic on the one hand and from the tragic on the other. One who witnesses an example of the grotesque cannot help but be torn between amusement and puzzlement, hilarity and terror, although the sinister, the ominous component seems to prevail in the end, despite a certain playfulness on the part of the author. Bakhtin (1965) on the other hand has pointed to the comic and liberating effect of the grotesque in connection with Rabelais and the spirit of the Renaissance. The carnival tradition, rooted deeply in medieval and renaissance popular culture, is of an ambivalent nature, uniting death and rebirth, chaos and new order, the individual body and the collective body of Nature. Kayser himself, in an earlier work (1965: 384–385), has suggested that the way in which the grotesque is integrated into the general structure of a work should be carefully studied. Gurevich (1984: *passim*) shows the possible method of finding reasonable interpretations of outwardly grotesque elements in medieval iconography, where the grotesque is subjected to symbolic hierarchy. As to "image" and

“concept” or the two sides of a poetic unit, Frye (1990: 136) maintains that “the meaning or pattern of poetry is a structure of imagery with conceptual implications.” All this highlights the problem of the grotesque as a phenomenon, a method and an objective to be viewed within the framework of macrostructures.

2. The aim of this paper is to discuss some problems connected with the imagery of the grotesque in Dante’s *Inferno* and to define its nature within the conceptual structure of that work. An attempt will be made at a kind of typology of the manifestations of the grotesque in the *Inferno*. To this end the general setting, the characters, their statics and dynamics, some elements of composition and a number of situations will be observed. The grotesque will be viewed as a phenomenon, as a method and as an objective.

2.1. That *Inferno* itself is an image of utmost estrangement is obvious. This results from the unchangeable monstrous order (read: deviated life, disorder) of existence in Hell when compared to life on earth (real life), and its opposition to the divine order of life in Paradise (ideal life). Existence in Hell is also a kind of life, yet it is subverted life, both really and ideally. On the other hand, the fantastic and the grotesque cannot be simply opposed to the real, for it is only in relation to reality that the fantastic and the grotesque may be perceived at all. It is not coincidental that one of Auerbach’s most convincing arguments in his *Mimesis* (1991: 194) is that despite the fantastic imagery, we must see the underlying realism in Dante’s *Comedy*. Technically this is only natural, for Dante (or anybody else) could not have depicted the maledicted underlife but by recourse to his knowledge of this world and by reversing its natural order, so producing deviation and chaos within the framework of some higher order. Kayser (1981: 180) maintains that the essential nature of the grotesque is not concerned with the moral order, which may dilute its effect. Yet we must remember that even if this order is established on a universal, macrotextual level, grotesqueness does not necessarily dissolve on the microtextual level and the conflict between various contexts will never be resolved in full. When we observe, for example, the punishments which are inflicted upon the miserable, we see an intermingling of natural and unnatural nightmarish elements. To be more exact, the elements taken individually are real; it is their

combination which creates the feeling of the bizarre, the estranged, the uncanny, the comic, the sinister, the horrific. There is nothing strange in being naked, yet it is unorthodox to imagine crowds of naked people in a large space except, perhaps, in a sauna. It is stranger still that in their naked state they do curious things, or that curious things are done to them. They cannot prevent this. They chase a banner which they will never reach (the Vestibule), they are bitten continually by flies and wasps (natural elements in themselves), or they are turned head first into burning ditches, their feet kicking out of the ditch until another sinner is pressed upon them and they pierce further into the burning earth (Malbowges, Subcircle III). Alternatively they are pressed into ice so that they cannot even weep, as their very tears freeze (the frozen lake of Cocytus, Circle IX). Ice is natural. Crying is natural. That a liquid should freeze is natural. Lying forever alive in ice with your tears turning into ice and blocking your eyes for good seems absurd. In general the four elements — water, air, fire, earth — are all depicted in extreme alienation from their natural state. However, in Dante's *Inferno* all things, despite having a wild, chaotic appearance and uncanny nature, have a fixed pattern and a fixed order. Therefore we must ask, if we do not actually deal with the instances of apparent grotesque, is the grotesque then resolved and overcome? We shall try to answer this question after discussing some manifestations of the grotesque through which we shall try to construct a kind of typology.

3. The grotesque in the *Inferno* may be considered according to the following three basic types:

1. character grotesque;
2. pattern grotesque or structural grotesque;
3. situational and plot grotesque.

3.1. As to the character grotesque the following constituents may be considered:

- a. appearance
- b. speech/sound
- c. behaviour
- d. transformation (metamorphosis)

Let us begin our limited and rather selective survey of the immense gallery of grotesque character images with Minos, whose



Eduard Wiiralt (1898–1954): *Hell* (1930).



function in the second circle (the first circle proper) of Hell is that of infernal judge.

Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia:  
 esamina le colpe nell'entrata;  
 giudica e manda secondo ch'avvinghia.  
 Dico che quando l'anima mal nata  
 li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;  
 e quel conoscitor delle peccata  
 vede qual luogo d'inferno è da essa:  
cignesi con la coda tante volte  
quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.  
 (V, 4–12)

Dante has transformed this Virgilian character into a monstrous being, a strange human, animal and demonic mixture. Minos has a tail which has become itself the instrument of weighing sins and pronouncing just sentence. The procedure seems rather bizarre, even comic. The number of times Minos wraps the tail round his body, that number of circles has the sinner to descend through the subverted cone of Hell to his final place of torture. We witness here the doubleness of the image. The first is of an *ad hoc* character, something which coincides with the impression of the sinner who comes before Minos and feels the inevitable necessity to reveal the whole truth about himself. That is the effect of both Minos' function and his horrible appearance, and there is an element of the grotesque through the addition of a tail and a terrible snarling grin (the Italian *ringhia* creates both visual and acoustic associations). Despite its novelty in relation to the Minos whom we know from Greek Mythology, this would not suffice to create a true image of the grotesque (at least not for the reader accustomed to the monstrous imagery of pagan myths), if it were not shortly afterwards accompanied by the bizarre, even comic behaviour. This "connoisseur of all transgression's" (*conoscitor delle peccata*) strange manner of sentencing (focusing on the tail as well) transforms the initial image. The discrepancy between the solemn, fierce function of Minos and his bizarre gesture turns him into a caricature of a judge. The comic element is later reinforced by Virgil's words in answer to Minos, who greets this newcomer, who has ignored the "rules of the house" by coming there alive with the following speech:

“O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio”,

.....

.....

“guarda com’entre e di cui ti fide:  
non t’inganni l’ampiezza di entrare!”

(*ibid.* 16, 19–20)

to which Virgil replies,

“ Perchè pur gride?”

(*ibid.* 21)

The elevated style of Minos, epitomized by his words “the house of pain” (“il doloroso ospizio”) is congruous with his function and incongruous with his method of sentencing. Virgil’s style is also elevated, yet there is a comic undermining of Minos’ authority.

The comic seems to reach an extreme and result in a complete caricature when we learn, much later, in Canto XXVII (124–127) from Guido da Montefeltro, who has been condemned to the eighth subcircle of Malbowges (*Malebolgia*) for evil counselling, that when Minos measured his placement he girded himself eight times and bit his tail ferociously while doing it.

Yet this is not comic despite its comic element. The gesture itself, the biting of the tail, is symbolically very suggestive as it closes the circle (*ouroboros* — the snake biting its tail) and indicates a final decision. It is an omen and, as such, ominous, something which appals. We must not forget that it is the sinners themselves that confess all their wrong-doings when seeing Minos, who has also been interpreted as their own conscience. This is, then, a kind of allegory of conscience, yet it does not lessen the insinuated feeling that “you will be judged in this way too”. In any case it is very difficult, if not impossible, to remain impartial and not feel personally and directly involved in the scene. And that is what, according to Kayser (1981: 118), differentiates the grotesque from a manifestation of the purely comic, in which a certain distance is maintained. Let us recall that Aristotle defined the comic as the ugly without pain. Indeed there is in the figure of Minos an element of the horribly comic, of bizarre derision, but this transforms into another feeling when we realize that behind the

mockery of the infernal judge stands God's judgement and punishment. That this is really so is affirmed by the grim stories and terrible tortures which the sinners have to suffer and which we, following Dante and Virgil, witness. The immediate and irrevocable conviction, the insubvertable order on the macrotextual level does not allow the liberating laugh which is permitted in many instances of the grotesque in later renaissance works. Here the grotesque transforms into tragedy. We probably have to observe the phenomenon from different positions. If we take the standpoint of Dante the protagonist, we are initially appalled and amused and perceive the sense of the grotesque. If we take the standpoint of Dante the author and theologian, we are appalled again, yet this is different, as we now perceive primarily the tragic side of the punishment and its relation to divine order. And it is this perspective which seems to remain with us. Alienation is overcome in spirit and becomes sublime.

So, here we have a case of the two-stage transformation of the initial image. Minos is not what he is, yet he is what he is not, albeit on another level. This presents a double paradox. The bestial, demonic, mythological character Minos, fierce judge, of whom we expect dignity, acquires a grotesquely comic hue, very much in accord with the subverted character of the general atmosphere of the passage, and restores tragic dignity on the macrotextual level. We actually have three different stages of one and the same image in its dynamic development, resulting in an image of the grotesque vanquished. Moral allegory dilutes the power of the grotesque. However, the grotesqueness of Minos will never dissolve completely, for despite the idea that Minos forms a link in the general chain of order, we shall never understand fully why he is as he is and thus the grotesque image remains. Although overcome in spirit, the grotesque remains in body.

In the same way we could, by departing from the phenomenon and the perception of the grotesque, observe the whole gallery of the characters which the *Inferno* offers. As this is clearly impossible within the scope of the present article, let us therefore dwell upon only a few cases-in-point. The four afore-mentioned devices of grotesque character building cannot always be equally seen. There are characters in whom the outward grotesque appearance is

prevalent: these are, for example, the Cerberus, the Minotaur, the Harpies, some centaurs, some Christian devils, some giants. There are other examples where the characters' speech is as relevant as the appearance. For example Pluto speaks in the fourth circle (the misers and the spendthrifts) in a strange language:

“Papè Satan, papè Satan aleppe!”  
cominciò Pluto con la voce chioccia;  
(VII, 1–2)

The menace of the name of Satan in an unidentified tongue, which vaguely resembles Greek, and the sound image of the cackling or clucking voice, suggesting a hen, with which the frightful menace is uttered, are in a strange and comic opposition. The incongruity reaches an extreme when we discover that this sound comes from the mouth of a creature who is very much like a wolf, as Virgil says,

Poi si rivolse a quella infiata labbia,  
e disse: “Taci, maladetto lupo;  
consuma dentro te con la tua rabbia. (“)  
(*ibid.* 7–9)

Pluto's reaction to Virgil's assertion that they move in the infernal space with the consent of the celestial will is a mixture of a disappointed dog dropping flatly down and the fall of broken rigging:

Quali dal vento le gonfiate vele  
caggiono avvolte, poi che l'alber fiacca,  
tal cadde a terra la fiera crudele.  
(*ibid.* 13–15)

Yet we cannot enjoy the comedy for long, for a few moments later we witness a joust between the two rows of sinners, the misers and the spendthrifts, who roll heavy stones against each other and clash, flinging reciprocal insults. The incongruous character manifesting in the appearance, the speech and the behaviour of the guardian of the circle — Pluto — is nevertheless in keeping with the incongruous characters of its inhabitants. The coarse comic of the strange battle and insults, during which even Virgil falls from his elevated style to a coarser tongue, is

juxtaposed with the horror of the invincible rage of the contenders. Again, the infinite quality of the punishment destroys the comic hue. The grotesqueness of the image, mitigated and transformed when placed and understood within the general hierarchy of punishment, will nonetheless never disappear completely.

The same may be observed in many other circles. In the third circle, where there is the Cerberus and punishes the gluttons, the latter howl very much in the same way as their oppressor does. In this connection we might recall the howl of Anita Eckberg in Fellini's *La dolce vita* when she hears a dog howling nearby. The phenomenon is clearly grotesque, for it comprises both a humorous angle and the strange, uncanny and menacing feeling this begets. That is exactly what the look of Marcello Mastroianni tells us. The howls of the miserable within the reach of the claws of the Cerberus are certainly grotesque, despite being understood in the framework of the *contrappasso* — the punishment sentenced in accordance with the nature of the sin.

An example of a grotesque, thoroughly meaningless speech is the speech uttered by Nimrod in the Well of the Giants. Nimrod, the biblical king who undertook the construction of a tower climbing to Heaven (as a result of which God mixed human tongues) now, as huge as huge can be, supports the structure of the Well — through which the poets may reach the bottom of Hell, where traitors are settled — along with those other giants who have rebelled against God's will. In spite of his almost immeasurable gigantic form, he is unable to produce a meaningful utterance.

“Raphèl màì amèch zabì almì”  
 cominciò a gridar la fiera bocca,  
 cui non si convenia più dolci salmi;  
 e ‘l duca mio ver lui: “Anima sciocca,  
 tienti col corno, e con quel ti disfoga,  
 quand’ira o altra passion ti tocca!  
 Cercati al collo, e troverai la soga  
 che ‘l tien legato, o anima confusa,  
 e vedi lui che ‘l gran petto ti dogà.”

(XXXI, 67–75)

The horn referred to is the one whose terrible plaintive sound had made Dante the protagonist think of Orlando's horn blowing out in a vain call for help. The idea is that Nimrod's horn can speak more than his mouth, although both call to no avail. The sound grotesque is emphasised by the contradiction between the gigantic body of Nimrod and his idiocy. He is both stupid and helpless. There is even something childlike about him, though it is that terrifying childishness that we witness in an insane person. The perception is both bizarre and sad, repulsive and tragic, all of it at the same time. And again, explained or not, we will never escape the feeling that this may happen to us. We will be inflicted if we trespass, yet this only lessens the effect of the grotesque, it does not abolish it.

To find grotesque expressed most impressively we may observe the figure of Geryon in Canto XVII. In Greek mythology Geryon was a monster, killed by Hercules, who had a human form with either three heads or three conjoined bodies. Dante presents him as the image of Fraud with the face of a just man and an iridescence of beautiful colour, the paws of a beast, sharp wings and a poisonous sting in his serpent's tail (*Inferno* transl. & comm. by Sayers: 178). The behaviour of the beast is congruous with his incongruous body. He does not show himself in full. Virgil and Dante see first his just face and bust, i.e. his apparently human part, as he hides the beastly side.

E quella sozza imagine di froda  
sen venne, ed arrivò la testa e 'l busto  
ma 'n su la riva non trasse la coda.

La faccia sua era faccia d'uom giusto,  
tanto benigna avea di fuor la pelle,  
e d'un serpente tutto l'altro fusto;

(XVII, 7-12)

Geryon's conduct is as grotesque as his appearance. We should also remember the bizarre way in which Virgil had managed to contact the beast — letting the girdle of Dante's garment down into the abyss so that Geryon could climb up and face them. Yet the height of the grotesque is reached when it appears that the two poets cannot experience Malbowges (*Malebolge*) where the

fraudulent are punished until they sit on his back and let him carry them like a flying ship, or a swimming snake (“eel” — “anguilla” — is actually the word Dante uses) or a falcon which circles, circles and suddenly drops into Circle VIII.

The modern image would be that of an airplane landing in smooth circles over a town where red lights (the lights of the tall fires in which some of the fraudulent are being punished in *Malebolge*) are burning and we do not know what they mean. Dante the character is truly appalled at the sight. Even if we discover later that the red lights are the flames in which the fraudulent burn, we cannot rid ourselves of the image of this grotesque vision. It has been suggested that within the figure of Geryon is the image of Antichrist and this should explain Dante's feeling of terror. Yet an image as such will always remain grotesque.

Here we certainly come across situational and plot grotesque alongside character grotesque.

Another example of behaviour grotesque is that of the Christian devils who may, besides their vulgar and base ways, also act and speak like *scolastici*. Let us observe the episode in Canto XXVII with Guido da Montefeltro. Guido had been a counsellor of fraud to Pope Boniface VIII on condition that the Pope would give him absolution from his sins. Before death he had retired to a franciscan monastery. Guido tells the two poets how it had happened that he had come to Inferno:

Francesco venne poi, com'io fu' morto,  
per me; ma un de' neri cherubini  
li disse: Non portar: non mi far torto.  
Venir sen dee giù tra' miei meschini,  
perché diede il consiglio frodolente,  
dal quale in qua stato li sono a' crini;  
ch'assolver non si può chi non si pente,  
né pentere e volere insieme puossi  
per la contradizion che nol consente”.  
O me dolente! come mi riscossi  
quando mi prese dicendomi: “Forse  
tu non pensavi ch'io loico fossi!”

(XXVII, 112–123)

This is in striking contrast with the vulgar and ferocious activities we witness in the conduct of the devils in the previous cantos which describe *Malebolge*. (It rather resembles the educated style of the later Renaissance devils who philosophise and preach, advising more frequent visits to the mass). In the previous cantos they behave vulgarly and basely, reminiscent of the coarse and burlesque images of the medieval imps we know, for example, from the *De Babylonia infernali* of Giacomino da Verona, very much in accord with Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque of popular culture. Yet this aspect of a (feigned or real) ability to reason like a logician makes the image of the Christian imp decidedly uncanny. This is also stressed by Dante's term "neri cherubini" which suggests that, monstrous or not, we do have the fallen angels or intelligencies, the once glorious cherubins, next in glory to the seraphs. Therefore we perceive the combination of a strange feeling of some awe and fright, in the same way as Guido does, which broadens the hitherto base image of the fiends who shout, fight and tell lies in the fifth subcircle of *Malebolge* where the barrators are forked by the imps in the boiling pitch.

There are certainly quite a few manifestations of the comic in these cantos of *Malebolge* in which Christian imps appear. It has even earned the name of the Rhapsody of Devils ("la rapsodia dei diavoli") (Pagliaro 1967: 311 etc.). They are disciplined like soldiers. To show to their troop leader Barbariccia (Barbiger) that they are ready to obey his command they pull out their tongues. And the vulgar signal which the leader gives is that of a "bugle of his breech". Thus the wide gamut of impish behaviour combines ferocity, comedy, vulgarity, wit, fallen and transformed dignity. The comedy and the derision of these cantos have often been connected with Dante's personal fate and his being accused of and exiled for barratry. For example Pirandello has called the episode "the grotesque representation of Dante's own condemnation."

Now let us consider some cases of metamorphosis. This is often a characteristic of the tortured spirits in hell. It is more than a mere transformation, it is a complete change and rechange in substance, although in Hell there is no bodily matter but the spiritual substance of the sinners until they regain their bodies after the Last Judgement, which will make suffering worse. For example, in the



second sub-circle of Circle VII, where the violent against their own bodies, suicides, suffer, we discover that they are transformed into plants. The two poets find themselves walking in a dry wood where the Harpies make their nests. The trees enclose the souls of the suicides. When Dante by chance breaks a branch, it begins to bleed and Pier delle Vigne tells his sad story. He had been honoured in King Friedrich's court in Sicily. Accused of conspiring against the King, he was disgraced, imprisoned and stabbed blind and he took his own life in despair. Suicide is sin against one's own body. Therefore there is the metamorphosis of the human bodies to trees and bushes.

Metamorphosis and the transformation of substance creates an extreme perception of estrangement, which reaches its height in the seventh subcircle of *Malebolge* (Circle VIII) where the spiritual bodies of thieves transform into snakes and other reptiles (XXV, 49–79).

Here we witness the transubstantiation of Agnello o Agnolo Brunelleschi, a Florentine thief. The utmost transformation — metamorphosis — certainly suggests the idea that the essence of a thief transforms itself into a beast, in this case a terrible snake, and gives us an utterly grotesque image of the thief's nature. It is as impossible to believe one's eyes as it is to trust the thief's nature. We see both, man and beast (as with Geryon), yet we are not sure where the one ends and the other begins. This is said in a nutshell in verse 77: the perverse image — both at once and neither which, indeed, comprises the essence of the feeling of the grotesque. You have both things in their extremes and neither, i.e. nothing, which causes terror and bewilderment. This is the image of the destruction of the self.

Right after the image of this grotesque transformation there comes another, even more suggestive image of a double metamorphosis: the intermingling of a man and a snake, in the course of which the man transforms into a snake, and the snake transforms into a man. The snake becomes the mask of the thief, and man's mask becomes the mask of the snake.\* (XXV, 91–144).

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\* Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that the Latin *persona* comes from the Etruscan *phersu* and means initially "mask".

Dante the author is proud of his ability to compete with and exceed in skill the ancient masters of metamorphosis. Dante the protagonist is bewildered at the sight. Orwell's *Animal Farm* ends with the same kind of bewilderment when the animals who go to the Farmhouse and peep through the window cannot make out the faces of the participants in the feast, for both the pigs' and the men's faces have blurred and transformed into each other and it is impossible to make out which is which. A powerful grotesque! In the case of the metamorphosis depicted by Dante, we are invited to discern the reasons for this transformation, and we may make an attempt at understanding it as a symbol, yet we cannot dismiss the image as such.

3.2. At the same time we cannot help but admire the grotesque in the technical sense which Dante has managed to paint. It is a splendid image of a grotesque ornament, in perfect symmetry, surely the very best in the *Inferno* and has thus merited being quoted here in full. Such pattern or structural grotesque is actually visible in the whole construction of the *Inferno*. This is determined by the rigid structure of its spiral construction which Dante the author now and then admires despite its great horror, as perceived by himself as protagonist. This structure is everlasting, yet the elements of the general pattern undergo certain transformations which are of local character and dynamics so that the general statics of the macropattern do not change. The observer perceives this fluctuation of ornamental elements before his very eyes. If it were a mere arabesque, he could enjoy its aesthetic effect, yet when he thinks himself within the frame he cannot help being appalled. The perceived discrepancies are those of the grotesque.

Among other examples of pattern grotesque (micropatterns), we may recall the imaginary pattern of the joust in Circle IV, mentioned before, where the misers and the spendthrifts, positioned in two semicircles, clash together rolling before them heavy rocks like two semicircles of knights jousting with lances. Then they move back again and everything is repeated. Or we may picture the mirror-like surface of the frozen river Cocytus from where the heads of the traitors of relatives and homeland stick out like the snouts of frogs with teeth that clatter like storks' beaks. A pattern of frogs and storks in a cold aesthetic mirror. Yet there and then Count Ugolino tells a most terrifying story of the

gruesome starving to death of his sons and grandsons, and the aesthetic pattern gives way to a mixed feeling of the cruelty of the human world and a deep compassion for the human being within him, though he may have erred, a feeling which, despite its most contradictory nature, is absolutely real.

3.3. Last but not least let us observe some cases of situational and plot grotesque. We already perceived the absurdity of Virgil and Dante, both haters of fraud, having to journey on the back of its very image — on Geryon. Despite its absurdity, this is congruous with the whole plot of the *Inferno*. In order to get out of the wood of sin (Canto I), Dante has to witness personally what is the fate of the sinner, for which he has to let Virgil lead him into the Underworld. Besides plot grotesque there are many occurrences of situational grotesque. For example in Circle III, where the gluttonous suffer, the poets have to tread on the spiritual bodies of the miserable which are lying under the everfalling rain.

While walking amongst the heads that stick out like those of frogs from the frozen pond of Cocytus (Circle IX), Dante stumbles into the face of a traitor. The face belongs to Bocca degli Abati who had betrayed the *Florentini* in the battle of Montaperti (won by the *Senesi*) by cutting off the hand of the Florentine standard-bearer thus throwing the Florentine army into panic. It may be a kind of personal vengeance on Dante's part against the traitor of his native city, yet the situation is very confused. It may as well have been fate or chance and this makes us puzzled. The walk among the doggish faces is of course grotesque *par excellence*.

Perhaps one of the best examples of situational grotesque is to be found in Canto XXX (the tenth subcircle of *Malebolge*) where the impersonators, the falsifiers of persons, run here and there and bite others. Gianni Schicchi, a will forger, attacks ferociously Capocchio, a falsifier of metals. This scene, which in its ferocity resembles that of Cocytus where Count Ugolino bites the nape of his enemy bishop Ruggieri, is already grotesque in itself. Yet when Dante asks for an explanation of another person (Griffolino d'Arezzo) he does it with the following words:

“Oh!” diss’io lui, “se l’altro non ti ficchi  
li denti a dosso, non ti sia fatica  
a dir chi è, pria che di qui si spicchi”.

(*ibid.* 34–36)

“If there is no one to bite you for the moment” is extremely grotesque. It suggests that violence is a norm in *Inferno*. Therefore the deviation from this norm, although a grotesque norm, is unexpected, and the whole situation is entirely grotesque. The grotesque in this situation is created by the discrepancy between expected violence and its being suddenly missing, whereby something which is normal within a normal order of things is perceived in inversion. This should make us extremely cautious. What is then grotesque and what is normality? Where is the grotesque: in things or in the way we see them?

The possible typology of the grotesque (the grotesque overcome, yet never in its entirety) in Dante’s *Inferno* comprises thus 1. character grotesque (or elements of the grotesque in the general setting); 2. pattern or structural grotesque (or the positioning of different characters in their determined cells, as in a grotesque ornament); 3. situational grotesque (or the relative shifting and fluctuation of these elements within a fairly fixed pattern); 4. plot grotesque (or the movement of the observer’s eye through the grotesque structure).

4. Our final task in this article is to discuss the grotesque as a phenomenon, a method and an objective. Let us therefore observe the final grotesque image beheld by Dante and Virgil in *Inferno* before coming out to see the stars again (“a riveder le stelle”). Our aim is not the mere description of the fallen bearer of light — *il Lucifero* — in his terrifying degradation, his three terrible faces in three colours devouring the three biggest traitors ever — Judas, Brutus and Cassius- he himself crying from his six eyes, waving his bat wings, and so producing the ice down at the bottom of Hell. We certainly recall in this connection the image which Goya has painted of the Saturnus devouring his children. But let us leave it for the time being and follow Dante and Virgil who, in order to get out of Hell, have to climb down his body, for Lucifer, after having been cast out of Heaven, down into the middle of the Earth, from the other side, that of the Southern Hemisphere, has pierced half

through the centre of the Earth. Thus in order to get through the centre of the Earth into the Southern Hemisphere, where Mount Purgatory lies (the only piece of land remaining after all the rest had fled from it in fear of the fallen angel), they have to climb down Lucifer's furry body. When they reach the very centre of the Earth, Virgil and Dante, clinging to him, make a sudden turn, so that their heads are now in the direction where their feet were before (Cf. Frye 1990: 238–239). When Dante now looks back he sees to his bewilderment that Lucifer is standing on his head. This is another powerful image of the subverted order of the normal state. Yet Virgil explains to him why it is so and Dante understands that it is normal. It is not that Dante has seen wrongly. To him Lucifer really stood on his head. In order to have restored the previous perspective he should have now himself stood on his head, and this would have been absurd. He perceived it as a phenomenon of the grotesque, until receiving a satisfactory explanation from Virgil. The explanation enables him to understand that the grotesque is part of the divine order. Disorder, or subverted order is a kind of order within the divine perspective, on the macrotextual level. Seen in the universal perspective, infernal disorder is order too, although only in *Inferno*. *Inferno* is order in its grotesqueness, as it is also realistic in its grotesqueness. Dante the protagonist sees the grotesque. Dante the author (expressed mainly through Virgil) sees the order and harmony of the Universe. Both the grotesque and realism, though contradictory, are methods by which Dante shows the underlying divine order, even in *Inferno*. Dante's language, combining different styles, is a perfect language to create the feeling of both the grotesque and the sublime. Virgil, for example, generally speaks in an elevated style. The overall vision is that of a sublime master, the embodiment of alienation overcome in spirit. And it is under his guidance, conceded by the celestial grace, that Dante observes the grotesque imagery of the Underworld, which is very realistic in its suffering, to reach higher spheres and perfect order. For Dante the grotesque is a method. It may even be an objective on the microtextual level, localized to *Inferno*, but it can never be the overall objective, the objective on the macrotextual level — in the order and harmony of the Universe. Therefore we may say that within the general conceptual structure, on the level of reason, we deal with the grotesque

overcome. Yet, on the level of physical perception, grotesque images remain, at least as far as we read the *Inferno*. They continue to lurk deep down at the bottom of our consciousness like the spirit of Mahomet, who — after explaining to Dante his being punished for sowing religious discord, with his foot in the air like that of a halted marionet — continues his walk.

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## Rabelais maître du grotesque

MADELEINE LAZARD

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Rabelais a placé son oeuvre sous le signe du rire ("Mieux est de ris que de larmes écrire", affirme-t-il dans l'adresse aux lecteurs qui précède le prologue du *Gargantua*) et sa puissance créatrice ne prend tout son sens qu'à l'intérieur même du projet comique, c'est là où se trouve sa plus grande originalité.

On a souvent souligné l'extraordinaire multiplicité du comique rabelaisien. Le grotesque s'y rattache par certains aspects. Dans un article sur "l'essence du rire" (1), Baudelaire distingue du comique significatif, tirant sa raison d'être de l'idée de supériorité, le comique absolu qu'il appelle le grotesque, le comique innocent, plus proche selon lui de la joie. Il tient Rabelais pour "le grand maître français du grotesque" (Baudelaire 1941: 175).

Les dictionnaires (le Littré et le Robert) définissent ainsi le grotesque: "ce qui fait rire en outrant ou en contrefaisant la nature d'une manière bizarre". Il devient donc synonyme d'extravagant, de fantasque et de ridicule. C'est à partir de cette définition, confrontée à celle de Baudelaire que l'on envisagera certains aspects de l'oeuvre rabelaisienne.

*Pantagruel* et *Gargantua* s'inscrivent, selon leur auteur, dans la lignée des légendes populaires, des géants, celle des *Grandes Chroniques*, qui relèvent de la littérature d'imagination. La tradition impose le recours au merveilleux et le lecteur est tout naturellement invité à accepter les sortilèges d'un monde de contes de fées qui échappe à la logique.

Rien de plus banal dans les *Grandes Chroniques* ou dans les contes folkloriques que les invraisemblances: propositions déme-

surées des géants, exploits extraordinaires (la bouche de Pantagruel abrite une armée, Gargantua: mange six pèlerins en salade) élasticité du temps et de l'espace: l'univers rabelaisien est sujet aux métamorphoses (dimensions variables des personnages, selon les épisodes, éducation de Gargantua située au temps des "hauts bonnets" du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, puis au temps des humanistes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, etc...). Mais loin d'inspirer la crainte les géants rabelaisiens sont débonnaires et bienveillants. Ce ne sont pas des ogres. Le motif de l'avalage est traité avec humour. Alcofribas explorant la bouche de Pantagruel en sort indemne, comme les pèlerins de celle de Gargantua.

Tous ces épisodes relèvent du comique "innocent", "pur", dont parle Baudelaire direct, naïf, sans méchanceté. Il naît de l'exagération du fantastique poussé à l'extrême, du décalage entre ce qu'on sait possible et le mépris de la vraisemblance. A la différence du comique significatif, de la satire, il n'exprime en aucune façon la dérision de tel personnage ou de tel comportement.

Ce rire dont l'essence n'est ni le sentiment de supériorité (Bergson) ni l'intention de dénigrer, M. Bakhtine en a eu l'intuition profonde et en a cherché l'origine et la signification dans son livre sur François Rabelais, qui, depuis sa traduction française en 1970, il a dominé la critique rabelaisienne en France et à l'étranger (Bakhtine 1970). L'idée essentielle du critique russe est que le rire de Rabelais est porteur d'une vision du monde dont le sens s'est perdu avec la culture populaire qu'il exprimait. Alors que le rire de la satire est purement critique, le rire de Rabelais possède une double dimension. C'est un rire ambivalent qui en même temps rabaisse et relève. L'essence n'en est pas le dénigrement: il est adhésion au tout créateur, il n'exprime ni la méchanceté ni l'orgueil, mais est liberté, libération de la peur, de la tristesse ("voyant le deuil (peine) qui vous mine et consume"), du faux sérieux.

Ce rire-là, l'auteur du *Pantagruel* ne l'a pas inventé. Il vient de la grande culture comique qui, au Moyen Age, constitue pour le peuple le seul moyen de faire entendre sa voix (dans les fêtes du «carnaval», au sens large, dans les formes de littérature échappant à la toute puissante idéologie chrétienne). Bakhtine qualifie donc de «carnavalesque» la vision du monde solidaire de ce rire qui attaque joyeusement les convenances, les vérités et les institutions



et les fait passer par le cycle de la mort et de la renaissance. Au service de ce rire, le langage du «réalisme grotesque», l'insistance sur le «bas corporel», les obscénités, les injures. Il rabaisse, mais c'est pour communier avec les sources de la vie, la terre, les organes de l'alimentation et de la reproduction (Jeanneret 1984).

D'où la mise en vedette des besoins naturels (sexualité, manger et boire, excrétion) organes et objets réputés bas, laids selon les critères traditionnels (épisode des «callibistrs» des dames de Paris (*Pantagruel*, ch. 15), litanie des couillons (*Tiers Livre*, ch. 26 et 27) pourvus de 336 épithètes, chapitre des Torcheculs (*Gargantua*, ch. 13) où l'exceptionnelle liberté d'imagination transfigure obscénité et sexualité par la fantaisie et le rire: les images des objets sont affranchies des liens de la logique ou de la signification, se succèdent comme dans le coq à l'âne, pourvus d'une destination nouvelle.

Les images du corps grotesque abondent dans toute l'oeuvre rabelaisienne. Je me bornerai à quelques exemples:

— Le récit de la naissance des géants (*Pantagruel*, ch. 1) au commencement du monde l'année des "grosses mesles" (nèfles). Ceux qui en mangèrent furent victimes d'une "enflure très horrible", à différents endroits du corps: aux uns le ventre devint "bossu comme une grosse tonne", les autres furent affligés d'un phallus "merveilleusement long (ils pouvaient s'en servir de ceinture «en l'enroulant six fois par le corps». A d'autres le nez devint "semblable à la flûte d'un alambic", ou les oreilles se gonflèrent tant qu'elles pouvaient s'en couvrir "comme d'une cape à l'espagnole", etc. Cette galerie de corps monstrueux, Rabelais, de façon significative, la fait précéder de perturbations cosmiques affectant le ciel dans la même veine carnavalesque.

La naissance de Gargantua est lié au motif de la nourriture et de l'excrétion. Sa mère Gargamelle mange tant de tripes que le «fondement lui échappait» et l'enfant finit par sortir par l'oreille gauche en criant aussitôt: "A boire! A boire!" (ch. 5). Cette affirmation de la puissance du boire et du manger traverse tous les romans, comme les images de la bouche grande ouverte, la scatologie, les déluges urinaires.

Tous ces motifs, outrés puisqu'il s'agit de géants, il ne faut les juger ni immoraux ni écoeurants par ce qu'ils soulignent le lien entre l'homme et le monde, dont la matérialité est liée à la vie de la

terre. La théorie bakhtinienne en permet donc une interprétation plus profonde. Elle est sans aucun doute originale, ingénieuse et féconde. Mais elle ne rend compte que d'un seul aspect du grotesque rabelaisien. Sans doute, Bakhtine a-t-il sous-estimé les facultés comiques de l'humanisme lui-même, capable de remettre en question non seulement les certitudes médiévales mais les siennes propres, et ne pas être dupe des apparences. Le rire de Rabelais, comme celui d'Erasme, se souvient autant de Lucien de Socrate que de la fête des fous.

A la suite de Bakhtine, mais d'une façon très différente, on pourrait insister sur la place importante du rire qui n'est pas dénigrant dans l'oeuvre rabelaisienne, mais du rire qui est jeu, jeu avec les choses et les idées. Ainsi, la harangue que prononce dans le *Gargantua* (ch. 19) Maître Janotus de Bragmardo, le plus savant des théologiens de la Sorbonne, venu redemander au prince les cloches de Notre-Dame qu'il a volées. Rabelais y joue avec la scolastique, respectée à son époque, et même plus tard, au moins dans certains milieux. L'intention satirique est évidente: il s'agit de discréditer l'éloquence creuse, incohérente du vieux "sophiste" (théologien) dont l'allure et le comportement sont ridicules avant même qu'il ait ouvert la bouche. Mais dans cette parodie de la rhétorique traditionnelle, l'auteur transforme les termes scolastiques en matière de jeu: "qui les [les cloches] voulaient acheter pour la substantifique qualité de la complexion élémentaire qui est intonifiée en la terrestérité de leur nature quidditative pour extranéiser les halots et les turbines sur nos vignes! ..."

— Il y a contraste dans ce passage entre leur apparence ésotérique et la nullité de leur signification, et aussi entre le niveau élevé auxquels il renvoie et le niveau très bas des aspirations bien réelles de Janotus: "Si vous nous les rendez à ma requête, je n'y gagnerai 6 pans de saucisses et une bonne paire de chausses qui me feront grand bien à mes jambes. Ho! par Dieu, une paire de chausses est bon, et *vir sapiens non abhorrebit eam*".

Les jeux de mots également contribuent à transformer les réalités sérieuses en créations ludiques: «Omnis clocha chlochabilis in chlocherio clochando, chlochans chlochativo et chlochare facit chlochabiliter chlochantes». Le jeu de Rabelais mime ici en le caricaturant le mécanisme des formes de raisonnement étudiées par la logique formelle. Rabelais joue à la logique comme un enfant

joue au médecin ou au marchand et ce jeu mimétique suggère la stérilité de la pensée de Janctus qui finit par rire lui aussi avec ses auditeurs mis en joie. Plus que d'une personne, ce sont les idées fausses dont on se moque. Ce qui est tout à fait différent.

Le caractère ludique du grotesque rabelaisien apparaît plus clairement encore dans l'épisode de la résurrection d'Epistémon (il avait eu la tête coupée dans la bataille et Panurge le ressuscite par un miracle de carnaval). Il revient de l'enfer, l'une des plus épouvantables craintes à l'époque, que son récit transforme en un jeu du monde renversé: «ceux qui n'ont pas eu la vérole dans cette vie l'auront dans l'autre», dit-il. Et Rabelais de jouer avec la souffrance qu'implique la maladie et la mort, avec l'idée de punition et de récompense, avec la peur de l'enfer et du diable. Toutes ces réalités perdent de leur gravité. L'enfer décrit dans ce chapitre n'est pas le royaume d'un Satan cruel. Les diables sont «bons compagnons», ce sont des diables de carnaval, il ne songent pas à tourmenter les pécheurs, ils font bonne chère, se promènent en barque, etc. et s'amuse à renverser l'ordre qui règne sur terre (85 exemples, sur 6 pages: "Xerxès criait la moutarde", Demosthène est vigneron, Eneas meunier, Cléopâtre revenderesse d'oignons, etc...) «Ceux qui avaient été grands seigneurs en ce monde icy gagnaient leur pauvre méchante et paillardie vie là-bas et les philosophes et les indigents étaient gros seigneurs à leur tour» (*Pantagruel*, ch. 30).

La vie des Enfers est organisée comme un vrai carnaval (déguisement des héros de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age et détronement, mort de l'ancien monde, selon Bakhtine). Cette façon de l'imaginer comme un monde renversé est ambivalente: c'est à la fois une satire (celle d'une conception simpliste de la religion) et aussi un jeu qui cherche à exorciser les peurs les plus viscérales (Baraz 1983: 137-138). Et il s'agit surtout de rendre à leur banalité ceux qu'on admire traditionnellement, de déconsidérer la considération irréfléchie.

Le grotesque n'est pas absent du *Tiers* et du *Quart Livre* que l'auteur, abandonnant le voile de l'anonymat (Alcofribas) signe de son nom, François Rabelais, suivi de la mention docteur en médecine. Mais il prend des formes très différentes du grotesque des deux premiers livres.

Le *Tiers Livre*, empli par les consultations de Panurge, désireux de se marier, mais redoutant d'être cocu est une «comédie intellectuelle», très allègre où coexistent discours savants et discours bouffons, et où sont abordés la question du mariage et de la divination, prétexte à une méditation sur la raison et la folie du monde. Il met en oeuvre l'ironie et l'humour humanistes, et fait apparaître tout ce que Rabelais doit à la culture officielle, plus encore qu'à la culture populaire.

Je me bornerai à deux exemples de l'éloge paradoxal qui reprend, dans sa forme, le procédé en vogue depuis l'antiquité, sous l'influence de Lucien et utilisé par Erasme, vénéré par Rabelais.

L'éloge des dettes est prononcé par Panurge au début du roman. Il présente en deux tableaux le monde sans dettes, où tout est tracasserie, d'où «seront bannis Foy, Espérance et Charité» et le monde avec dettes, monde de charité, de solidarité, de sympathie humaine. Car la notion de dettes implique celle d'échange, d'assistance mutuelle, de bonne volonté réciproque. Et Panurge de se «perdre dans cette contemplation» d'un monde harmonieux régi par le prêt et l'emprunt, à l'image du corps humain dont tous les organes coopèrent pour entretenir la vie. Mais cette prestigieuse justification de l'échange est farcesque dans la mesure où Panurge le sophiste entend par là légitimer sa conduite car il s'est endetté après avoir mangé son blé en herbe et dilapidé les revenus de sa chastellenie de Salmigondin... et il est prêt à emprunter sans jamais rendre!

C'est un éloge burlesque, c'est-à-dire une parodie de discours rhétorique. De même l'éloge du Pantagruélion qui achève le livre, dû cette fois à l'auteur, et symétrique de l'éloge des dettes. Panurge, toujours indécis en dépit de ses nombreuses consultations s'embarque avec Pantagruel pour aller quérir l'oracle de la Dive Bouteille. Entre autres provisions, le prince fait charger une cargaison de son «herbe pantagruelion», une plante merveilleuse (en fait le chanvre ou le lin). L'éloge d'une herbe se mue en un hymne au génie et à l'industrie humaine dont la plante devient le symbole. Outre ses multiples utilisations, elle donne aux hommes la possibilité de commercer et de communiquer, peut-être même d'explorer d'autres planètes et d'autres mondes. Sa signification rejoint celle de l'éloge des dettes en rappelant la valeur de l'énergie

qui anime le mouvement et les échanges dans l'univers. Éloges paradoxaux, burlesques au départ, ces deux éloges dithyrambiques provoquent un rire de l'intelligence, un rire qui ne dénigre rien. On a pu les qualifier de cosmiques, car ils identifient le microcosme (l'homme) au macrocosme (l'univers) et débordent largement la simple parodie. Il relèvent d'un grotesque très particulier à Rabelais dont la verve de bonimenteur (qui rappelle celle d'Alcofribas), l'habileté de rhétoricien se déploient en de magnifiques envolées lyriques, en des visions grandioses, en disproportion avec l'objet qui les déclenche (les dettes, une herbe).

La navigation allégorique du *Quart Livre* propose, plus que les romans précédents, des figures et des situations étranges. Le grotesque est partout présent dans cette odyssee bouffonne qui emporte les voyageurs sur la mer du monde, des épreuves, de la tempête, les mène successivement à des escales symbolisant des aberrations humaines, des maux et des vices de l'Europe qu'ils ont quittée. Des monstres longuement décrits se substituent aux ennemis gigantesques et les géants sont devenus spectateurs. Le *Quart* et le *Ve Livre* (qui est posthume, mais tiré sans doute de brouillons retrouvés après la mort de l'auteur) explorent le monde imaginaire dans un climat d'inquiétude reflétant les troubles de l'époque, le durcissement de la lutte contre la liberté de conscience, de la conscience religieuse en particulier.

Le monde des îles est un monde grotesque, souvent plus effrayant que risible; d'un grotesque «impur», non innocent car l'intrusion de l'actualité, les intentions polémiques sont à déchiffrer dans chacun des épisodes. Baudelaire avait d'ailleurs souligné dans son éloge de Rabelais qu'il "garde, au milieu de ses plus énormes fantaisies quelque chose d'utile et de raisonnable. Il est directement symbolique. Son comique a presque toujours la transparence d'un apologue." (Baudelaire 1941: 177). Ce que vérifie le *Quart Livre*.

Les îles constituent une série d'huis-clos, elles abritent et encouragent une manie. Elles sont le refuge de personnages fantastiques, symboles d'un vice de caractère que Rabelais veut dénoncer, montrant l'isolement des humains en proie à une idée fixe, refusant de se mêler aux autres. La manie engendre des créatures monstrueuses, tout en gestes et en membres, dont les dimensions morales sont franchement étalées: toute une anatomie

intérieure est révélée et déformée. La plupart des personnages mis en scène sont des êtres incomplets, physiquement anormaux. Le *Quart Livre* fait surgir ainsi une vision surréaliste de corps faits d'un membre, d'un fragment de membre, dont les appétits sont partiels et particuliers (Glaser 1964: 238–239).

Le peuple des Ennasins, au nez en forme de trèfle qui subvertit la distribution des sexes et le système des relations familiales par d'étranges alliances, Bringuénarilles avaleur de moulins à vent, malade d'une indigestion de poêles et de chaudrons, les gens de Ruach qui ne vivent que de vent (ch. 43) et meurent en pétant, les Chicanous qui gagnent leur vie en se faisant battre (ch. 12–16), etc... Le lecteur est bombardé de suggestions symboliques qui, parce qu'elles ne relèvent d'aucun code connu, défient l'interprétation Jeanneret 1992: 45).

— Le grotesque se fait grinçant et effrayant dans la description de Quaresmeprenant, incarnation des méfaits du carême dans l'île de Tapinois, «bon catholique d'une grande dévotion», monstre de l'ant nature, carcasse sinistre où se mêlent l'organique et l'instrumental, personnage déshumanisé signifiant un arrêt de vie, une stupéfiante momification: "Travaillant, rien ne faisant, rien ne faisait travaillant," etc... (ch. 22).

Non moins étranges, et déconcertantes les Andouilles de l'île farouche, femmes guerrières en forme de phallus, dont les pantagruélistes ne savent si ce sont des saucisses, des écureuils, des belettes, des Amazones et qu'on voit, au fort de la bataille, adorer un prodigieux pourceau ailé survolant les combattants (ch. 35–43).

Ces effigies saugrenues, ces deux figures de monstres évoquent une sorte de monde cauchemardesque où se brouillent l'humain et l'animal, le vivant et l'inerte et où s'incarnent des fantasmes plus angoissants que comiques, difficiles à interpréter. Rabelais y exprime une des tendances du siècle, le goût de l'étrangeté, de la démesure et l'inquiétude qui caractériseront plus tard la sensibilité baroque.

Mystère à déchiffrer que ces monstres? Ou simple fruit d'une imagination déchaînée?

La satire est, en fait, inséparable du grotesque dans la peinture de ces êtres monstrueux dont les déformations de l'âme se marquent affreusement dans leurs difformités physiques (l'inquiétude soulevée par Quaresmeprenant débouche clairement sur la satire

des pratiques et superstitions religieuses. Il en va de même pour les Chicanous (ch. 12-16), les Papimanes, les Gastrolâtres, etc...). Mais bien des épisodes sont d'une interprétation plus difficile). Le grotesque, dès lors, risible ou/et effrayant n'est pas gratuit. Le *Quart Livre*, monde de la matière déformée, monde de l'excès, préconise sans doute les vertus du naturel et de la modération. Le thème des voyages extraordinaires est traditionnel (dans la littérature romanesque et populaire. Mais Rabelais le renouvelle radicalement en alliant satire, actualité, didactisme par la fantaisie débordante de l'imagination et le lyrisme. D'ailleurs, même lorsqu'il caricature, dans bien des cas, Rabelais éprouve un certain attendrissement: d'où le brio étourdissant avec lequel il décrit des êtres qu'il déteste, qu'il envisage avec une «sympathie féroce». La dérision est presque toujours riche d'un incommensurable humour.

L'épisode des paroles gelées (ch. 55, 56) ressortit au fantastique. En mer les voyageurs entendent des bruits étranges, bruits de combat, hennissements de chevaux, de clairons et des paroles dont ils ne comprennent le sens que lorsqu'ils peuvent les voir, lorsque dégelées, elles tombent comme des dragées de toutes couleurs sur le tillac du navire. Ce sont des voix du passé, gelées pendant le combat entre les Arismapiens et les Nephelibates qui dégèlent au printemps. Les mots deviennent des choses, des objets concrets. Le grotesque prend une densité poétique qui fait de cet épisode l'un des plus beaux passages du livre. Il a prêté aux interprétations les plus variées et l'on sait que les contemporains de Rabelais l'ont considéré comme un poète.

La création verbale est à elle seule, susceptible d'effets grotesques chez cet amoureux des mots. La parole joue un rôle capital dans l'ensemble des romans. Je me bornerai ici à quelques exemples frappants dans le *Quart Livre* du pouvoir générateur des mots. Au lieu de créer des personnages réels, Rabelais cherche à en créer par la parole. Dans la guerre contre des Andouilles, les colonels de Pantagruel portent des noms qui prédisent «heur et victoire» et déterminent l'action: Tailleboudin, Riflandouille. Les noms des vaillants cuisiniers partis au combat, Tirelardon, Lardonnet, Rondlardon, Corquelardon, etc. (tous dérivés du mot lard) forment une armée de mots qui naît musicalement, fondée sur un lien phonique, unifiée par l'unité des sons en régiments

patriotiques (de même patrie linguistique) et organisée par l'homonymie.

Pendant la tempête, le personnage de Panurge, «le veau, le pleurart», se construit à partir de balbutiements et d'onomatopées be, bou, hu, ha, ho, ho, etc... et la parole remplace l'action: une tempête de mots définit la scène (ch. 50).

Plus curieusement encore, "l'île des Ennasins et des étranges alliances du pays" est un univers textuel où l'onomastique a une force dynamique. Les Ennasins ont le nez en forme d'as de trèfle et la peau rouge. Ils se présentent en couples linguistiques, tous parents et alliés et simplement désignés par le nom qu'ils se donnent, et qui leur confère une réalité (ils n'ont ni père, ni mère, dit l'un d'eux à Panurge: "c'est parenté de votre monde"). On voit ainsi défiler ma coignée / mon manche, ma mie / ma croûte, ma couenne / mon lard, etc... Chaque couple forme une union sexuelle fondée sur des termes d'affection métaphorique. La fornication de ces paroles sexualisées transforme les mots d'objets en mots d'action par l'accouplement sémantique. Le langage remplace les couples qui font l'amour par des mots qui le font. Les mots s'attirent l'un l'autre pour devenir des personnages.

Grotesque d'un comique immédiat, grotesque qui fait surgir des images troublantes et effrayantes, qui confine à la satire, au pur jeu intellectuel, à la philosophie, au lyrisme à la poésie ou qui relève du pur plaisir verbal, toutes ces formes coexistent et souvent au cours du même épisode, dans l'oeuvre rabelaisienne.

Sa lecture est une lecture à plusieurs niveaux où se fondent les éléments empruntés aux légendes populaires et au savoir humaniste. L'auteur lui-même, dans le prologue du *Gargantua* a encouragé une lecture active à l'affût de toutes les pistes du sens (Ménager 1989: 153). Mais le rire rabelaisien se veut toujours un rire thérapeutique, libérateur qui adhère pleinement au monde matériel et le transfigure, qui recouvre des sentiments complexes mais cherche à exorciser la violence et la peur.

Rabelais, en donnant la formule de son inspiration «Mieux est de rire que de larmes écrire» a défini une esthétique de la satire ludique, de la satire grotesque: il combat le mal et l'erreur non par la terreur et la pitié (qui provoquent la catharsis d'Aristote) mais par la purification de l'âme (cf. Le sophiste de Platon — exposé de l'Étranger). Il y a dans l'âme des désordres et des laideurs



analogues aux difformités et aux maladies du corps. Par cette médecine joyeuse qu'est la satire grotesque, il rétablit l'harmonie et la raison à la façon des humanistes (Demerson 1996: 188).

### Notes

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## **La doctrina humanista de la risa y el lenguaje del realismo grotesco**

JUAN CARLOS PUEO

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La importancia que tiene la obra de Bajtín en el estudio de la historia de la risa radica nada menos que en la diferenciación entre dos formas de concebir la risa que convivieron durante la Edad Media y el Renacimiento, hasta que en el siglo XVII acabó imperando una de ellas sobre la otra. La risa grotesca, el humor carnavalesco, se nos ofrecen como una cosmovisión enfrentada a la seriedad unilateral de la cultura oficial, que concibe la risa únicamente como instrumento de ataque contra todo aquello que incumple o se rebela contra sus dogmas. Bajtín definió el humor carnavalesco como un humor popular, universal (en el sentido de que abarca todas las cosas y todas las gentes, incluyendo a los propios reidores), ambivalente y utópica, y profundamente enraizada con los cultos antiguos. La expresión de este tipo de risa se centra sobre todo en las alusiones a lo que Bajtín denomina “lo inferior material y corporal”, de forma que la risa grotesca se constituye como risa degradante y materializadora. La risa permite poner en cuestión todo lo que la cultura oficial nos presenta como dogma inamovible, no para acabar con ello, sino para permitir la coexistencia de lo vario y múltiple, de lo que no puede quedar encerrado en una sola mirada.

La historia de esta concepción de la vida y del mundo, opuesta al dogma de la seriedad unilateral de la cultura oficial comenzaría en la Edad Media, con la cristianización de los ritos paganos y la permisividad de la Iglesia ante los carnavales y festejos similares que tendían el puente entre la religiosidad antigua y el cristianismo

no oficial. La pervivencia de estos elementos de la cultura popular llegó hasta el Renacimiento, donde alcanzó toda su plenitud, según Bajtín, al invadir también el campo de la literatura y las artes cultas, hasta el punto de que no es posible comprender buena parte de la literatura de esta época sin tener en cuenta la importancia que tuvo la cultura de la risa y de lo inferior material y corporal. Pero al mismo tiempo se pueden ver en la cultura renacentista los primeros atisbos del triunfo de la cultura oficial, con su preocupación por la seriedad respetuosa frente al dogma, conviviendo con lo que terminó siendo el canto del cisne de la cultura popular.

Bajtín señala que la oposición entre el realismo grotesco de la cultura de lo inferior material y corporal y la seriedad dogmática de la cultura oficial no impidió la existencia de otras formas de seriedad que durante la Antigüedad convivieron sin dificultad con la cultura de lo grotesco, tales como la seriedad trágica o la filosofía crítica, y ya en el mundo moderno, la seriedad rigurosa y metódica de la nueva ciencia. Todas estas formas de seriedad se vieron influidas de alguna manera por el dogmatismo de la Iglesia y de los herederos de la nobleza feudal, al igual que ocurrió con la cultura de la risa, que a partir sobre todo del siglo XVII se limitó tan sólo a mantener su función crítica hacia todo lo que la cultura oficial no aceptaba, y con la prohibición de que esa crítica se dirigiera contra aquello que la cultura oficial considera bueno, justo o bello. Como dice el propio Bajtín:

La actitud del siglo XVII en adelante con respecto a la risa puede definirse de la manera siguiente: la risa no puede expresar una concepción universal del mundo, sólo puede abarcar ciertos aspectos *parciales y parcialmente típicos* de la vida social, aspectos negativos; lo que es esencial e importante no puede ser cómico; la historia y los hombres que representan lo esencial e importante (reyes, jefes militares y héroes) no pueden ser cómicos; el dominio de lo cómico es restringido y específico (vicios de los individuos y de la sociedad); no es posible expresar en el lenguaje de la risa la verdad primordial sobre el mundo y el hombre; sólo el tono serio es de rigor; de allí que la risa ocupe en la literatura un rango inferior, como un género menor, que describe la vida de

individuos aislados y de los bajos fondos de la sociedad; la risa o es una diversión ligera o una especie de castigo útil que la sociedad aplica a ciertos seres inferiores o corrompidos. Ésta es, esquemáticamente, la actitud de los siglos XVII y XVIII ante la risa. (Bajtín 1987: 65).

Pero al igual que había formas de seriedad no dogmática que acabaron siendo desplazadas o absorbidas por la cultura oficial, existió ya en la Antigüedad y durante la Edad Media y el Renacimiento una cultura de la risa que intentó (y consiguió ya a finales del XVI) sustituir a la concepción de lo inferior material y corporal por una forma de pensamiento menor caracterizada por su respeto a lo defendido por la seriedad de la cultura oficial y por su justificación de la risa como ataque contra lo que se considera contrario a sus intereses. Frente a la risa popular, la risa oficial puede definirse como aristocrática, dogmática y unilateral. Esta teoría oficial de la risa apenas dio en el Renacimiento algún resultado en la práctica de la literatura, limitándose al ámbito del pensamiento, primero en torno a los modos de comportamiento del modélico cortesano renacentista y poco después a la teoría de la literatura, especialmente los géneros (como la comedia o la sátira) defendidos por los partidarios de las teorías de Aristóteles y Horacio. Para ello, las teorías renacentistas de la risa tomaron como base las autoridades de Aristóteles, que prometía hablar de la risa en el segundo libro de la *Poética*, y Cicerón y Quintiliano, que habían dedicado importantes capítulos de sus tratados de retórica al lugar de la risa dentro de la oratoria, y que señalaron algunos de los dogmas que más importancia tuvieron en el desarrollo posterior de las teorías oficiales.

La característica más importante en esta otra forma de sentir la risa es la radical separación entre el sujeto y el objeto de la risa. Mientras el realismo grotesco siempre se había mostrado cierta ambivalencia al respecto, uniendo ambos términos de forma que la risa implicaba toda una cosmovisión que incluía, por supuesto, a los mismos reidores. De esta manera, Cicerón señalaba ya la necesidad de separar los objetivos del discurso serio de los del discurso risible, porque el estilo grave corresponde a la alabanza, mientras que el estilo jocosos tiene como objeto la burla o

reproisión de lo feo o deforme, aun cuando, gracias sobre todo al recurso de la ambigüedad, una frase pueda ser dicha para ser tomada en serio o pueda tener un sentido jocoso, según el momento en que se diga (Cicerón 1989, II: 248).

La teoría oficial de la risa se basa además en la diferenciación entre dos tipos de risa: la propia de las clases superiores y la propia de las clases inferiores. Esta diferenciación parte de un punto de vista dogmático que pretende erradicar la risa popular de lo inferior material y corporal. La ética aristotélica señalaba ya la necesidad de diferenciar entre las bromas de los hombres libres y las de los siervos, caracterizando a éstas últimas por la indecencia de sus palabras, que debía ser evitada (Aristóteles 1985, IV: 1127b33). El ejercicio de la retórica implica la pertenencia a las clases superiores, de modo que Cicerón estableció también la diferencia entre las dos formas de risa al incluir su teoría dentro de un diálogo cuyo tema es la oratoria. Su intención fue precisamente la de declarar el lugar que la risa puede ocupar dentro de un conjunto de advertencias y consejos para llegar a ser un buen orador y para mantenerse en todo momento en esta posición. Esto implica que todo aquel que pretenda mover a risa a un auditorio se ceñirá única y exclusivamente a las reglas expuestas por Cicerón, evitando todo aquello que puede hacer reír pero que está por debajo de la dignidad del orador: representar tipos censurables, imitar en demasía, hacer muecas, decir obscenidades, todo lo que, en fin, puede hacer reír si se trata de mimos y actores, pero que no conviene a los altos fines de la oratoria (Cicerón 1989, II: 251–252).

Para Quintiliano, la dignidad de la retórica le impide utilizar ciertos recursos que no responden al ideal intelectual del orador romano: los chistes soeces y obscenos han de evitarse siempre porque son de mal gusto y propios de mimos y actores, igual que los chistes demasiado chocarreros o brutales (Quintiliano 1979, VI, iii: 29, 83); por el contrario, el orador debe ofrecer una imagen de hombre ingenioso, pero siempre digno, sin que muestre nunca insolencia ni arrogancia, que tenga siempre conciencia del lugar y el momento en que se halla y que no dé la impresión de haberse pensado en su casa las burlas que dice en el foro (ibid. 33).

La nobleza de palabras, gestos y actitudes que exige Quintiliano en el orador romano tiene su correlato en el ideal renacentista expuesto en el *Cortegiano* de Castiglione, quien desde el primer

momento censura a los que ponen por encima de la cortesía su deseo de hacer reír. Algunos años antes, Pontano había escrito un tratado sobre la conversación, *De sermone*, en el que proponía el ideal del *vir facetus et urbanus*, opuesto al *vir rusticus*. Para Pontano hay tres géneros de jocosidad: 1) el propio de esclavos que tratan de cosas viles; 2) el propio de campesinos, que se caracteriza por su rusticidad y por su ignorancia; 3) el género liberal y suave, honesto y que no es ni servil ni ingenuo (Pontano 1954, III, v: 1-2). El propósito de todo el tratado, no es sino el de ofrecer una guía para que el *vir facetus* se atenga únicamente a las normas del tercer tipo de los que señala, el único que conviene a la gente educada que se halla por encima del humor chocarrero de los esclavos o de los villanos, dentro de un intento por establecer una “ética de la *facecitas*” (Weber 1970: 86; véase también Weber 1978: 75). Vincenzo Maggi, autor de un importante comentario a la *Poética* de Aristóteles, que incluye una de las más importantes teorías de la risa del XVI, se ciñe a los preceptos aristotélicos para señalar que hay que evitar la risa producida por las palabras indecorosas (Maggi 1550: 301-327).

Pero no solamente encontramos en estos autores una diferenciación explícita entre los dos tipos de risa propios de las clases dominante y dominada. La propia teoría de la risa abunda en esta diferenciación y permite además la subordinación de la risa a los intereses de las clases altas, pues confirma el hecho de que la cultura oficial pretende servirse de la risa para condenar todo aquello que se muestra disconforme con sus dogmas. Todas las teorías coinciden en que la risa tiene como causa, según Aristóteles, “un defecto y una fealdad que no causa dolor ni ruina” (Aristóteles 1974, V: 1449a33-34) o, según Cicerón, una “fealdad o deformidad expresadas no feamente” (Cicerón 1989, II: 236). La definición de la risa como la consecuencia de la percepción de una fealdad explica el éxito que tuvo la fórmula dentro de todas las teorías oficiales, ya que opone la risa a lo bueno, lo justo y lo bello, y hace de ella el castigo a los que van contra estas formas de concebir el mundo.

Ya en Quintiliano encontramos la idea de que la fealdad puede estar en el cuerpo o en el alma (Quintiliano 1979, VI, iii: 37). En el Renacimiento, con una conciencia más terminante (debida al cristianismo) de cuáles pueden ser los peores defectos del hombre,

Vincenzo Maggi se refiere a la fealdad del alma como la más ingeniosa de las fealdades que pueden mover a risa, puesto que, de igual forma que la belleza del alma es superior a la del cuerpo, la fealdad del alma supera a la del cuerpo y provoca una risa mayor (Maggi 1550: 313). En realidad, el pensador renacentista que pretende subordinar la risa a la cultura oficial tiene como objetivo los defectos morales del hombre, todo lo que el cristianismo considera pecaminoso y que la cultura popular defendía al glorificar lo inferior material y corporal, que la cultura oficial identifica en su teoría de la risa con la fealdad o deformidad de la que hablaban Aristóteles y Cicerón.

La expresión ciceroniana “fealdad o deformidad expresadas no feamente” implica además una diferenciación entre sujeto y objeto necesaria para colocar a uno y a otro a ambos lados de la frontera que separa lo bueno de lo malo, lo pecaminoso de lo honesto. Quien expresa incluso lo feo de forma bella escapa siempre a la risa, y es considerado, por tanto, dentro del grupo de lo aprobado por la cultura oficial, grupo caracterizado por su *urbanitas*, cualidad que Baldassare Castiglione otorga a su *cortegiano* y que debe adornar a toda persona que se diferencie del vulgo y pertenezca a la élite aristocrática que detenta el poder y la cultura. Maggi restringe su tratado al ámbito de la risa ingeniosa, la risa propia de un hombre cultivado, tal como lo había presentado Castiglione, la cual ha de surgir de una fealdad presentada “no feamente”; esta risa se opone a la risa burda e inculca de mimos y campesinos, en la que las fealdades se presentan “feamente” y a la que habían aludido anteriormente Aristóteles y Pontano como formas de reír de las que el hombre educado debía siempre huir.

Maggi, que señala que la fealdad puede ser de tres tipos, verdadera, fingida o accidental, indica que la fealdad del alma debe ser sobre todo fingida (ibid. 313–314), advertencia importante si tenemos en cuenta que una fealdad verdadera implica la existencia de un defecto con el que hay que acabar, mientras que una fealdad accidental no implica el grado de conciencia necesario por parte de sujeto y objeto de la risa para que ésta resulte útil para la cultura oficial. Fingir una fealdad del alma necesita de cierta educación y cierto ingenio, y es signo, por tanto, de verdadera belleza del alma, mientras que los otros tipos de fealdad pueden ser utilizados por personas menos educadas. Este precepto corresponde a la división

señalada arriba entre la comicidad de las clases elevadas y la comicidad de las clases bajas y que viene ya establecida así desde el primer momento: “algunos chistes muestran cierta agudeza de ingenio, y chistes de este tipo se dirigen a hombres libres; la otra, de ningún modo se dirige a ellos, y éstos parten o de una verdadera fealdad del alma, o de una fealdad corporal fingida o de cosas exteriores, géneros cómicos que son propios de los esclavos y de los bufones” (ibid. 312).

La exigencia de que la fealdad se exprese de forma agradable a los sentidos se relaciona con otra de las constantes habituales en las teorías antiguas y renacentistas de la risa: la necesidad de tener siempre en consideración contra quién va dirigida la risa. Ya Aristóteles había observado en la *Ética a Nicómaco* la necesidad de observar siempre cierta prudencia respecto de los que pueden ser objeto de burla, para no herirlos ni hacer de ellos enemigos irreconciliables (Aristóteles 1985, IV, 8: 1128a16–34). Este dogma se repite continuamente en todos los autores que tratan el tema de la risa desde el punto de vista de la cultura oficial: Cicerón añade además la prohibición de reírse de la maldad o de la miseria, en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones, aunque dentro de ciertos límites. Esto reduce el campo de lo risible a los defectos ordinarios de la vida cotidiana y a la fealdad y deformidad corporales, que también pueden llegar a ser objeto de risa siempre que se mantenga el buen gusto y se evite caer en la crueldad o en la chocarrería (Cicerón 1989, II: 237–239).

Respecto a esta necesidad de mostrarse cauto y no hacer chistes que puedan resultar molestos a los demás, Cicerón se mantiene dentro de cierta ambigüedad, ya que, como he señalado antes, su intención es ofrecer una obra que sea útil para los futuros oradores, quienes se verán en la necesidad de emplear todas las armas de su ingenio para derrotar a sus adversarios. Entre ellas, la risa no es la menos importante, ya que ponerlos en ridículo es una acción que puede asegurar la victoria. En este sentido, Cicerón aprueba el uso de agudezas y chistes en los discursos, pero coloca en el mismo nivel los casos en que el orador puede derrotar a su rival sin necesidad de burlarse de él para injuriarle, aunque manteniendo una actitud graciosa y divertida, por la sencilla razón de que el humor no es tan sólo un arma contra otros oradores, sino un elemento más de ornato, una forma de hacer agradable el discurso



(*ibid.* 221–222). Quintiliano precisa que también hay que descartar las burlas que pueden ocasionar enemistades demasiado serias, refiriéndose a las dirigidas a grupos de personas, clases sociales, naciones, etc., ya que estas bromas pueden dar lugar a enemistades no buscadas, pues el objeto de la burla era en realidad una sola persona (Quintiliano 1979, VI, iii: 34).

En el Renacimiento, Pontano sigue las huellas de Cicerón y Quintiliano y explica por qué las burlas no se dirigirán contra los míseros, ni contra los poderosos, ni contra pueblos o facciones; en el primer caso porque es indigno de un carácter noble; en los otros dos, por las lamentables consecuencias a que puede dar lugar una actitud tan poco cauta (Pontano 1954, III, vi: 1; V, ii: 10). También para Castiglione tiene la risa sus límites: ni los miserables, ni los malvados ni los poderosos deben ser objeto de risa, sino de compasión, castigo y respeto, respectivamente (Castiglione 1994, II: 46). Sin embargo, Castiglione añade otros dos límites a los que se habían venido observando hasta entonces, ya que la actitud de veneración que debe mantener el cortesano hacia la mujer le impide en toda ocasión dirigir sus dardos hacia ella, siempre y cuando no haya hecho nada por merecerlos, mientras que un cristianismo sincero impide asimismo burlarse de Dios o de las cosas sagradas (*ibid.* 68, 90). Es mucho mejor utilizar la risa dentro de un contexto cortés en el que el ingenio puede ser utilizado también para alabar o reprender al mismo tiempo que mueve a risa a los demás. La mejor ocasión es siempre la respuesta a otra persona, dado que la provocación se halla en estos casos justificada, y no implica descortesía, porque es la persona a la que se responde la que debe ser culpada (*ibid.* 47, 93).

Maggi, que retoma el dogma aristotélico que señala que la risa viene causada por una fealdad sin dolor, confirma que las fealdades dolorosas deben mover más a compasión que a risa (Maggi 1550: 302 y *passim*). Asimismo, observa que la prudencia se ha de observar siempre, no sólo con las personas a las que van dirigidas las bromas, sino también con uno mismo: algunas veces se dicen en broma frases que, si no se tiene cuidado suficiente, pueden ser tomadas en serio por los que las escuchan, extremo que hay que evitar en todo momento para que nadie pueda creer verdaderos los vicios que en realidad son fingidos: “Será, pues, propio de un hombre prudente, cuando se le ocurra al decir algo de este tipo,

añadir alguna palabra que indique que lo dijo en broma y no en serio" (ibid. 320; la traducción es mía — J.C.P.). La risa puede ir incluso contra la propia dignidad, lo cual es totalmente desaconsejable, puesto que el que ríe se ha de mantener siempre dentro de los límites de lo tolerado, no puede ponerse a sí mismo como ejemplo de lo risible, puesto que es producto de una fealdad (sobre todo si es una fealdad del alma) que la cultura oficial repudia. De nuevo encontramos la misma separación ente sujeto y objeto propia de la risa oficial. No hay ambivalencia posible, la separación entre uno y otro es tajante para los partidarios de la nueva risa. Castiglione es del mismo parecer:

Que a la verdad ya vos veis cuán mal parecería que un caballero tenido en buena reputación, por contrahacer a alguno, fingiese en su gesto llorar o reír, o formase puntualmente las voces del otro o luchase consigo mismo, como hace Berto, o se vistiese un vestido de villano en presencia de muchos, como Estracino, o hiciese semejantes cosas; las cuales, en éstos que agora hemos dicho, parecen bien por ser éste el oficio proprio dellos; mas a nosotros no conviene, sino pasando disimuladamente, hurtar esto del remedar, guardando siempre la autoridad que se requiere en los hombres de honra, no diciendo palabras sucias ni haciendo cosas deshonestas, ni torciendo el rostro o la persona con una desenvoltura desvergozada y baxa, sino componiendo los ademanes y todos los movimientos de manera que los que estuvieren presentes imaginen por nuestras palabras y gestos mucho más de lo que veen y oyen, y con esto sean movidos a reírse. (Castiglione 1994, II: 50).

La prohibición de atacar a determinadas personas afecta también a la propia justificación de la risa. Para los teóricos de la Antigüedad, la presencia de ésta en el foro podía servir para relajar al público, provocar su admiración o confundir al adversario. Para Cicerón, la risa no debe excitarse sin justificación, por el simple deseo de hacer reír al auditorio, sino que debe tener un motivo que justifique su utilización en la oratoria: es por este motivo, más que nada, por lo que el orador ha de mostrar siempre cierta sobriedad y

cierta moderación para no provocar la risa a cada oportunidad que se le presente, sino sólo cuando las circunstancias lo aconsejen (Cicerón 1989, II: 247). Esto ocurre sobre todo cuando se replica al adversario, ya que en ese caso los chistes responden a algo que se ha dicho anteriormente y en estos casos se actúa con más nobleza que si se utiliza la burla con el único propósito de zaherir al oponente (ibid. 230).

Para Quintiliano, el propósito de la risa es el mismo que para Cicerón: ayudar a la derrota del adversario ridiculizándolo, pero impidiendo siempre que esta arma pueda volverse contra el propio orador y perjudicarlo, ya que las circunstancias pueden hacer que un chiste se vuelva contra aquel que lo ha dicho (Quintiliano 1979, VI, iii: 32). Además, también puede servir para aligerar al juez de un juicio demasiado grave, divertir su atención de los hechos del caso o, sencillamente, evitar que se aburra (ibid. 1). Pero Quintiliano va más allá de la retórica cuando señala que la risa no es sólo útil al orador, sino que su función en la vida cotidiana puede ser de gran importancia, dada su continua presencia en todos nuestros actos y su posibilidad de alterar el rumbo de ciertos asuntos apagando el odio y la ira (ibid. 8-10).

La idea de la risa como un elemento habitual de la vida cotidiana tuvo gran éxito en el Renacimiento, ya que los teóricos de la risa vieron en ella la justificación necesaria para que ésta no resultara completamente desterrada de lo que la cultura oficial consideraba adecuado para el hombre. Pontano dedica su atención a la conversación del hombre fuera de sus deberes habituales y dentro de los momentos que el hombre dedica a relajarse y a olvidar los deberes del día. La mayor parte de su obra se dedica a las conversaciones que tienen como objeto mover a risa a los oyentes mediante el lenguaje común utilizado en la conversación relajada entre amigos y familiares, sin necesidad de apelar a la idea de utilidad, propia del moralista, ni a la de *facunditas*, propia del orador, aunque manteniéndose siempre dentro de los límites de la más estricta moralidad (Pontano 1554, I, xii: 8-9). Siguiendo de cerca a Pontano, Maggi cita a Aristóteles y a Eustracio para defender la idea de que el hombre necesita en algún momento del día distraerse mediante las bromas y la conversación amena, manteniéndose siempre dentro del aristotélico "término medio" y dentro también de los límites de la moral (Maggi 1550: 322).

Los ejemplos que aducen tanto los autores antiguos como los renacentistas suelen ser anécdotas en las que un personaje hace o dice algo que redundará en el ridículo de otra persona. La división entre sujeto y objeto está clara en todo momento: el atacante permanece en el lado de lo permitido, mientras que al atacado siempre se le censura alguna tacha física o, sobre todo, moral. Vincenzo Maggi llega a ver censuras de tipo moral en todos o casi todos los casos narrados por Cicerón, de forma que su exposición de los ejemplos de *De oratore* se centra casi exclusivamente en señalar qué tipo de fealdad se halla detrás de la facecia ciceroniana, empeño del que no siempre sale muy airoso.

La separación entre la risa permitida por la cultura oficial y la risa carnavalesca de la cultura popular no está, sin embargo, tan clara. Hay que tener en cuenta que la práctica literaria apenas siguió los dictados propuestos por los teóricos de la risa, por lo menos hasta la celebración del Concilio de Trento y la aparición de los *Índices* de libros prohibidos de 1559 y 1564, y aun así todavía hubo de pasar algún tiempo antes de que comenzaran a desaparecer paulatinamente las manifestaciones carnavalescas de la cultura popular (Bajtjn 1987: 26). Por el contrario, las obras de autores como Boccaccio siguieron manteniendo su éxito, aunque a veces fueron convenientemente censuradas en aquellos párrafos donde se mostraban irrespetuosas con aquellos que detentaban el poder, en especial con la Iglesia; por lo demás, las colecciones de facecias (Bracciolini, Carbone, Toscanella, Erasmo, Bebel, Domechini) seguían siendo los libros de humor más importantes, y en ellos se encontraban mezclados ejemplos en uno y otro sentido. Como señala Daniel Ménager, durante el Renacimiento, más que de coexistencia entre lo serio y lo grotesco, conviene hablar de integración, aunque esta integración no excluya siempre el conflicto (Ménager 1995: 163).

Encontramos un excelente ejemplo de esta integración en los capítulos dedicados a la risa por Castiglione en su manual de cortesanía. La teoría ofrecida por Castiglione se basa sobre todo en Cicerón, y, al igual que éste, señala la posibilidad de que la risa obedezca a una fealdad que se halle dentro de las cosas o de las palabras, pero añade además una tercera posibilidad en la que se podrá observar mucho mejor la presencia de elementos propios de la cultura popular: la de las burlas y engaños:

Volviendo, pues, a declarar las maneras de las gracias que hacen a nuestro propósito, digo que (según mi opinión) tres suertes dellas se hallan, aunque miser Federico haya sólo hecho mención de dos: de la que cae en el hablar largo, que (según él dixo) se puede llamar *urbanidad* y consiste en el efeto de una cosa; y de la presta y aguda viveza que está en un dicho solo. A estas dos nosotros agora añadiremos la tercera, que llamamos *recaudos falsos* o *burlas*; en las cuales hay cuentos largos y dichos breves y aun alguna cosa puesta por obra ...” (Castiglione 1994, II: 48).

Respecto a los ejemplos, es bien sabido que Castiglione tomó las anécdotas y facecias que narra en *Il Cortegiano* de la obra de Cicerón, atribuyendo muchas de ellas a sus contemporáneos. Sin embargo, también es cierto que, sobre todo para la materia de las burlas y engaños, incluyó algunas anécdotas que provenían de repertorios más modernos o que aparecieron por vez primera en su obra. Es en estas facecias donde Castiglione nos permite observar que, a la hora de hablar de la risa, es difícil silenciar los elementos propios de la cultura popular; todo lo contrario, en el *Cortesano* encontramos un excelente ejemplo de literatura carnavalesca que nos muestra al caballero Bernardo Bibiena, responsable de casi todo el discurso sobre la risa incluido en esta obra, en pleno carnaval, sujeto y objeto a la vez de una burla contra un fraile y un caballero que resultará ser él mismo:

Porque estas Carnestolendas pasadas el Cardenal de San Pedro Víncula, el cual sabe cuánto suelo yo holgar de hacer burlas a frailes cuando voy máscara, habiendo primero bien concertado lo que quería que se hiciese, vino un día juntamente con el Cardenal de Aragón y algunos otros cardenales a unas ventanas que están en la calle de Bancos, mostrando quererse estar allí por ver pasar las máscaras, como es costumbre de Roma. Yo, yendo máscara, pasé luego por delante dellos y, viendo estar un fraile hacia la una parte de la calle (a mi parecer) algo turbado, holguéme y vi que aquello era lo que yo buscaba; y así en la misma hora me fui corriendo para él, como suele un halcón hambriento ir volando tras el ave que

ha gana de matar; y preguntándole a las primeras palabras quién era, en respondiéndome él, mostré conocelle y con muchas razones comencé a hacelle creer que la justicia andaba buscándole por algunas malas informaciones que dél tenía y por eso que se viniese conmigo hasta la Chancillería, que allí yo le ponía a salvo. Él entonces, sobre la turbación que ya mostraba, mostrándose más turbado, todo medroso y temblando, parecía que no sabía qué hacerse y decía que él había muy gran miedo que si se alexaba de San Celso no lo prendiesen; yo, poniéndole siempre buen corazón, díxele en fin tanto que él saltó en las ancas de mi caballo. Entonces, cuando yo vi esto, yo me tuve por rey y no me trocara por todo el mundo; y así luego arremetí mi caballo por Bancos adelante; el cual iba dando saltos y echando coces acá y acullá. Imaginad vosotros agora qué hermosa vista sería un fraile en ancas de un caballo de una máscara con sus hábitos volando y cayéndosele la cabeza agora para adelante y agora para atrás, que a cada paso parecía que había de dar consigo en el suelo. Viendo tan buena fiesta aquellos señores comenzaron a tirar huevos desde las ventanas, luego hicieron lo mismo todos los banqueros y cuantos allí estaban; de manera que nunca con tanta abundancia cayó del cielo granizo con cuanta entonces caían huevos de aquellas ventanas, los cuales casi todos me cabían a mí; mas yo, pues iba máscara, no recibía de aquello pena, antes me parecía que la risa y todo era sobre el fraile; y por eso no hacía sino dar docientas vueltas por Bancos hacia arriba y hacia baxo, y siempre con aquel monstruo en las espaldas, no embargante que él casi llorando me rogaba que le dexase apear y que no hiciese tan gran afrenta a los hábitos. Y diciendo esto el ribaldo, hacfase dar ascondidamente muchos huevos a algunos mozos de espuelas que estaban allí puestos para esto y, mostrando tenerme abrazado por no caer, estrujábelos todos en los pechos y muchas veces en la cabeza, y otras en mitad de la frente, tanto que yo estaba perdido y atestado de toda la suciedad

del mundo. En fin, cuando ya todos estuvieron cansados de reír y de tirar huevos, saltó el bueno del fraile de las ancas de mi rocín y, echándose atrás la cogulla, mostróme su cabeza con un gran cabello y díxome: "Miser Bernardo, yo soy un mozo de mulas de San Pedro Víncula y soy el que cura vuestro macho." Yo quedé entonces que no sé si fue mayor el dolor o la saña o la vergüenza que hube; pero ya por menos mal púseme a huir a gran priesa hacia a mi posada y en todo el otro día nunca osé parecer; y fue tanta la risa desta burla que hasta hoy dura. (Ibid. 87).

El episodio no deja de ser revelador, porque es el propio Bibiena quien, habiendo señalado poco antes que determinadas burlas no son propias de las personas que pertenecen a la clase social más elevada, se presenta a sí mismo olvidado de su dignidad (aunque salvaguardado por la máscara), escarneciendo al supuesto fraile hasta el punto de participar alegremente en la lluvia de huevos que éste recibe. Quedan completamente olvidadas las diferencias sociales entre todos los participantes de la broma, que se mantienen en un bando único e igualitario: el caballero se burla del supuesto fraile, los criados se dedican a burlarse del caballero, y en seguida hacen lo mismo los demás ciudadanos, aun sin estar al corriente de la broma contra Bibiena; los propios cardenales olvidan su rango y no solamente se complacen en observar el desfile carnavalesco, sino que también se suman a la fiesta. El mundo, por supuesto, se vuelve del revés por unos momentos. Sólo cuando Bibiena se da cuenta de cuál ha sido su papel en esta acción (el burlador burlado) parece que recobra la conciencia de su condición social y se esconde corrido y avergonzado.

Aun a pesar de todas las prevenciones a las que he aludido anteriormente, Castiglione no es siempre el primero en seguir sus preceptos. Ya hemos visto a un caballero que, sin recordar su importante papel en la sociedad, se une alegremente a la fiesta popular. El respeto debido a la clase aristocrática y a las damas tampoco se tiene muy en cuenta cuando Bibiena propone como ejemplo de burla una anécdota, en la que dos damas son engañadas al presentarles unos caballeros un villano disfrazado de noble extranjero, relato en el que también se puede notar cierto sabor carnavalesco (ibid. 85).

Castiglione observa que el cortesano debe huir de las burlas soeces, es decir, de las alusiones a lo inferior material y corporal, ya que resultan de mal gusto, sobre todo cuando se hacen en presencia de las damas. Pero para ilustrar este precepto, el autor propone un ejemplo que cae precisamente en lo mismo que pretendía evitar, aun a pesar de todos los escrúpulos de Bibiena, quien cuenta la respuesta de un florentino, que alude sexualmente a las desventajas de un tratado con el emperador Carlos V, a un sienés (ibid. 68).

Pero donde Castiglione se muestra más contradictorio entre la teoría y la práctica es en el tema del respeto hacia la Iglesia y hacia las personas que la constituyen. Algunas de las anécdotas que cuenta muestran una actitud antidogmática en su tratamiento, no muy respetuoso, de la religión cristiana: "Otro hubo que, topando un rebaño de cabras y viendo venir delante dellas un gran cabrón, se paró y, con una extraña maravilla, dixo: "¿No mirais que hermoso cabrón? Parece un San Pablo" (ibid. 51). Si la ocasión lo permite, los hábitos religiosos no son necesariamente un impedimento para hacer un buen chiste basado, por ejemplo, en el sentido literal de ciertas palabras:

... como en estos días, diciendo un cura de un lugar la misa a sus feligreses y comenzando, después de haber echado las fiestas, la confesión general (como es costumbre) en nombre del pueblo, diciendo: "Yo pecador me confieso a Dios que pequé en reír, en burlar, en escarnecer, en mal pensar" y lo que se sigue, haciendo mención de todos los pecados mortales, un amigo suyo muy familiar, volviéndose a los que le estaban cerca, díxoles: "Vosotros séme testigos de lo que por su misma boca confiesa haber hecho el cura, porque yo entiendo de acusalle ante el Obispo". (Ibid. 64).

Obsérvese la consciente actitud contraria a la risa por parte de la cultura oficial, que presenta las acciones de reír, burlar y escarnecer como actos pecaminosos que el cristiano debe evitar, aunque el burlador (y con él el propio Castiglione) haga caso omiso a este precepto. Pero no solamente se trata de no tener en cuenta el respeto debido a la religión cristiana o a sus representantes. Mucho



más numerosas son las facecias en las que el autor ataca abiertamente a sacerdotes de todos los rangos. En este sentido, Castiglione se suma a la corriente anticlerical que presenta a algunos miembros de la Iglesia como hombres lerdos, perezosos, lascivos o ávidos de poder (ibid. 48, 51, 61, 76, 82).

Por supuesto, las facecias relacionadas con la cultura popular no se agotan en este tipo de anécdotas. Refiriéndose a un pasatiempo muy común en la cultura popular que consiste en “aquellas grandes mentiras que eceden el grado de toda credulidad, cuando están bien compuestas” (ibid. 54), Castiglione narra dos cuentos humorísticos a propósito de los viajes de dos personajes (un mercader de Luca y un portugués) en los que se puede observar una cierta carnavalesización de la naturaleza. El cuento del mercader luqués se sitúa en la frontera entre Polonia y Moscovia, donde, a causa del intenso frío, las palabras se hielan en el aire y es necesario encender una hoguera para que se deshíelen y puedan ser escuchadas (ibid. 55). El motivo del viaje por mares y tierras occidentales (relacionado con el motivo del descenso a los infiernos) donde los personajes pueden ver y experimentar maravillas de todo tipo pertenece también al ámbito de la cultura popular, y pasa de igual forma al realismo grotesco. Prueba de ello es el viaje de Pantagruel y sus camaradas hasta llegar al oráculo de la Botella, en el transcurso del cual aparece la versión rabelesiana del cuento de las palabras congeladas (*Libro Cuarto*, LV–LVI), motivo que, al igual que en el caso de Castiglione, procede seguramente de la lectura de Plutarco (*Cómo pueden conocerse los propios progresos en la virtud*, VII). La fama de este motivo como mentira delirante fue tal que pasó al repertorio del célebre barón de Munchausen. Asimismo, también puede interpretarse como una visión carnalesca de la naturaleza, en la que además se invierten los papeles entre los personajes principales, el episodio entre una mona capaz de jugar al ajedrez y el caballero portugués, hasta el punto de que las actitudes de ambos obligan a pensar en la antropomorfización del animal y la animalización del hombre (ibid. 56).

Todos estos ejemplos no hacen sino confirmar que la risa cortesana de Castiglione todavía mantiene elementos propios de la risa popular, como ocurre con toda la literatura humorística del Renacimiento. Pero la convivencia de ambas formas de reír no fue sino un paso en la evolución de la historia de la risa. Los siguientes

teóricos de la risa, como Vincenzo Maggi, darán todavía menos oportunidades a la cultura popular, y su condena del grotesco será cada vez más vehemente. El siglo XVI no significa sino el comienzo del languidecer del realismo grotesco en beneficio de la risa ofensiva y oficial.

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## Secondary Modelling Systems in the Grotesque — the Problem of the Language

KRZYSZTOF BILIŃSKI

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According to a Polish dictionary of literary terms, the grotesque is “an aesthetic category realized in fine arts, music, theatrical arts and literary works distinguishable by a series of cooperating properties such as: 1) the fantastic, fancy for peculiar, eccentric, terrific, monstrous, magnified and misshapen forms (hence the grotesque is connected with ugliness and parody); 2) absurdity caused by a lack of a uniform system of principles managing the shown world and a simultaneous introduction of various, often contradictory stimulating factors (fabulous, naturalistic, mythological and satirical factors as well as psychological and religious factors, etc). As a result, the grotesque world resists logical interpretation; 3) diversity of humour, mixture of comicality and tragedy, clowning and distress or horror motives, demoniac character and triteness, satirical character and unselfish aestheticism; 4) provocative attitude to the world vision based on common sense fixed in social consciousness, disrespect in relation to a compulsory decorum and parodistic relation to predominant literary and artistic conventions (it leads to a grotesque connection with parody, travesty and burlesque); 5) in the literary grotesque, style diversity, ostentatiously demonstrated verbal inventiveness, binding discordant style standards, mixing polished parlance and vulgar parlance, contrasting the way of expression with the pronouncement situation” (Głowiński, Kostkiewiczowa, Okopień-Sławińska, Sławiński 1988: 173).

The aesthetic category of the grotesque, thus, escapes simplistic prospects of bringing it to a negative hyperbolisation fulfilling satirical functions only, as it is proposed by Heinrich Schlegels (Schlegels 1894). Mikhail Bakhtin has criticized this standpoint in his fundamental work about Rabelais, proposing a conception of the radical ambivalence of the grotesque.

It seems that the problem may be considered from the aspect of its meaning in an artistic text filtered through secondary modelling systems. Such transformation enables us to perceive the grotesque in Bakhtin's understanding as internal transcoding, i.e. as a set of "semiotic systems wherein a meaning appears not on a way of approach of two structure chains but immanently within one system" (Lotman 1988: 56). Lotman speaks here about the binary influence, as exemplified by mathematical expressions and by unprogrammed music which has no connection with texts. Music forms a significance under mutual influences of many elements. However, "multi-member internal transcoding" does not seem to be limited to music exclusively but is also revealed in higher meaningful structures. It also takes place in the grotesque. It has to be related to the objectively existing reality expressed linguistically. Then, a significance is created "in a way of external transcoding (...); a balance is fixed between two structural chains of different type and their elements. Equivalent elements form pairs and together they form a sign" (Lotman 1988: 57).

The richness of meanings does not enable us to place the grotesque within the "external binary transcoding" range but rather include it in "secondary modelling systems", where one can observe "multimember external transcodings" i.e. not only two but many autonomous structures, and the sign will not be a balanced pair but a bundle of mutually balanced elements of different systems" (Lotman 1988: 57).

A meaningful existence, thus, appears in immanent-relational bundles of internal and external transcodings compactly connecting aesthetic and cognitive functions.

In world literature, the grotesque emerges from ancient, medieval and Renaissance culture and from different systems of values. François Rabelais, in his grotesque novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, has provided a powerful image of "homo ludens" as opposed to gloomy ascetic habits. A characteristic example of

Rabelais' grotesque is the fragment describing the miraculous birth of Gargantua /*La vie tres horrible du grand Gargantua, pere de Pantagruel, Chapitre 6*/ (Rabelais 1970: 21–24).

Bakhtin has emphasized that excess, i.e. material-corporal abundance is the leading motive. The naturalistic picture of intestines and the coarse joke based on a mixture of *sacrum* i.e. new life and *profanum* i.e. prolapse of the anus, turns into the grotesque, as it is connected with the hyperbolically shown act of tripe eating and abdomen enlarging (pregnancy — obesity). A peculiarity of this birth description consists in a parodistic vertical inversion of the perspective. Thus, there is a mouth comprehended erotically, a rectum imitating a vagina and a child born through an ear. This deformed reality paradoxically harmonizes with the carnival “upside-down world”. At the same time, the episode reflects, according to Bakhtin, a joyful drama of a cosmic order.

Language allusiveness is connected with it: salty dishes eaten by Grandgousier are marked in the same way as a liturgical extraordinary prayer (commemoration). This leads to erotic desacralization, to the popular presentation of “mutual fat rubbing” i.e. sexual intercourse. The miracle of Gargantua's birth is a parody of medieval saints born as the result of earnest prayers of their parents (e.g. St. Alex) or contemporary sovereigns conceived as the result of the interference of a supernatural force (e.g. Polish prince Bolesław Krzywousty). Religious allusions are here clearly visible: Gargantua's birth seems to refer to the scholastic opinion concerning the miracle of Christ's. Thus, a contemporary hymn proclaimed: “*Gaude, virgo, mater Christi. Quae per aurem concepisti*”. There is much evidence that the above mentioned fragment was well known to the 16th-century reader. Biblical allusions also seem to confirm the truth of Gargantua's birth. The oddity of the hero's birth has been included by Rabelais into the mythical-plebeian genealogy similar to that of Salomon's ancestors or of Jesus' lineage. Gargantua is the 7th, miraculously born, child, and therefore he is destined to happiness and completeness. By the way, it may be mentioned that there have been attempts to find likeness in concrete historical figures to the heroes of Rabelais: Grandgousier could embody king Louis XII and Gargantua, François I. In the carnival world, however, such rationalized deductions seem simplified.

Rabelais also indulged in playing with the reader of the novel: he interrupted his philosophically grotesque quasi-story, asking the reader to accept the seemingly logical reasonings of ancient scientific authorities.

The grotesqueness of the above-mentioned episode appears, thus, as a combined bundle of meanings based on mutually penetrating internal and external transcodings. The image attracts the reader's attention due to the autosignificance of the presented world. It is semantically significant in the world of clowning and simultaneously turns to objective extratextual determinants, such as social, religious, customary realities. The equivalence of meanings at various word transmission levels forms a clearly visible polysemantic and ambivalent evaluation of occurrences. The narrator suppresses a stereotyped univocal character of nature. The grotesque does not know a single version of events but is rather subjected to a continuous reinterpretation wherein the world is shown as fundamentally dynamic.

A grotesque treatment of body and philosophic actions also occurs in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The enchanting world of wealth and poverty in the eighteenth-century England is here grotesquely deformed. The image of the human-resembling Yahoos is a satire of educated civilization as antagonistic in relation to nature. Physiological descriptions show moral and social degeneration caused by culture. Swift, in his critique, spared nobody: he put on the same level machinations and falseness of ministers, lawyers and doctors, showing a gloomy world managed by careerists and officials (Part 4, In *A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms, Chapter 6*) (Swift 1970: 298-304).

The grotesqueness of the episode is based on the contrast between health and illness. In the Houyhnhnms's land, sicknesses do not exist due to nature's perfection. On the other hand, in England under the government of Queen Anne, the number of sick persons had increased rapidly and as the result of it, doctors became desired persons of great importance. Englishmen paid big sums of money for food, but had no good habits of consuming it. It was the cause of unavoidable indispositions. Logical arguments had no weight in the light of practice. A simple opposition of health to sickness forms a basis of the grotesque situation in internal transcoding. Mutually complementary meanings become

related to external transcodings which should be analyzed as objectively functioning historical conditions. The social contradictions lead to a moral decline, changing the hitherto existing ethical ideal. Corruption, flattery, immorality, thievery prevailed. The economic barrier dividing society into the poor and the rich grew ever higher. Sickness forces people to use medical services, but doctors, instead of attending their patients, aggravate illnesses even more. In this way they secure their superiority over patients. They do not try to find a medicine for the relevant illness but rather a lingual substitute on the basis of which the causes are looked for. Swift describes ironically how doctors try to cure people by reversing the functions of mouth and anus. In this grotesque situation, doctors become murderers because it is easier to predict death than health. Doctors are philosophers because they are able to forecast and explain everything. Their perfidious doctrine does not disavow them but, as is shown by Swift, fix their social prestige, changing ignorance and stupidity into virtue. In Swift's grotesque novel the paradise of civilization turns into its opposite, where an animal instinctive wisdom is superior to the wisdom of infatuated man.

The analysis of Rabelais' and Swift' novels proves the complexity of the grotesque as well as its ambiguity escaping dictionary definitions. The hidden beauty of lingual possibilities, the multiplicity of potential internal and external ways of transcoding is revealed in the grotesque. The grotesque aspires to the expression of the inexpressible because it attempts to transmit a multiplicity of logical forms both at the level of textual communication and the communication between the receiver and the objective sphere of existence. The semiosis consists in the intersection of the meaningful bundle formed in the sphere of expression. In the grotesque, a special role is played by exchangeability, replacement of mutually determining elements of meanings. On this equipollence characterising very well the grotesque, Lotman writes: "The equipollence of semantic units of an artistic text is realized in a different way: the basis of it is a composition of lexical units (and other semantic elements) which may not be equipollent at the primary linguistic structure level (...). Then a secondary (artistic) structure is formed, where these units correspond mutually..." (Łotman 1988: 69).

In conclusion, it seems that the literary grotesque may be defined as an aesthetic category occurring in an artistic text in immanent and relational-reversible internal and external transcodings based on equipollence of meanings (polysemantization).

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## Rabelais, Quevedo y el cuerpo grotesco: notas para un estudio comparativo

SUSANA G. ARTAL

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El hecho de que esta Primera Conferencia Internacional de la EVKA, consagrada al lenguaje del grotesco, incluyera en su convocatoria una especial mención a François Rabelais y Francisco de Quevedo, ejerció en mí una particular atracción. Desde hace ya varios años, desarrollo una investigación cuyo objetivo general es estudiar el tema del cuerpo humano en la obra de esos dos autores. Y lo que en mi opinión legitima el proyecto de un estudio comparativo entre estos creadores, tan distanciados por diferencias ideológicas, idiomáticas, temporales y espaciales, es su relación con la cultura cómica popular, y en particular, con lo que Bakhtin denomina canon grotesco en la representación del cuerpo humano (Bakhtine 1970: 36)\*. De allí mi convicción de que, más allá de nuestras distancias, las geográficas e idiomáticas entre Estonia y la Argentina, esta convocatoria de la EVKA me iba a permitir dialogar con colegas con los que compartíamos inquietudes e intereses profundamente afines.

Para aportar a ese diálogo, reseñaré algunos aspectos de mi investigación. En primer lugar, los elementos previos al trabajo con los textos: el problema de si pudo Quevedo conocer directamente la obra de Rabelais, la delimitación del *corpus* y la búsqueda de un conjunto de presupuestos contextuales extra-literarios. En segundo

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\* Para el concepto de cuerpo grotesco, ver en especial el capítulo V y la introducción.

lugar, expondré los lineamientos de una primera fase de aplicación: el estudio de imágenes deshumanizantes.

### 1. ¿Rabelais en España?

En una primera instancia, era fundamental determinar si los posibles puntos de contacto obedecían a un conocimiento directo del autor francés por parte del español. Es decir, intentar responder una pregunta tan elemental como determinante para este tipo de estudios: ¿conoció Quevedo la obra de Rabelais?

De acuerdo con lo que sabemos hasta el momento, la biblioteca de Francisco de Quevedo no incluía ninguna obra de Rabelais (Maldonado 1975: 405–428). Por supuesto, este dato, que de haber resultado positivo habría sido bastante concluyente, no es suficiente para descartar la posibilidad de un conocimiento directo de la obra de Rabelais por parte del autor español. Pero diversas circunstancias conspiraron contra la difusión de la obra de Maître François en España.

En un artículo publicado por la *Revue de Littérature Comparée* (Gillet 1936: 140–144), Joseph E. Gillet pasa revista a las advertencias de la Inquisición contra Rabelais.<sup>\*</sup> Observa que, pese a que ni el *Index* español de Valdés de 1559 ni el de Quiroga de 1583 lo mencionan, habría llegado a España el *Index* de Amberes que se refiere al autor francés por lo menos cuatro veces. Los *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* madrileños, en sus ediciones de 1640 y 1667, prohíben expresamente su obra completa, calificándolo entre los autores más perniciosos. A las trabas impuestas por la censura deben sumarse otros dos elementos de naturaleza muy distinta pero que confluyeron: uno lingüístico y otro político.

Gillet considera que, más allá de las prohibiciones expresas de la Inquisición, la extrema dificultad de la lengua de Rabelais constituyó una barrera crucial para que su obra atravesara los Pirineos. Barrera a tal punto efectiva que, hasta principios del siglo XX, el creador de *Pantagruel* es casi desconocido en España. Efectivamente, la primera traducción castellana del *Gargantua*, a

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\* *Index de la Sorbonne de 1544, Index de Grand Inquisiteur Vidal de Bécaris (1540–1550), Index de Liège (1569), Index de Anvers.*

cargo de Barriobero y Herrán, data de 1905. En 1909, aparece una traducción catalana de Luis Ferraud de Sangermán. La traducción castellana que mencioné antes, se reedita en 1910 y en 1924, esta vez junto con la traducción de *Pantagruel*, también por Barriobero y Herrán.\*

El elemento político lo constituyó la tensa relación entre Francia y España durante los siglos XVI y XVII que desató olas de francofobia en las clases dominantes y en la élite intelectual españolas (véase Gutiérrez 1982). Uno de los muchos textos del siglo XVII en que esa francofobia se manifiesta, la *Visita y anatomía de la cabeza de Richelieu* (Quevedo 1945: 644), nombra a Maître François y sus obras directamente. Veamos el pasaje:

[...] Cuando entendí que no había más que hacer en la memoria del eminentísimo, columbré dos librillos, uno mayor que otro y un rótulo encima, que decía: *Bibliotheca Armandina Ruchelana*. El otro tenía por título: *Obras de Marco Francisco Rabeles, doctor en medicina: contiene cinco libros de la vida, hechos y dichos heroicos de Gargantúa y su hijo Pantagruel. La Pronosticación de Pantagruel con el Oráculo de la diosa Babue*. Y otros muchos tratados semejantes, todos unos peores que otros. Este estaba muy bien encuadernado, y tan lleno de registros, que entendí era el breviario de su eminencia [...]

La elección del texto que he citado no es caprichosa. Su autor, el que para atacar a Richelieu elige, como muestra de su impiedad, nombrar como su “breviario” las Obras de Rabelais, es justamente Francisco de Quevedo. Asensio Gutiérrez señala que los títulos que Quevedo señala:

[...]sont plutôt un résumé de son oeuvre. Ils ne correspondent pas à ceux de Rabelais mais ne reprennent

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\* No es mi objetivo pasar revista a las traducciones castellanas que siguieron sino observar los hechos. En primer lugar, que pese a la cercanía geográfica entre España y Francia, debieron transcurrir poco menos de cuatro siglos para que Rabelais atravesara los Pirineos. En segundo lugar, que sigue pendiente la deuda de una traducción y edición castellana confiable y debidamente anotada.

pas las indicaciones des Index: Quevedo est plus complet, il connaît l'existence d'une oeuvre parallèle de Rabelais, son almanach bouffon et même le personnage final du *Cinquième Livre*, la "pontife" Bacbuc. L'espagnol a entendu parler de l'oeuvre complète, puisqu'il ajoute aux deux premiers ouvrages le *Tiers Livre*, le *Quart Livre* et le *Cinquième Livre*. (Gutiérrez 1982: 235).

En realidad, no es exacto observar que esos títulos no correspondan a los de Rabelais. En la "Bibliografía sumaria de las ediciones de Rabelais", Jacques Boulenger incluye con el número 71, una edición cuyo título se aproxima demasiado al que Quevedo emplea (véase Boulenger 1925: 169-200).\*

Unos años antes de que Quevedo escribiera estas líneas, otro español ya se había dedicado a hostigar a Maître François, trazando una fantástica biografía libertina y enrostrándole su carácter obsceno y su irreverencia religiosa. Lo curioso es que ese español es justamente Juan Alonso de Laureles, un acérrimo enemigo de Quevedo. Efectivamente, pese a la casi nula difusión de la obra de Rabelais en España, en pleno siglo XVII, en la *Venganza de la lengua española contra el autor del Cuento de Cuentos* por don Juan Alonso Laureles (1629), texto reproducido por Valladares en

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\* El título de esta edición es: *Les oevres de Me François Rabelais, docteur en Medecine. Contentant cinq liures, de la vie, faicts & dits héroïques de Gargantua, & de son Fils Pantagruel. Plus, la Prognostication Pantagrueline, avec l'oracle de la Diue Bacbuc, & le mot de la Bouteille. Augmenté des Nauigations & Isle Sonante. L'Isle des Apedeftes. La Cresme Philosophale, avec vne Epistre Limosine, & deux autres Epistres à deux Vieilles de diferentes moeurs. Le tout par Me François Rabelais. A Lyon Pap Iean Martin. 1558*. Acerca de la fecha, Boulenger señala: "Edición antdatée, certainement postérieure à 1565" (p. 181). Este título es más extenso que el que Quevedo cita, pero la exactitud con que se respeta el orden de los elementos es notable y hace pensar en una traducción palabra por palabra, en la que simplemente se eliminó parte de la longitud excesiva del título original. Otros títulos, como el consignado con el número 80 en esa misma bibliografía, se asemejan. Pero el orden en que aparecen algunos elementos varía ligeramente: se menciona primero al oráculo de Bacbuc y luego la Prognostication pantagrueline.

su *Seminario erudito* (1787), hay un párrafo entero consagrado a atacar a Rabelais. Por otra parte, la censura contra el *Cuento de cuentos* hecha por Fr. Juan Ponze de León (véase Quevedo 1945: 770-772), reproduce literalmente páginas de la *Venganza*...

Desde mi punto de vista, la aparición de esta mención a Rabelais en el marco de una censura contra una obra de Quevedo resulta extremadamente sugestiva. Más allá del problema de cómo llegó el autor francés al conocimiento del censor español, lo que considero significativo es el hecho de que un contemporáneo de Quevedo —partícipe pues, en términos de Jauss, del mismo “horizonte de expectativas” — vinculara de algún modo a ambos autores.

De lo señalado hasta aquí se desprende que, hasta donde sabemos, no podemos hablar de una influencia directa de Rabelais en la obra del creador del *Buscón*. Podría pensarse sí en posibles contactos indirectos, ya a través de fuentes comunes a ambos autores, ya a través de obras que mencionaban a Rabelais. (Gillet señala, por ejemplo, las *Relazioni universali di Giovanni Botero*, traducidas al castellano por Diego de Aguiar (Valladolid, 1600).) En todo caso, creo que, a la hora de pensar en esas influencias indirectas, resulta indispensable orientar la búsqueda hacia Italia, tierra que los dos escritores visitaron y en cuyo riquísimo acervo literario sin duda abrevaron.

## 2. Delimitación del campo de trabajo.

La naturaleza del trabajo propuesto exigió, en primer lugar, una estricta delimitación del campo de trabajo que facilitara y precisara los términos de la comparación. En ese sentido, la primera discriminación que se efectuó fue la de circunscribir la investigación a la producción satírica de los dos autores.

De este modo, apartamos del centro de nuestro interés la producción no satírica de Quevedo y Rabelais: los epistolarios, traducciones, ediciones, tratados eruditos, filosóficos, políticos, los textos escritos en latín y griego, etc.

Sobre el *corpus* así obtenido, se practicó una segunda discriminación, que consistió en dejar a un lado, para el desarrollo de este proyecto, la consideración de:

- a) la poesía satírica de Quevedo, dada la inexistencia de una producción poética en el autor francés;
- b) el *Cinquiesme Livre* de Rabelais, acerca de cuya autenticidad subsiste aún la polémica.

Las restricciones apuntadas tendieron a precisar un campo de trabajo, de por sí extremadamente complejo por el hecho de estar trabajando con autores separados casi por un siglo, entre los cuales, como señalamos más arriba, no es factible señalar una influencia directa.

En consecuencia, las obras en que se centró el análisis son: *Pantagruel*, *Gargantua*, *Tiers Livre* y *Quart Livre* de François Rabelais y el *Buscón*, los *Sueños*, el *Discurso de todos los diablos* y la *Hora de Todos* de Quevedo.

### 3. Presupuestos contextuales extra-literarios

El primer aspecto abordado fue el estudio de la visión del cuerpo humano durante el Renacimiento. Este punto es de particular importancia para determinar hasta qué punto el tratamiento del tema del cuerpo en los autores considerados está enmarcado en esa visión general y en qué escapa a dicho marco. Para analizar esta cuestión, fue necesario estudiar tres elementos:

- a) los conocimientos de las ciencias naturales acerca del mundo viviente en el Renacimiento. Este aspecto cobra particular relieve en el caso de Rabelais por haber sido este autor médico y profesor de anatomía.
- b) La teoría del arte durante el Renacimiento. El objetivo de estudiar este punto era tratar de definir los propósitos que orientaban al artista en la representación de la naturaleza, y por consiguiente, los criterios de belleza, imitación y selección. La existencia de una extensa literatura teórica al respecto, en el terreno de las artes plásticas, me llevó a encarar este aspecto del trabajo a partir de las artes figurativas.

- c) La representación plástica del cuerpo humano. En esta parte del trabajo, me propuse considerar las preceptivas renacentistas para la representación del cuerpo humano y, en especial, la teoría de las proporciones.

Los resultados de esta fase del trabajo constituyeron un panorama de los elementos contextuales extra-literarios que era preciso considerar para el estudio del tema elegido.

#### **4. Imágenes deshumanizantes en la prosa satírica de Quevedo y Rabelais**

La siguiente etapa de mi investigación, consistió en el estudio de las imágenes deshumanizantes en la obra de François Rabelais. Se agrupó en esta categoría a aquellas imágenes en las que se establece una relación entre un término humano (es decir, el cuerpo humano o una de sus partes) y un elemento no humano (un animal, un objeto o partes de ellos). El conjunto así definido comprende pues animalizaciones y cosificaciones.

Las imágenes de este tipo son muy numerosas en la prosa satírica de los dos autores estudiados y no constituyen un rasgo estilístico aislado sino que se integran como uno de los elementos con que construyen la imagen grotesca del cuerpo humano. Como observé en un artículo anterior (Artal 1996: 85-97), las animalizaciones o las cosificaciones plasman, en el plano del lenguaje, la confusión del cuerpo y el mundo que Bakhtin señala como una de las características centrales del realismo grotesco. Estas asociaciones no solo se destacan por su cantidad sino también por la variedad en sus procedimientos de construcción.

El trabajo realizado comprendió los siguientes pasos:

- a) el relevamiento, en los cuatro libros de Rabelais, de las imágenes deshumanizantes;
- b) la elaboración de un sistema de clasificación de esas imágenes;
- c) la clasificación, en función del sistema elaborado, del total de imágenes relevadas;
- d) el estudio de la frecuencia de cada uno de los diversos tipos de imágenes en cada uno de los libros y en el conjunto de la obra de Rabelais;

e) el análisis de los resultados obtenidos y la formulación de las conclusiones correspondientes.

A continuación, inicié el estudio del mismo sistema de imágenes en la prosa satírica de Quevedo, es decir, en el *Buscón*, los *Sueños*, el *Discurso de todos los diablos* y la *Hora de Todos*. La metodología empleada fue similar a la que se utilizó para el análisis de estas imágenes en la obra de Rabelais.

Como apéndice de este trabajo, adjunto los cuadros clasificatorios resultantes del análisis de imágenes deshumanizantes en la prosa de ambos autores. En esos cuadros se designa con la letra A el término humano de la relación y con la letra B, el elemento no humano. Cabe señalar que las pautas clasificatorias elaboradas a partir del estudio de animalizaciones y cosificaciones en la obra de Rabelais, resultaron adecuadas para analizar ese sistema de imágenes en la prosa satírica de Quevedo. Por supuesto, se introdujeron modificaciones y precisiones tipológicas, que, en una segunda instancia, fueron útiles también para perfeccionar la clasificación inicial del sistema de imágenes rabelaisianas.

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Lo dicho hasta aquí intenta resumir las fases iniciales del proyecto, las determinaciones previas al abordaje específico de los textos y una primera etapa de aplicación. Los pasos siguientes de mi investigación consistieron en el estudio del retrato y de la hipérbole de lo corporal. Pese a que los límites de esta comunicación no me permiten desarrollar estos aspectos, deseo recalcar que los resultados obtenidos me reafirman en la convicción de que un estudio comparativo del tema del cuerpo humano, en la prosa satírica de Quevedo y Rabelais, puede aportar conclusiones interesantes, tanto para el conocimiento de ambos autores como para proporcionar modelos de acercamiento productivos para abordar el lenguaje del grotesco.



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**Apéndice:** Cuadros clasificatorios de ID (imágenes deshumanizantes) en la prosa satírica de Rabelais y Quevedo.

1. Cuadro clasificatorio de ID en la prosa de Rabelais:

I D E S H U M A N I Z A N T E S	I. Con mención explícita de B	a. de semejanza no circunscripta		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A (o parte de A) es (parece) B</li> <li>2. B (por A o parte de A)</li> <li>3. x parte de A es x parte de B</li> <li>4. x parte de A es B</li> <li>5. A es x parte de B</li> <li>6. A<sub>1</sub>+A<sub>2</sub> es (parece) B</li> </ol>
		b. de semejanza circunscripta por	1. el desarrollo de una acción	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A realiza la acción x como B</li> <li>2. A sufre la acción x como si fuera B</li> <li>3. A haciendo x parece B haciendo y</li> <li>4. A parece B haciendo x</li> </ol>
			2. una característica de A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A posee x cualidad como B</li> <li>2. A posee x parte propia de B</li> </ol>
	II. Sin mención explícita de B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A (o parte de A) + sintagma verbal asociado a B</li> <li>b. A (o parte de A) + modificador asociado a B</li> </ol>		

2. Cuadro clasificatorio de ID en la prosa satírica de Quevedo:

I D E S H U M A N I Z A N T E S	I. Con mención explícita de B	a. de semejanza no circunscripta		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A (o parte de A) es (parece) B</li> <li>2. B (por A o parte de A)</li> <li>3. x parte de A es x parte de B</li> <li>4. x parte de A es B</li> <li>5. A es x parte de B</li> <li>6. A<sub>1</sub>+A<sub>2</sub> es (parece) B.</li> </ol>
		b. de semejanza circunscripta por	1. el desarrollo de una acción	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A realiza la acción x como B</li> <li>2. A sufre la acción x como si fuera B</li> </ol>
			2. una característica de A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A posee x cualidad como B</li> <li>2. A posee x parte propia de B</li> <li>3. A tiene por nombre B</li> </ol>
	II. Sin mención explícita de B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A (o parte de A) + sintagma verbal asociado a B</li> <li>b. A (o parte de A) + modificador asociado a B</li> <li>c. A modifica a un núcleo sintagmático asociado a B</li> </ol>		

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## Lo grotesco en la epopeya burlesca española

JOSÉ MARÍA BALCELLS

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La literatura española cuenta con varias obras del subgénero poético de la epopeya burlesca, de la que hay creaciones en la Edad Media, en el Siglo de Oro y en el XVIII. En el XIX ya no se compusieron epopeyas burlescas en España. Pues bien: el enfoque grotesco, entendido como la práctica de un estilo degradado que, pese a su afinidad con lo burlesco, no pretende efectos jocosos (véase Arellano 1984: 22 y ss.), es uno de los aspectos que pueden ser analizados en tales textos, aun cuando lo grotesco solamente está presente, de manera muy significativa, en dos de ellos, uno de carácter medieval, pese a haberse compuesto a principios del siglo XVI; y otro del Barroco. Los textos aludidos son: *Carajicomedia*, parodia inserta en el *Cancionero de obras de burlas provocantes a risa*, pero no antes de la edición valenciana de 1519; y el *Poema heroico de las necedades y locuras de Orlando el enamorado* de Francisco de Quevedo.

Las principales preguntas que plantea el hecho de que únicamente sean dos las epopeyas de burlas creadas con perspectiva grotesca muy ostensible y sistemática son las siguientes: ¿Hay factores semejantes entre aquellas obras en las que no se produce lo grotesco, factores que podrían explicar dicha ausencia? ¿Tienen la *Carajicomedia* y el *Poema heroico* elementos comunes relevantes, y por tanto diferentes a las restantes muestras del subgénero, elementos susceptibles de abonar la referida presencia? Creemos que la respuesta a ambos interrogantes puede contribuir a entender alguna de las causas del por qué lo grotesco se da de manera amplia en las mencionadas parodias.

### Epopeyas de burlas no grotescas

La hipótesis que se defiende aquí es la que comenzamos a desarrollar a continuación: sí hay alguna coincidencia básica entre las epopeyas burlescas en las que el fenómeno de lo grotesco no aparece. La coincidencia principal estriba en que dichas parodias son animalísticas, es decir están protagonizadas por animales, como ocurre con el canon de las mismas, la *Batracomiomaquia*, aun cuando este paradigma clásico, que no influye en absoluto en *La Gaticida*, incide de manera muy diversa y en grado muy distinto en cada una de las otras epopeyas de burlas áureas, a saber: *Guerra de los ratones y los gatos* de Luis Zapata; *La Muracinda* de Juan de la Cueva; *La Mosquea* de Villaviciosa; y *La Gatomaquia* de Lope de Vega (cf. Balcells 1994: 25-30).

En esas cinco epopeyas cómicas, lo grotesco no se manifiesta debido a que los animales cotidianos que protagonizan el argumento (ranas, ratones, gatos, perros, moscas, hormigas, etc.) han de imitar necesariamente las actitudes, las acciones y el lenguaje de los héroes de las epopeyas serias, porque en caso contrario no se lograría la parodia burlesca. En otras palabras: la imprescindible *mimesis* preserva a dichas obras del desplazamiento hacia la ridiculización extrema de los ingredientes de contenido y expresión de la epopeya, los cuales han de ser imitados del modo más fidedigno posible por las epopeyas animalísticas.

Los tratadistas españoles del Siglo de Oro, siguiendo criterios aristotélicos, dejaron muy clara esta cuestión en sus libros de teoría y preceptiva, ya que, salvo la excepción de Luis Alfonso de Carballo, que en su *Cisne de Apolo* pedía un estilo risible, y por tanto bajo, para la epopeya burlesca, todos los demás reclamaban para ella un estilo alto, e incluso altísimo. En efecto: en su *Philosophia Antigua Poetica* (1596), el Pinciano, por boca de Fadrique, recordaba que la epopeya, tanto la de veras como la de burlas, exigían un lenguaje elevado, prioritariamente constituido por vocablos grandes y peregrinos, estando los compuestos dentro de la clase de los peregrinos. A su vez, en sus *Tablas Poéticas* (1617) entendía Cascales que no sólo no requiere estilo bajo la epopeya burlesca, sino que lo requiere más alto todavía que la

epopeya convencional, y ello para el mejor logro de los efectos paródicos.

En coherencia con estas recomendaciones, la epopeya burlesca española animalística nunca utiliza un estilo bajo, de mal gusto, grosero, sino por el contrario un estilo siempre culto, difiriendo las obras únicamente en el nivel de sobriedad lingüística y retórica de que hacen gala. Por el contrario, las epopeyas no animalísticas, las cuales no se sitúan en la línea de la *Batracomiomaquia*, no han realizado su parodia a través de la *mimesis* mediante animales, y sus autores se han encontrado libres para un ejercicio máximo de la ridiculización que ha derivado en el uso de lo grotesco, el cual puede afectar no sólo al contenido, sino al lenguaje de la obra.

Añadimos que la tentación morbosa hacia lo grotesco parece que resulta tanto más irresistible para el escritor cuanto más magnífico sea el asunto objeto de ridiculizaciones, y cuanto más culto y refinado sea el lenguaje del texto parodiado. De este estímulo morboso carecen precisamente las epopeyas burlescas animalísticas, porque las epopeyas serias cuyos rasgos parodian no se caracterizan por el lenguaje refinado y con profusión de recursos retóricos, ya que un lenguaje de esta naturaleza contradice la gravedad de la epopeya, y se considera indecoroso para ella.

### *La Carajicomedia*

Pero presentemos ya brevemente la *Carajicomedia* antes de señalar sus principales factores grotescos: tocante a su datación, se ha propuesto que la referida parodia ha de fecharse poco después de la muerte de la reina Isabel de Castilla, y por tanto no antes de 1506. Y en todo caso entre ese año y el de 1518, ya que se publicó a principios del 1519. En lo que respecta a su autor, se trata de una obra anónima, seguramente debida a un seglar, el cual imagina la ficción de que encontró el manuscrito que nos traslada, y al que habría añadido, al final, el texto de otro manuscrito, presentándose meramente como el autor de las glosas en prosa, mientras los otros dos, los autores de los versos, serían los imaginarios frailes Fray Bugeo Montesino (evidente alusión a Fray Ambrosio Montesino), y Fray Juan de Hempudia, con autoría circunscrita a la parte final

de la *Carajicomedia*. Dado el carácter ficticio de los dos autores aludidos, podrían considerarse "máscaras de una única persona", lo que corrobora el hecho de que no hay diferencias de estilo entre ninguno de los que presuntamente comparten la escritura de esta parodia (*Carajicomedia* 1995: 8).

Por lo que hace al objeto de la parodia, el anónimo autor ridiculiza el *Laberinto de Fortuna* o *Trescientas* de Juan de Mena, obra cuya primera edición es de 1481 (cf. Varo 1981: 26 y ss.). Sin embargo, parece que el apoyo más sustantivo de la burla fue la primera de las ediciones comentadas del *Laberinto*, la publicada en Sevilla en 1499, edición debida a Hernán Núñez, quien incluía, obviamente, aclaraciones en prosa a los puntos más oscuros del poema de Mena.

De tales comentarios se mofa el autor de la *Carajicomedia* merced a las prosas que acompañan a las estrofas paródicas. Pero esta epopeya burlesca se estima que no se limita a ser una parodia del *Laberinto*, sino que también apunta a ridiculizar el proyecto político por el que Mena aboga, proyecto en el cual ensalza la monarquía absoluta que encarnaría con los años la reina Isabel. A la vez, Mena censuraba la corrupción e inmoralidad de su época.

El método paródico practicado en la *Carajicomedia* es excepcional en la historia de la epopeya burlesca española, debido a que su técnica clave consiste en parodiar el *Laberinto* estrofa a estrofa, lo que permite conjeturar que se ha materializado una suerte de *contrafactum* "a lo obsceno" en vez de "a lo divino". La fórmula de referencia la secunda el autor desde la copla I a la XLVII. Luego, se parodian las coplas de Mena dedicadas a la muerte del Conde de Niebla.

La dimensión grotesca de la *Carajicomedia* radica en que su autor no se ciñe a la ridiculización del *Laberinto*, sino que el ridículo al que somete la obra es muy extremo, valiéndose de una parodia de enorme grosería y de ostensible contraste con el universo moral del poeta cordobés, que dedicaba su epopeya al muy "prepotente" rey don Juan el Segundo de Castilla, mientras en la *Carajicomedia* se cantan las desventuras de una "impotencia", pero sexual, la del personaje llamado Diego Fajardo.

Y aún no satisfecho con tan atrevidísima como grotesca parodia, el autor realiza otra insólita parodia, no menos grotesca, pero ahora del subgénero mismo de la epopeya de burlas, puesto

que, esperpentizando el relato de la muerte del Conde de Niebla por Mena, relata la muerte del carajo, esto es del pene, de Diego Fajardo, quien perece tras la postrera de sus batallas sexuales, la de capitanear la pelea de un ejército de penes contra otras tantas vaginas, a las que los miembros viriles atacan como si el objetivo militar fuese el del asalto a una fortaleza. Al cabo, vencerán en tan inusitada lucha los coños de las mujeres. Ni que decir tiene que, comparadas con esta batalla de penes contra coños, las parodias cifradas en encuentros bélicos de animales son de una candidez rotunda.

### El Poema heroico de Quevedo

Cumple referirnos ahora al *Poema heroico* de Quevedo, un texto bien conocido, pero cuya fecha de escritura es una incógnita. No cabe duda, sin embargo, de que en cualquier supuesto hablamos de una creación de senectud, pues puede que no se escribiera antes de 1636, cuando don Francisco alcanzaba los 56 años. Cabe postular tal datación a partir de la siguiente conjetura: “Se desconoce la fecha del poema, pero en general se coincide en situarlo después del *Tribunal de la Justa Venganza*, larga invectiva contra el satírico, escrita en 1635 (...) El *Orlando* se habría escrito en contestación a la invectiva antes aludida” (Quevedo 1964: 51, nota 1).

Es muy sabido que en el *Poema heroico* se parodia el mundo de la caballería orlandiana, pero según lo había trazado Boiardo en su *Orlando Innamorato*. Quevedo incorporó también elementos procedentes del *Furioso* de Ariosto y aun de otros poemas cabalerescos italianos (ibid. 15 y ss.), pero los episodios que acaecen en el texto quevediano (Angélica llega a París con su hermano Argalía, quien desafiará y combatirá con los paladines; huida de Angélica...) remiten a Boiardo (cf. Alarcos 1946: 37).

En el *Poema heroico* la burla predomina, ciertamente, sobre lo grotesco, pero en el canto I la faceta grotesca es lo más llamativo del texto, que comienza ya con un ostensible tratamiento grotesco de las partes proemiales de la epopeya. Quevedo inicia su poema paródico con una exposición seguida de una invocación a las musas, añadiendo luego una dedicación. En la exposición, y apar-

tándose radicalmente de Boiardo, el poeta no se contiene en proclamar que cantará “los disparates, las locuras” de Orlando, sino que, en su primera alusión a Angélica, aprovecha la oportunidad para degradarla llenándola de oprobio, con el insulto de “niña buscona y doncellita andante”, un insulto acaso de raigambre aretiana. Dos estrofas después, presenta a Medoro, personaje inventado por Ariosto, como “aquel cabrón desventurado/ que llamaron Medoro los poetas”.

Con todo, en una de las partes proemiales prescindibles, en la dedicación, Quevedo aumentará todavía su afán distorsionador de los prolegómenos cuando, en vez de componer una sucinta dedicatoria a alguien al que se quiere honrar, generalmente un prócer, se extiende a lo largo de hasta cinco octavas con una invectiva furibunda contra un individuo al que no nombra en el poema, pero al que se ha identificado con su adversario el historiador sevillano Francisco Merovelli de la Puebla, dado que con anterioridad había escrito contra este personaje ocho octavas (cf. González Ollé 1993: 285–298), de las que aprovecharía cinco, no sin reelaborarlas, insertándolas de manera abrupta en su *Orlando*.

Cada una de las octavas está repleta de variados insultos de grueso calibre, lo que hace de estos versos una dedicatoria sin parangón en ninguna epopeya burlesca española, entre otras razones porque nada hay de burla en las octavas, en las cuales la intencionalidad satírica no reviste estilo grave y severo, sino que se impregna de continuados insultos, formulados de modo tan degradante que confiere índole grotesca a la invectiva. Léase el arranque de esta insólita dedicatoria “al revés”:

A ti, postema de la vida humana,  
afrenta de la infamia y de la afrenta,  
peste de la verdad introducida,  
conciencia desechada de una venta,  
ánima condenada, entretenida  
en dar a Satanás almas de renta,  
judísimo malsín Escariote,  
honra entre bofetones y garrote;

(Quevedo 1971: 412–413)

Otros muchos momentos desvalorizadores se encuentran en el *Poema heroico*, algunos señalados por Iffland (1978), momentos



que unas veces son incontrastablemente grotescos, mientras otras son pasajes semi-grotescos. Entre los primeros hay que citar la descripción del convite que da Carlomagno en París a los asistentes al torneo, descripción en la que el autor, sin dejar de atenerse al hilo de Boiardo, amplía de modo muy considerable el pretexto que le brinda el italiano para demorarse en hipérboles esperpénticas hinchidas de gran fantasía. Entre los fragmentos en los que se roza lo grotesco, cabe señalar, por ejemplo, la caricatura desvalorizadora de Astolfo a vueltas del motivo de las armas del caballero (véase Rangel 1979: 164–165), o ciertas parodias del amanecer, parodias que no extrañarán en la pluma de quien fue tan escasamente proclive a plasmar la temática de la naturaleza, lo cual condice con afanarse en el descrédito, mediante la perspectiva grotesca, del prestigio literario del orbe natural, y en concreto del subtema estelar de la alborada.

A diferencia de la *Carajicomedia*, epopeya burlesca en la cual lo grotesco se consigue por mor de la misma temática cantada, la escatológica, en el *Poema heroico* la degradación del universo de Boiardo se efectúa insertando a cada paso ridiculizaciones ingeniosísimas, ridiculizaciones en las que de vez en vez se compasan léxico de germanía y una lengua afectadamente culta, en ocasiones parodiando el sello lingüístico, retórico y plástico de Góngora.

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## Virtuality and the Grotesque in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*

MARINA GRISHAKOVA

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The long history of reading proves that *Don Quixote* possesses an enormous potential of virtual sense — the sense which is created by readers in the process of reception. The author himself points jokingly at the virtual “unwritten” part of the novel: the Moor, the imaginative narrator of the story, is forced to restrict himself to the narrow limits of the narrative, “though he has ability, capacity and brains enough to deal with the whole universe”, and he requests “that credit be given him, not for what he writes, but for what he has refrained from writing” (Cervantes 1952: 336). This Moor is a kind of autoparody, for the intention of Cervantes was just “to deal with the whole universe”, to write the “universal” novel. Since all Moors are “impostors, cheats and schemers” (Cervantes 1952: 212), he finds the ways to follow his aim even confining himself to “a story so dry and of so little variety as this of Don Quixote” (Cervantes 1952: 336).

One of the first structuralist descriptions of *Don Quixote* is an article by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky, “How Don Quixote is made” (Shklovsky 1921). Shklovsky regards *Don Quixote* as a traditional “frame” composition (the “weak frame” of Cid Hamete’s manuscript) with intercalated stories. Originally the hero was a “brainless” hidalgo, then Cervantes used him as the unifying principle of bookish wisdom. Hence the ambivalence and the changing image of the hero: Don Quixote does not just imitate the sensation of lifelikeness, but feels himself alive — in comparison with his false doubles. The heroes of the main story

and of the intercalated stories are not being co-told, but are co-existing; the main heroes are not only enduring different jokes and accidents, but are experiencing and discussing them. According to Shklovsky *Don Quixote* is "a step towards the new novel". Soon Shklovsky renounced the formalist method however. In the Soviet conditions he reinterpreted the novel as an allegory: Don Quixote is a fighter for social justice, and the famous errantry is the way to freedom and happiness (essay "The copper sword of Don Quixote", 1982). Here we have a peculiar testimony of the virtual openness of the text and of the insufficiency of reducing it to stable immanent meanings.

Interest in the structure of *Don Quixote* and its virtual meanings is symptomatic for the postmodernist situation (McHale 1987: 34). Postmodernism is interested in the provocativeness of the novel. The structure of *Don Quixote* is fragmentary, it defies full and consistent logical explanation, it includes "empty places", narrative gaps, reticence and incomprehension as constructive devices. *Don Quixote* is based on the principle of "Chinese boxes" (McHale 1987: 130) — "possible worlds", including each within the other.

*Don Quixote* is a text with a high degree of "epistemological uncertainty" (a notion formulated by postmodernism). Here objects are in the state of metamorphosis and mimicry, changing permanently: physical borders are permeable and identity is uncertain and unstable. The objects are doubling and multiplying: Pedro who can scarcely spell a word correctly — but who tells the story "with very good grace"; Don Sancho — the Biscayan and Don Sancho Panza, the governor of Barataria; two Distressed Duennas and two figures of duennas "to give an air of propriety to the room as if they had been real duennas" (Cervantes 1952: 350); two alcaldes (or regidores?) or two donkeys; two Torralvas — Torralva the shepherdess (in Sancho's story) and Torralva the licentiate (in Don Quixote's story), etc. Such principle contradicts the realistic understanding of a hero as integral continuity. Oscillation between illusion and reality is not the inner state of Don Quixote's mind (for he is only a perfect reader and imitator of books), but the constructive principle of the text, which provokes such oscillation in the conscience of the reader: if there are different "possible worlds", there may be different objects under the same name in these worlds. Nabokov has counted seven Don Quixote's: "(1) the

initial Señor Quijana; (2) the final Quijana the Good; (3) the presupposed "original", "historical" Don Quixote, whom Cervantes slyly places somewhere behind the book in order to give it a "true story" flavour; (4) Don Quixote of the imagined Arabic chronicler who — perhaps — underplays the valor of the Spanish Knight; (5) Don Quixote of the second part, the Knight of the Lions in juxtaposition to the first part, Knight of the Mournful Countenance; (6) Carrasco's Don Quixote (7) the coarse Don Quixote of the Avellaneda spurious continuation and "the army of Don Quixote's of translations" (Nabokov 1983: 112). But there are also several Sancho Panzas: Sancho — a smelly peasant, coward and glutton; Sancho — the squire, who considers his master a "simpleton" and "madman"; Sancho — the poet of wisdom of Don Quixote; Sancho — the carrier of folklore — bookish wisdom in Baratarian episode.

To fix fluctuating realities the inscriptions or "juridical formulas" are used, as in the episode where Don Quixote is walking with the inscription "Don Quixote" on his back, or in the scene with bachelor Carrasco under the guise of the Knight of Mirrors ("You must also confess and believe", added Don Quixote, "that the Knight you vanquished was not and could not be Don Quixote of La Mancha, but some one else in his likeness, just as I confess and believe that you, though you seem to be the bachelor Samson Carrasco, are not so, but some other resembling him, whom my enemies have here put before me in his shape..." (Cervantes 1952: 247)).

The story of a "bad painter", a painter who tried to reconcile contradictions of the "appearance" and the "essence", is meta-descriptive and autoparodizing: there was the painter of Ubeda, who, when asked what he was painting, answered "What it may turn out". "Sometimes he would paint a cock in such a fashion, and so unlike, that he had to write alongside of it in Gothic letters", "This is a cock" (Cervantes 1952: 214).

In Harvard lectures on *Don Quixote* (1952, published in 1983) Vladimir Nabokov regarded the novel as a set of mirrors ("reflections, and reflections of reflections, shimmer through the book"; "so here are the two heroes, their shadows merging in one and overlapping, forming a certain unity that we must accept"; "so we have at least seven colours of the Don Quixote specter in the

book, merging and splitting and merging again «as the shadow of something on the wall illuminated by several moving lights from various angles») (Nabokov 1983: 78, 24, 112).

According to Nabokov, there is nothing of the real 17th century Spain in the book: only conventional fictional realities of pastoral, picaresque and chivalry novels, romances, ballads and farces: "...apart from the account of Don Quixote and Sancho's fascinating conversations and the magnificent illusions which make up Don Quixote's main adventures, the novel is a farrago of prefabricated events, secondhand intrigues, mediocre pieces of verse, trite interpolations, impossible disguises and incredible coincidences..." (Nabokov 1983: 111).

Following Salvador de Madariaga (Nabokov 1983: 41), Nabokov regards Cervantes as an author who does not generalize his own theoretical principles: the aim of parodizing chivalry books is a mere conditional device, an attempt of the necessary self-determination in the postfactum composed "prologue". "'Don Quixote' is one of those books that are, perhaps, more important in eccentric diffusion than in their own intrinsic value". Cervantes is first of all a "magician" and "story-teller" with unbridled imagination, but also a cruel puppet-master, who revives "his squeaking dolls" again and again. In the second book Don Quixote is mystified, and Nabokov calls this situation "mental cruelties". We could interpret the situation as copying and playing up the basic Quixotean "myth", finding illusory solutions in the form of theatrical tricks with false inscriptions, false beards and noses, theatrical blood (vine), broken puppets etc. It appears that the hero is fighting with his own shadows. This situation of existential deadlock is also important for Nabokov's own novels.

We can speak about the "virtual grotesqueness" of "Don Quixote": the strange objects come into being in the points of intersection of possible worlds — the objects which are simultaneously windmills and giants, cow-heels and calves' feet, Master Pedro (the fortune-teller and the puppet-showman, but probably the devil's servant) and Gines de Pasamonte or Don Ginesillo de Paropilla, a young peasant or Dorothea (from pastoral or love-adventure novel) or the Princess Micomicona (from chivalry novel). The grotesqueness is embodied in an object named "basin/helmet" (baciyelmo), two barbers (a "real", but disguised one and another

“real” barber, an owner of the basin) discussing the name of this object. The episode is one of the traps of the book, because the love-adventure story pairs are reunited to resolve the doubtful question and to maintain the existence of Mambrino's helmet — but also to carry out the plan of the “real” barber and curate — to “enchant” Don Quixote and put him in the cage.

Don Quixote is a grotesque knight: knightly asceticism is exaggerated into corporeal insufficiency, almost ghostliness (his cheeks appear “to be kissing each other in the inside of the mouth”), poverty (worn stockings) and sickness (kidney ailment); knightly dignity is expressed through exaggerated eloquence and purism of speech, knightly cruelty — through awful bursts of anger: “dropping his buckler he lifted his lance with both hands and with it smote such a blow on the carrier's head that he stretched him on the ground so stunned that had he followed it up with a second there would have been no need of a surgeon to cure him”; “Don Quixote «...» once more dropped his buckler and once more lifted his lance, and without actually breaking the second carrier's head into pieces, made more than three of it, for he laid it open in four”; “...he came down on the Biscayan with such fury, smiting him full over the cushion and over the head, that — even so good a shield proving useless — as if a mountain had fallen on him, he began to bleed from nose, mouth, and ears...” (Cervantes 1952: 7, 24).

The combination of Don Quixote the Knight and Sancho Panza — the Squire (the “head” and the “body”) is a grotesque image. Don Quixote's world is determined by enthusiasm and insolence, that of Sancho Panza by fear and greed. One is an extreme idealist (as he answers to traders who require him to show them Dulcinea: “The essential point is that without seeing her you must believe, confess, affirm, swear, and defend it...” (Cervantes 1952: 10)). The other recognizes only the reality of physical weight and power: what is not visible, does not exist, and what is visible, is still conspicuous. For him the only undoubtedly real thing and symbol of adventures is blanketing at the inn-yard. The world-picture of Don Quixote is exaggerated (“I count for a hundred”) and dramatic (“there is no recollection which time does not put an end to, and no pain which death does not remove”) (Cervantes 1952: 39, 41). The world-picture of Sancho is diminished (“we are «...» not more than

one and a half"), concrete ("I am more fit for plasters than for arguments") and escapist ("...I mean, with all my five senses, to keep myself from being wounded or from wounding any one: as to being blanketed again I say nothing, for it is hard to prevent mishaps of that sort, and if they come there is nothing for it but to squeeze our shoulders together, hold our breath, shut our eyes, and let ourselves go where luck and the blanket may send us") (Cervantes 1952: 39, 41, 64). Don Quixote is experiencing reality as metamorphosis — an endless magical modification. Sancho, on the contrary, is always ready to end the plot and to return to his domestic affairs.

Here the traditional carnival-circus pair ("thin" and "thick", "tall" and "short") is transformed through plural subtle distinctions. We may speak of the effect of "alienation", which is a condition of the grotesque. The grotesque is a secondary phenomenon: it is always "strange", "exaggerated", "distorted" from the standpoint of a certain norm: "... the grotesque images preserve their peculiar nature, the sharp distinction from the images of ready, finished existence. They are ambiguous and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous and freakish from the point of view of any "classical" aesthetics, that is to say, aesthetics of a ready, finished existence" (Bakhtin 1990: 32).

The grotesque was "discovered" in 15th century Italy: the original Roman ornaments including strange hybrid motifs became the object of stylizations. The objects of exotic and distant cultures (for example, Hindu or African deities) seem strange to new European culture: they lose their ritual and practical functions and become aesthetic objects (Mukarovský 1966: 17–24). They lose their original semantics, as the signs of primary emotions which they inspired (fear, veneration), are reduced through aesthetic reception to the feelings of anxiousness and fun.

The secondary nature of the grotesque is emphasized in the introduction of Michel Jeanneret to *Les songses drolatiques de Pantagruel*. Unlike the allegory or the caricature, the grotesque supposes contemplating and experiencing, but not interpretation, deciphering or verification. This is a sign of changing, anti-classical, anti-heroic world, where the objects are only casual forms of unknown powers.



The grotesqueness in Cervantes' novel is the result of the collision of plural virtual meanings. Reading, understanding, interpreting are the main motifs of the book. The novel depicts possible readers of the story: the historian who examined the annals of La Mancha and found Cid Hamete's manuscript in the street; the housekeeper who is afraid of magicians coming out of the books to bewitch her; the Curate and the Barber discussing the *Galatea* of Cervantes; the landlord who likes "the furious and terrible blows the knights deliver" (Cervantes 1952: 118); his wife who likes the quiet moments when chivalry books are read aloud; Maritornes who prefers the descriptions of ladies in the arms of their knights under the orange trees; the landlord daughter weeping for the knights separating from their ladies; the heroes themselves discussing the first books; the Canon — the author and theorist of chivalry novel; the printers who are also co-authors since the misprints are changing the text, etc. "Possible worlds" where the heroes are travelling are interwoven: they form different contexts in which the knight story is reinterpreted ("mirrored"). The "real" hidalgo Quijano has disappeared, but his virtual shadow Don Quixote (the product of reading chivalry books) is still living and multiplying. The knight-image is alienated from the original chivalry context and desintegrated in the process of "re-reading". Cervantes' novel reproduces the process of the aesthetical reception which always changes our preconceptions, creates the illusions and destroys or modifies them. J. L. Borges has presumed that the main cause of the vitality and suggestiveness of Cervantes' novel — also in translations — is the diffusion of the reader's world and the world of the book, the involvement of the reader in the book (in other words, the virtual dimension of the text): if the imaginative heroes of the book are its readers, then, perhaps, a real reader is also an imaginative hero? (essay "Secret magic in *Don Quixote*"). The intention of Cervantes was to confuse a reader, to give him the pleasure of reading and to reveal the nature of this pleasure.

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## Fragmente zum Grotesken in der italienischen Literatur des Seicento

FELIX KARLINGER

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“La teoria del diletto era nell’aria o predomina nelle polemiche letterarie di quell’età.” (Croce 1929: 48)

Und worin besteht dieses “dilettare” im 17. Jahrhundert? “... con tanti scherzi, conte tante sentenze, e con tanti stravaganti modi...”\*

Und wiederum mag man fragen, worin diese “stravaganti modi” bestanden und was ihre Funktion gewesen ist. Ihr Wesen bestand vor allem darin, “stupore” zu erregen, Staunen und Verblüffung sollten Genuß bereiten, und das war meist nur durch unerwartete Wortbilder oder groteske Handlungselemente, auch durch die Verbindung entgegengesetzter Gedanken und Gefühle zu erreichen, Einige Beispiele aus dem Bereich der Lyrik — Gian Battista Marino — und der Prosa — Giambattista Basile — sollen dies andeuten.

Die Tendenz zum Grotesken zeigt sich bei Marino bereits, wenn er — der Vielschreiber eines äußerst großen Werkes — sich selbst charakterisiert: “Rassomiglio me stesso alla testugine, animal terrestre ed acquatile, tardo stupido, neghittoso ed essangue, non solo per esprimere la pigrizia del mio ingegno poco veloce, povero di vivacità ed inetto alle alte speculazioni, ma anche per dinotare il difetto della mia natura ritrosa e restia.”

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\* Soweit die Dedicazion Scarano’s der Erstausgabe des *Cunto de li cunti*; nach Benedetto Croce, *Saggi sulla letteratura italiana del 600*. Bari, 1925.

Wir müssen dabei bedenken: ein damals bereits berühmter Dichter spielt mit burlesken Vergleichen, um sich selbst zum Gegenstand des Lachens zu machen.

Wie hier liebt es jedoch Marino häufig, gerade in grotesken Vergleichen "stupore" und "meraviglia" zu erregen. Das kann etwa durch die Verknüpfung des Galanten mit dem Banalen und Alltäglichen geschehen, wie in den Gedichten "Donna che cuce" oder in "Ninfa mungitrice", wo das Bild einer Nymphe mit dem einer Stallmagd ineinander fließt. Doch gerade derlei Grotesken sind vom Dichter beabsichtigt: "È del poeta la fin la meraviglia / chi non sa far stupir, vada alla striglia."

Der überraschende Witz, die Verblüffung ist jedoch selbst häufig nicht banal, sie verlangt vielmehr ein scharfes Mitdenken, um in den Genuß der pointe zu gelangen. Das mögen die folgenden Verszeilen zeigen:

"Felici in sí bell'urna ossa raccolte  
perché pur a le mie non si concede  
in sí terso alabastro esser sepolte?"

Der Ausschnitt stammt aus dem Gedicht "Giuoco di dadi" (Würfelspiel). Die Würfel sind aus Knochen (Elfenbein) geschnitten, deshalb muß die weisse Hand, die sie umschlossen hält, zwangsläufig zur 'Alabaster-Urne' werden, um den vor Liebe Schmachtenden zur pseudo-elegischen Betrachtung über den der-einstigen Aufenthaltsort seiner eigenen Gebeine anzuregen, sodaß seine erotischen Wunschträume in Todesmetaphorik gekleidet werden.

"Parla viver parer" wird zu einem grotesken Leitgedanken von Marino, wobei das "viva parer" ein "dar vita" ausschließt. Sehr häufig führt das Groteske auch zu einer Zweideutigkeit, in der sich der Witz verschlüsselt, oder zu einer Ironisierung der erotischen Situation. Dazu ist es gut, sich eines der Kußmadrigale Marinos näher anzusehen.

Wohl stehen Marinos Kußmadrigale unter dem Einfluß von Catull, aber die "arte di ben baciare" wird etwa in einer besonders pikanten Kuß-Gattung, nämlich den geraubten Küssen, ins Groteske übersteigert.

Taci, bocca, taci  
 dall'amate bellezze  
 le rapaci dolcezze!  
 Taci che s'egli... che s'oda Amore,  
 la pena avrà di tue rapine il cuore:  
 Nè minor, fora indire  
 il parlar, che 'l rapire.  
 Ma sè taciti siam, quanto rapaci,  
 avrem' mill'altri e più soavi, ah, taci!

Das ganze ist ein wirtmusikalischer Scherz, ein verbales Gewebe von äusserst zarter Durchsichtigkeit. Dem Ton des scherzando entspricht der lockere heterosyllabische Bau, in der Grundstruktur ein Wechsel von Settenar und Endecasillabo. Vorangestellt — als Ankündigungskommando — ist ein Sechssilber. Die Position von "taci" am Anfang und Schluß der Zeile, außerdem die Reimordnung (taci als isolierter Reim — es folgen vier Reimpaare und erst das letzte antwortet zunächst mit gleichem, dann mit identischem Reim: rapaci — taci) weisen dem ersten Vers eine Sonderstellung zu. Noch ein anderer Vers ist gegenüber den entsprechenden Endecasillabi um eine Silbe zu kurz geraten: der 4. Diese Verkürzung bewirkt den beabsichtigten schwebenden Akzent, den Anakoluth, also die gewollte Ungenauigkeit in der Syntax, die eine Spontaneität suggerieren soll; ein zweimaliges Anlaufen und wieder Abbremsen, wie aus Furcht, den Namen Amors auszusprechen und seine Aufmerksamkeit zu erregen.

Das Groteske liegt unter anderem darin, daß der Mund gleichzeitig als Räuber der Küsse und als Organ des Sprechens aufgefordert wird, zu küssen und dabei nicht zu reden, da sonst Amor das Vergnügen stören könnte. Auf diesen verspielten Zynismus folgt — mit poetischer Scheinlogik — die Gleichsetzung von Sprechen und Stehlen, und schließlich, adversativ einsetzend ("ma...") die Pointe im letzten Reimpaar: wenn wir schweigen, werden wir den Genuß des Küssens verewigen können, ja sogar steigern, denn "rapaci" und "soavi" — (dem Schein nach Antithese) — bedingen sich gegenseitig. Im Raube, das heißt im Verzicht auf das werbende Sprechen, liegt die Pointe.

Doch erst ein Blick von der Inhaltsanalyse her auf die Verbalstruktur zeigt, wie raffiniert Marino seinen grotesken Witz serviert.

Ein wichtiges Wortzentrum ist "taci"; es gibt am Anfang und Schluß des Madrigals dem ganzen Werk eine thematische Geschlossenheit und eine innere Symmetrie. Es erscheint auch immer wieder als Binnenreim, leitet jede der drei Satzperioden ein und wird durch die Repetition akzentuiert. Das zweite Wortzentrum ist "rapaci" (auch in den Formen rapine und rapire anklingend); Schweigen und Rauben bedingen sich gegenseitig: das Schweigen erleichtert den Raub und der Räuber hütet sich zu sprechen.

Der Höhepunkt des Grotesken liegt aber darin, daß sich mit "taci" und "rapaci" ein drittes Wort reimt, das der Leser die ganze Zeit erwartet, das der Dichter jedoch mit konstanter Boshaftigkeit vorenthält: "baci".

Marino verweigert das Stichwort, um — wie es das Gedicht lehren will, den Genuß zu erhöhen.

Will man das Gedicht flüsternd lesen, so mag man wohl auch als Wortmusik das zischelnde Geräusch von Küssen daraus heraushören.

Insgesamt gehört zum Grotesken bei Marino eine kunstvolle Poesie, wie man sie sich poesieferner kaum vorstellen kann.

Ähnlich liegt bei Basile eine starke Ironisierung der Gefühlswelt; das gilt auch für seine Lyrik, der es nicht an burlesken Wendungen fehlt — so etwa bei den Sonetten, die sich mit dem Vesuv-Ausbruch von 1632 befassen — doch tritt diese Tendenz noch stärker in seiner Prosa, im *Cunto de li cunti*, zutage. Dadurch daß dieses Werk im neapolitanischen Dialekt geschrieben ist, bleibt die Möglichkeit das Groteske noch zu übertreiben, da die süditalienische Umgangssprache eine starke Vorliebe für kräftige Formulierungen besitzt.

Basiles Witz ist derb und drastisch, er erfordert keine Gedankenartistik, stupore und meraviglia haben eher eine gewisse Parallele zum Grobianismus, wie er in Deutschland zur Zeit des dreißigjährigen Krieges vorherrschte.

Besonders deutlich zeigen sich diese grotesken Züge einerseits bei der Beschreibung von Personen, andererseits bei den langen Serien von Flüchen.

Um gleich ein Beispiel aus dem "Trattenimento primo" des ersten Tages zu wählen, geben wir die Beschreibung des Orco wieder:

Era nano e sconcio di corpo, aveva il capo più grosso d'una zucca d'India, la fronte bernoccoluta, le sopracciglia congiunte, gli occhi stravolti, il naso schiacciato, con due narici che parevano due chiaveche maestre; una bocca quanto un palmento, dalla quale uscivano due zanne che gli giungevano ai malleoli; il petto peloso, le braccia di aspo, le gambe piegate a vòlta, e i piedi larghi di papera. Insomma, pareva un diavolo, un parasacco, un brutto pezzente e una mal'ombra spiccicata, che avrebbe sbigottito un Orlando, atterrito uno Scannarebecco, e fatto cadere in deliquio il più abile Schermitore.

Man muß dabei noch bedenken, daß diese Schreckensgestalt eigentlich eine absolute gute und gutmütige Jenseitsgestalt ist, die dem Helden des Märchens dreimal zu Hilfe kommt und sein Glück sichert. Dadurch wirkt die Drastik besonders grotesk.

Ähnliche Beschreibungen finden sich im *Cunto de li cunti* zahlreiche; doch wir wollen bei dieser ersten Erzählung des ersten Tages bleiben. Zur burlesken Groteske gehören bei Basile übersteigerte Flüche, wie sie im Süditalienischen noch heute häufig zu treffen (und vermutlich für das barocke Neapel besonders typisch gewesen) sind. Diese Ketten von Verwünschungen werden aber nicht zwischen Streitenden vorgebracht, sondern es ist die eigene Mutter, die ihren Sohn damit aus dem Hause jagt. So setzt sie das erstemal ein:

Che stai a fare in questa casa, pane maledetto? Squaglia, pezzo di briccone! Tòglimiti dinanzi, mangiasucciole! Tu mi fosti cambiato in culla, e nel luogo di un bambolino, di un pacioncello, di un bel fantino, mi fu posto un maialone pappalagagne! (Croce 1925)

Der so aus dem Hause Gejagte findet bei dem wie ein Unhold beschriebenen Orco Zuflucht und Dienst, und es geht ihm dort so ausgezeichnet, daß Basile wiederum nur mit einem grotesken Bild seinen Zustand schildern kann:

... di modo che, in quattro giorni, si fece grasso come un turco, tondo come un bove, ardito come un gallo, rosso come un gambero, verde come un aglio e

grosso come una balena, e così tarchiato e con la pelle tesa che quasi non poteva più aprire gli occhi.

Die Vergleiche stammen meist aus Bildern der Tierwelt, wobei auch die Meerestiere vielfach zitiert werden.

Auch der Held Antuono bedient sich grotesker Metaphern, sobald er zu sprechen beginnt, und erklärt seiner Mutter:

Ora sí daremo un calcio in faccia alla pezzenteria!  
Ora sí che porremo rimedio a cenci, stracci e bandelli!

Und nun erleben wir eine erneute Szene derbster Beschimpfungen, wie sie kaum mehr übersteigert vorstellbar sind, wenn die Mutter nun zum drittenmal ihren Sohn aus dem Hause jagt:

Fiáccati il collo, figlio scomunicato! Rompiti la catena delle spalle! Levamiti dinanzi! ché io vedo le viscere mie e non posso digerirti, e mi si gonfia l'ernia e metto il gozzo sempre che mi vieni tra i piedi! Finiscila presto, e che questa casa ti scotti come fuoco! Io di te mi scuoto i panni, e fo conto di non averti mai cacato al mondo.

Nicht weniger massiv sind die Vorwürfe, welche der Orco dem Antuono macht, als dieser abermals bei ihm eintrifft.

Zwar kommt die Grotteske in der direkten Rede bei Basile besonders zum Ausdruck — so später auch in langen Monologen und Dialogen — aber sie beschränkt sich nicht darauf, gipfelt vielmehr in der Ironisierung der Gefühle.

Das wird etwa deutlich in der dritten Erzählung des dritten Tages. Das Grotteske hat in dieser Erzählung "lo viso" geradezu eine eigene und selbständige Funktion. Es geht in der Handlung kaum eine Szene vorüber, wo Basile nicht vom grotesken Ton Gebrauch macht, sei es, daß die Prinzessin Renza auf einem Esel reiten muß, obwohl sich später zeigt, daß es auch Pferde gibt, bis hin daß Prinz Cecio das Liebesleid der Prinzessin für eine körperliche Krankheit hält und um einen Harn-Arzt (Urologen) schicken läßt.

Renza stirbt durch das Geräusch des Kusses, den Cecio einer andern Frau gibt, und dieser selbst begeht mit einem Nagel Suizid.



Das Groteske verwirrt hier den Leser total; so oft er lachen will, weil er eine Szene für komisch findet, wird er durch eine tragische Wandlung erschreckt. Und wenn er durch den Handlungsgang traurig gestimmt ist, wird er durch eine Buffonerie überrascht. So bleibt er am Ende verunsichert und ratlos gegenüber dieser Groteske.

Die Ironisierung beschränkt sich nicht auf die Gefühle — insbesondere die Liebe — sie bezieht selbst den Tod mit ein. Er wird nicht ernst genommen. „... tutto è solo apparenza“ verkündet eine der Eklogen Basiles. Eine verlorene Welt- und Wert-Anschauung wird parodiert, philosophische Formulierungen durch volkstümliche Sprichwörter ersetzt (Karlinger 1965).

Auf zweierlei Ebenen und in zweierlei Denkweisen — Traumgleichnis und Tagbewußtsein — wird etwas Gegensätzliches miteinander verschmolzen.

So ergibt sich ähnlich — und doch wieder anders — wie bei Marino das Groteske aus dem Gegensätzlichen der Bilder und Handlungen, dem Unvereinbaren von theoretischem Gedankengut und praktischem Schicksal.

Doch noch ein Wort über das metaphorische bei Basile: es wird besonders evident, wo es ins Kosmische geht und etwa Sonne und Mond, Morgendämmerung und Abenddämmerung eine Rolle spielen. Dann klingt nicht etwa eine sanfte und liebliche, lyrische Stimmung an, sondern der Zug ins Groteske wird unübersehbar, wenn wir lesen: „... als Aurora gerade hervorkam, um den Nachttopf ihres Alten voller roter Pisse durch das Fenster des Ostens zu gießen...“ — oder wenn es gar heißt: „... Zur Stunde, da die Sonne wie eine herabgewirtschaftete Hure ihr Quartier wechselte...“.

Die Metapher entspricht hier voll der Funktion, welche Tesauro ihr zumißt:

... essendo la metafora il più ingegnoso e acuto, il più pellegrino e mirabile, il più gioviale e giovevole, il più facondo e fecondo parte dell 'umano intelletto...  
(Ibid. 28)

Marino und Basile sind nicht die einzigen Literaten des Seicento mit einer ausgeprägten Neigung zum Grotesken, im Marinismo wurde diese Tendenz weitgehend aufgegriffen, doch nicht mit der gleichen Virtuosität gehandhabt. Und Basile fand

einen Nachfolger in Pompeo Sarnelli, dessen unter dem Titel *Posilecheata* laufende Märchensammlung viele Eigenarten von Basile wie auch den neapolitanischen Dialekt aufgreift. In der Metaphorik ist Sarnelli wohl nicht so derb wie Basile (er sollte ja auch später Bischof von Bisceglie werden) wohl aber in der Anlage von Szenen grotesker Art.

Es sei hier nur auf eine hingewiesen, weil sie uns zu zeigen vermag, wie gerade volkstümliche Züge ins Burleske führen können.

Wir kennen von Perrault her das Märchen "La belle au bois dormant". Woher Perrault den Stoff kannte, ist unbekannt. Aber Sarnelli hat -jedenfalls im Jahre 1684 — und somit wesentlich früher — das gleiche Märchen im Druck herausgebracht. Und nur auf einen typischen Unterschied zwischen den beiden Fassungen soll hier verwiesen werden, weil er die Verbindung des Grotesken mit der rustikalen Situation im Gegensatz zum höfischen Ambiente bei Perrault hervorhebt.

Wir erinnern uns, daß bei unserm Französer die Heldin des Märchens verflucht wird, weil zur Tauffeier eine Fee nicht eingeladen wird. Es besteht also ein typischer Formfehler hinsichtlich der höfischen Gepflogenheiten, der Etikette.

Ganz anders spielt sich die Szene bei Sarnelli ab. Die Feen sind alle eingeladen und kommen auch alle. Bevor sie ins Haus des Täuflings eintreten, schlüpfen sie aus ihren Pantoffeln, wie es im Süden üblich ist, um keinen Schmutz ins Innere des Hauses zu tragen. Nun tritt eine Fee mit dem nackten Fuß auf eine am Boden liegende Nußschale, schneidet sich dabei und erleidet einen starken Schmerz. Voll Wut verflucht sie sodann den Täufling.

Ähnliche Szenen finden wir mehrfach bei Sarnelli, der zwar in Italien einigen Erfolg hatte, jedoch im Ausland kaum bekannt geworden ist (Sarnelli 1988).

Das Groteske ist bei Sarnelli breiter ausgestreut als bei Basile; es beginnt bereits in seiner Vorrede "A li vertoluse lejeture", in welcher der Dichter breit erklärt, warum er seinen Text auf Neapolitanisch und nicht in der toskanischen Mundart bietet. Er greift die berühmte Sprachakademie der Crusca an und widerspricht der Behauptung, daß sich der neapolitanische Dialekt nur für die "boffune" — die Clowns der "commedia" eigne.

Und in dem breit ausgeführten Nachweis, daß das Neapolitanische den anderen italienischen Mundarten weit überlegen sei, bringt er ein burleskes Gespräch mit einem Lombarden:

E po', che 'mpertenza è chesta: dicere che lo parlare Napoletano serve sulope li boffune de le commedie? Chesto tutto soccede perché li frostiere che lo dicenno non fanno studio a le parole noste, perché vedariano quanto songo belle cheste e brutte le lloro. Na vota, cammenanno no cierto filosofo de Posileco pe la Lomardi, perché parlava Napoletano chiantuto e majàteco, tutte se ne redevano. Isso, mo, pe farele toccare la coda co le mmano, decette ad uno che faceva la protaquamquam: Vedimmo no poco, de 'razia, si songo meglio la parole voste o le noste! Nuje decimmo: Capo, e buje comme decite? — Nuje decimmo: Co, respose l 'auto. Ed isso: — Nuje decimmo: Casa, e buje? — Ca, decette l 'auto. — Nuje decimmo Io, e buje? — Mi, llebrecaje lo Lomardo.

Ora lo filosofo decette accosí: — Di' alla 'mpressa le parole meje a lengua toja: Io, Casa, Capo. E lo Lomardo, súbeto: — Mi Ca-Cò! — E si te cacò — decette lo Napoletano — te lo mmretaste! Pocca se dice a lo pajese che non è mio: Lengua che no' la 'ntienne e tu caca. — Ora videchi parla a lo sproposito, nuje o vuje? (Sarnelli 1962).

Sarnelli gibt sich in seinem Vorwort den Anschein, als wolle er eine wissenschaftliche Verteidigung seiner Mundart vertreten. Das wäre sicher auch auf eine nüchterne Art möglich gewesen, doch das Groteske macht einen wesentlichen Bestandteil seines Werkes aus, und so wählt er auch seine Methode und seinen Stil nach diesem Gesichtspunkt.

Und wie bei Marino und Basile wird vor allem die Selbstironisierung zu einem hervorstechenden Punkt seiner grotesken Ausdrucksweise.

Dazu noch einen kleinen Ausschnitt aus dem Ende seiner Vorrede an die Leser:

... e quando tutto mancajovarrà a li patre de fameglia c'hanno peccerille assaje: pocca la sera, lejennolo o a lo frisco fora la loggia, la 'state, o a lo focolaro, lo

vierno, non sulo li peccerille ma li granne s'addormarranno pe lo rencrescemiento de le tanta freddure che nce songo, e facennole mettere tutte a lietto sparagnarranno lo magnare, e benedicerranno l'arma de chi l'ha scritto. Lo quale vasannove le mmano, si ve l'avite lavate, s'arrecommanna. (Vrg. Sarnelli 1962, auch Karlinger 1965a).

Wenn Benedetto Croce ursprünglich in all diesem Stil eine "fraseologia pedantesca e vuota" hat sehen wollen, so mußte er sich selbst später korrigieren und in diesem Zug zum Grotesken die Absicht erkennen, die Welt durch eine ironisierende Brille zu betrachten.

Die Gefühlsspannungen jenes Jahrhunderts war von der unseren weit verschieden; so konnten barocke Formen sich einbürgern, deren groteskes Kolorit die Stimmung jener Zeit getroffen hat.

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## Parodia de lo neoplatónico en la poesía burlesca de Quevedo

ÁNGEL GARCÍA GALIANO

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Son ya numerosos los estudios que han detectado y sistematizado en la poesía amorosa de Quevedo los componentes estéticos y retóricos de la misma que beben directamente de la tradición neoplatónica (especialmente de los tratados de Ficino, Bembo, León Hebreo y Castiglione) a la que se deben añadir, como es sabido, la presencia del amor cortés y del petrarquismo. Es admirable advertir cómo mediante un procedimiento de desautomatización, Quevedo repristina los tópicos amorosos de estas tres corrientes poéticas renacentistas. Este procedimiento ha sido estudiado por el profesor Pozuelo Yvancos (1979). De su descripción del macrocontexto semántico neoplatónico partimos para aplicarlo a los poemas burlescos.

Efectivamente, una de las claves de la intensa literariedad de la poesía de nuestro autor se logra a partir de la tensión dialéctica entre norma lingüístico-estética y manipulación retórica personal. Estas manipulaciones que, por otro lado, como vamos a ver, son sistemáticas, confieren una originalidad semántica, que no lingüística, muy acusada a su obra de creación, singularidad frente a la tónica normativa de la época que se puede concretar en tres características fundamentales:

- El puro grito como expresión del deseo.
- La huida de la retórica “manierista” de su época.
- La unión de amor-muerte.

El presente estudio pretende sumarse a dicha herencia desde un ámbito acaso menos atendido por la crítica: la utilización paródica,

mediante la inversión, la ironía y la dilogía, de la cosmovisión erótica neoplatónica en su poesía burlesca.

A la escasa producción de poesía explícitamente basada en el macrosistema neoplatónico, frente a otros autores de su entorno como el Conde de Villamediana, por ejemplo, se añade el hecho de que no siempre se ha deslindado cuidadosamente la imaginería petrarquista o cortés de la estrictamente neoplatónica. A partir de estudios como el citado de Pozuelo podemos atender y aislar las escasas composiciones eróticas quevedianas que participan de esta concepción poético amorosa cuyos pilares serían:

— El desprecio del cuerpo.

— *Ascensus* por medio de la belleza de la amada a la Belleza absoluta.

— Distinción clara entre deseo (carnal, como actividad de los sentidos) y amor (actividad del intelecto). Véase al respecto el soneto 331, "Amor que sin detenerse en el afecto sensitivo pasa al intelectual". Cito siempre por la edición de José Manuel Blecua (Quevedo 1981).

— Actividad de los ojos como vehículo de comunicación de las almas: véanse el soneto 333, "Música consonancia del movimiento de unos ojos hermosos, imperceptible al oído, como la música de los orbes celestiales. Y, con un planteamiento irónico que lo hace sumamente interesante, pues quedaría a mitad de camino entre lo puro y lo ferino, el soneto 448, "Comunicación de amor invisible por los ojos", verdadera joya de ambigüedad y elegancia que nos coloca ya en las mismas puertas de la inversión paródica y en el que me detendré más adelante.

— Simbolismo del fuego y del amor como animador erótico.

— Amor como alma y motor del Universo.

Como es bien sabido, la fundamentación renacentista del amor la realiza Marsilio Ficino en su famoso comentario al *Banquete* de Platón, el *De amore*. Es, en realidad, el único tratado original sobre este tema, junto con los *Diálogos de amor*, del judeoespañol errante León Hebreo. Podríamos decir (simplificando mucho) que si la fuente, directa o indirecta, para la inspiración de los poetas era Ficino, el manantial para nuestros prosistas, de Montemayor a Cervantes, fue León Hebreo.

Las ideas de Ficino circularon mucho por España, en un primer momento, sobre todo, a través de Castiglione, en cuyo diálogo *El*

*cortesano*, traducido por Boscán y “casualmente” prologado por Garcilaso, se fundamenta la nueva concepción del caballero renacentista. Y del poeta. Así, frente a la institución del trovador feudal y su vehículo de expresión, cifrado mediante los herméticos códigos de vasallaje del amor cortés, se ofrece ahora la imagen del poeta cortesano petrarquista y neoplatónico: frente a la jerarquía cortés de la sangre, se impone ahora la de las almas y la dignidad personal. Resumiendo mucho, esta nueva concepción erótica tendrá un marcado carácter espiritual, una consideración del amor como contemplación y “ascensus”, unido siempre a la busca de la Belleza y a la apreciación sensible de esta mediante los dos sentidos más nobles, el oído y, especialmente, la vista. En efecto, el amor surge de y entra por los ojos. Acaso no esté de más, a este respecto, recordar ahora la génesis de esta teoría de la visión tal como la formulan Empédocles, Platón, Lucrecio y, finalmente, San Agustín: de ellos se nutre la tesis de Ficino. Lo que ahora cabe destacar es que, para ellos, la luz tiene algo de material y, a la vez, es lo más “espiritual” del mundo sensible, de la creación. No en vano fue lo primero que creó Yahvé en su Universo, *fiat lux*: como es sabido, Longino en su *Tratado de lo sublime* comenta esas dos palabras, *fiat lux*, como las más admirables de toda la Biblia. La luz, en fin, como emanación sutil de los cuerpos (los espíritus) captada o absorbida por el ojo. Análogamente, la belleza que suscita la visión de la amada se imprime a través de los ojos (como la luz en un papel fotográfico) en el alma del poeta, he ahí el origen del amor, un amor que se realiza y se justifica en el deseo de la belleza suprema, de la que nosotros sólo captamos el reflejo, especialmente en el rostro, en los ojos de la mujer, que ha de servir para dirigirnos a aquella otra superior; una belleza que no estriba ahora en la armonía, proporción o dignidad, sino en la impresión de este “reflejo de la Perfección” en el alma del que la contempla. En contra de los proporcionalistas, que ven la belleza en la armonía de las partes, Ficino es un iluminista, es, por excelencia, el filósofo de la luz: todo lo iluminado es bello, todo es bello, por tanto. Sucede que esa belleza se va desvaneciendo desde su centro (Dios) hasta los lejanos y gélidos confines, la materia. El ser humano, por su parte (en el que se cifraría como en un genoma el mapa exacto de la Creación, verdadero microcosmos), posee un triste privilegio: su doble naturaleza, material y espiritual a un tiempo, lo convierte

en el ser más excepcional de la creación, y en el más frágil. Es, a juicio de Ficino, como un capricho divino: por un lado participa de la belleza espiritual y eterna, es imagen y semejanza de Dios; por otro, está hecho de barro, y a veces se siente tan atraído hacia lo que hay de tierra en él, de mera materia, que, abatido por el placer carnal, hasta corre el peligro de olvidar que su linaje es espiritual. El hombre se debate, pues, entre dos fuerzas, la material y táctil (el sentido más “bajo”) que lo arrastra hacia el barro y la visual o lumínica que lo impele a la contemplación eterna de la Belleza.

Toda belleza, incluso material, es incorpórea por dos motivos, porque lo que capta de ella el ojo es la luz y porque el proceso de captación es inmaterial, una abstracción: esa belleza se imprime en el alma, se espiritualiza y nos eleva o trasciende. Por su parte, el amor tiene dos formas, una, material, el eros, encaminada a perpetuar la especie, y otra, espiritual, el ágape, dirigida a inmortalizar al individuo concreto en la contemplación extática de Dios. El amor platónico (nombre acuñado por Ficino para este último y hoy en día envuelto, cosas del tiempo, en una pátina peyorativa) es fruto de esa misma tensión bipolar en que vive el ser humano, ha de surgir de lo material, de la belleza sensible, pero se debe trascender en pos de la pura Contemplación: es anhelo infinito, aspiración, tensión entre la posesión y la muerte física. Como esta, como la muerte, es instantáneo, en el amor y la muerte la experiencia temporal no tiene sentido alguno, es, insisto, instantáneo, imagen de la Eternidad, puro Presente: el amor siente el horror de vivir en lo sucesivo porque es gozo del momento que no se puede ni quiere perder. Para la filosofía neoplatónica, por tanto, el amor es un deseo infinito, un ansia que sólo puede colmarse en Dios mismo.

Cuándo y cómo surge el amor para Ficino: ya se ha dicho, a través de la mirada, ella es la desencadenante de la fascinación del amor, pues que la vista capta lo incorpóreo del ser amado, sus espíritus, los cuales, transformados por la imaginación, purificados, impresionan en el alma y forjan un modelo ideal común entre el amante y la amada (“mi alma os ha cortado a su medida”): En las páginas finales del Libro IV de *El Cortesano* de Castiglione, hay un hermoso y conocido episodio dedicado al amor, es donde más se advierten las influencias neoplatónicas del libro, ahora imbuidas de petrarquismo gracias al magisterio del cardenal Pietro Bembo, en cuyo diálogo *Los asolanos*, de 1505, se funden ambas corrientes



en una sola cosmovisión poética, el petrarquismo neoplatónico, capital, como dije, para la comprensión de nuestro poeta en particular y de los Siglos de Oro en general. Pues bien, Bembo, como personaje y contertulio de *El cortesano*, responde así a la pregunta sobre el origen y causa del amor. Cito, por supuesto, en la maravillosa traducción de Boscán (Castiglione 1984: 350):

Así que el enamorado que contempla la hermosura solamente en el cuerpo, pierde este bien luego que aquella mujer a quien ama, yéndose de donde él está presente, le deja como ciego, dejándole con los ojos sin su luz y, por consiguiente, con el alma despojada y huérfana de su bien; y esto ha de ser así forzosamente, porque estando la hermosura ausente, aquel penetrar e influir que hemos dicho del amor no calienta el corazón como hacía estando ella presente, y así aquellas vías por donde los espíritus y los amores van y vienen, quedan entonces agotadas y secas, aunque todavía la memoria que queda de la hermosura mueve algo los sentimientos y fuerzas del alma.

Y de tal manera los mueve que andan por extender y enviar a su gozo los espíritus; mas ellos, hallando los pasos cerrados, hállanse sin salida y porfían cuanto más pueden por salir, y así encerrados no hacen sino dar mil espoladas al alma y con sus agujijones desasosiéganla y apasionanla gravemente...

Adviértase que esta concepción de los espíritus no difiere excesivamente, sino que antes bien es deudora, de la explicación aristotélica, la divergencia estriba en que el eros en Aristóteles, más modesto, es deseo de reproducción y funciona de manera mecánica: la sangre hierve en el corazón y de ahí, convertida en pneuma, en aliento, en sople vital, se expande por la sangre y sale eventualmente por los ojos. Recuértese que en griego "imán", "pneonta", es literalmente "piedra con aliento", con pneuma, piedra que respira, por eso atrae a otros metales. Es lógico que a la gnosis platónica le fascinara esta solución "pneumática", el Uno divino como gran imán; de allí pasó a San Gregorio en cuyas *Moralia* traduce *pneuma* por *spirtus* y de ahí a Ficino, Bembo, Castiglione, Boscán y Garcilaso. Es, en definitiva, el objeto del

amor quien desencadena el proceso, y lo inicia incluso antes de que el amante sea consciente de ello. Esta es la causa que hace posible la transformación de los amantes, amada en el amado transformada, vueltos el uno en el otro: si el amor o la belleza que hay en el hombre ha sido puesta o actualizada por el objeto de su amor, parece claro que cuando el objeto, el amado, corresponde al sentimiento amoroso, de lo que se enamora es de su propia naturaleza vista en el otro: es un espejo. Espejo que puede ser los ojos, la superficie de las aguas, el reflejo de la luz, etc.

Por consiguiente, si la clave de la poesía satírica de Quevedo se funda, como norma general, en la intensificación de la expresión lingüística hasta los límites de todos conocidos, con los poemas de ámbito paródico neoplatónico, Quevedo elabora un recurrente sistema de inversión grotesca mediante la utilización de idénticos recursos retóricos en todos los textos donde aborda este tipo de sátira, a saber: la sustitución sistemática del concepto "amor platónico", como macrocontexto semántico (García Berrio 1982: 261-293), es decir, deseo de belleza, *ascensus*, etc. y sus redes isotópicas, por el tándem deseo sexual/avaricia y sus respectivos correlatos léxicos. De esta suerte, el triángulo neoplatónico formado por

belleza(de la amada)-eros-divinidad,

concretado léxicamente en la relación físico-amorosa mediante el siguiente campo asociativo:

ojos(de la amada)-alma-Belleza

se transforma en las parodias de Quevedo en la siguiente tríada:

belleza (sensual)-deseo/avaricia-apetito carnal

y su concreción léxica en la red isotópica:

mirada-dinero-cumplimiento (o no) de la transacción carnal.

De esta manera, los ojos, que eran los portadores de los espíritus, se convierten en tentación carnal y pícara, y el alma, recinto sagrado sobre el que se imprimía "el gesto de la amada" es ahora el grosero y pragmático receptáculo de un vicio: la avaricia.

Pero es que incluso en el ámbito estricto de su lírica amorosa nos encontramos con un soneto, el 448, en el que, desde la ironía, el juego y el ingenio elevados a sus más altas cotas de ambigüedad y elegancia, nos topamos con un sistema de sustitución (ojos por labios, esto es, eros por deseo; inteligencia, alma y espíritus, por tacto, sensualidad y ayuntamiento carnal) que colocan a esta pequeña obra maestra al borde mismo de la inversión irónica. Véase, si no:

Si mis párpados, Lisi, labios fueran,  
 besos fueran los rayos visuales  
 de mis ojos, que al sol miran caudales  
 águilas, y besaran más que vieran:  
 Tus bellezas, hidrópicas, bebieran,  
 y cristales, sedientos de cristales;  
 de luces y de incendios celestiales,  
 alimentando su morir, vivieran.  
 De invisible comercio mantenidos,  
 y desnudos de cuerpo, los favores  
 gozaran mis potencias y sentidos;  
 mudos se requebraran los ardores;  
 pudieran, apartados, verse unidos,  
 y en público, secretos, los amores.

Como puede observarse (y me remito, pues no es objeto estricto de este estudio, a los análisis que del mismo hacen Pozuelo (ib., 1979) y Olivares (1995) la clave irónico-paródica está en la sustitución del elemento neoplatónico “ojos” (su haz de relaciones semánticas: luz, espíritus, alma, belleza, divinidad) por el más carnal de “labios” (y su red léxica: besos, comercio, goce, cuerpo). De esa suerte, la comunicación espiritual de los ojos se transforma en sedientos besos. La belleza de la amada ya no se imprimiría en el alma del poeta y viceversa, sino que ambos, hidrópicos, beberían y apagarían su sed mutuamente. De esa forma, las luces y los “incendios celestiales” del verso siete no se traducen ahora desde el macrocontexto neoplatónico (García Berrio 1981), sino que adquieren una tonalidad eróticocarnal implícita. La misma suerte corren “invisible comercio”, “desnudos de cuerpo”, “gozaran”, “favores”, “unidos”, etc. Dicho de otro modo, el mero cambio de la palabra ojos por labios desequilibra (desautomatiza irónicamente,

paródicamente) el sistema contextual neoplatónico y lo convierte, por un procedimiento de sucesivas transposiciones léxicas, en un juego pícaro y chancero que, en la genialidad de Quevedo, soporta simultáneamente ambas lecturas, la neoplatónica y la ferina, ya que los términos usados basan su potencial eficacia en la dilogía y, por tanto, en que se puedan sugerir, a la vez, ambas interpretaciones.

Centrémonos ahora en el ámbito exclusivo de sus poemas burlescos. No se me oculta que desde los *Asolani* de Bembo se ha producido una fusión en la lírica amorosa de las tradiciones petrarquista y neoplatónica, por eso no es siempre fácil deslindar ambos sistemas que llegan emparejados a nuestra herencia renacentista; sin embargo, y a pesar de que se podría aducir algún claro ejemplo de parodia sobre el modelo petrarquista he creído conveniente, por razones de espacio y de claridad expositiva, centrar mi trabajo, exclusivamente, en aquellos textos de Quevedo en los que la estilización grotesca mediante los procedimientos retóricos de que se sirve, se hace en exclusiva sobre la base de la cosmovisión erótica del neoplatonismo. Véase, empero, al respecto de lo antes citado el emblemático soneto 559, "Riesgo de celebrar la hermosura de las tontas" en el que destruye la descripción petrarquista de la belleza femenina: la boca-rubí es ahora "jeta comedora"; los cabellos, si verdaderamente de oro fueran ya los habría vendido, dejándola calva, al igual que las "perlas" de sus dientes.

Igualmente, se podría aducir el soneto 571, "Reprehende en la araña a las doncellas, y en su tela, la debilidad de las leyes" en el que mediante los mismos mecanismos de desautomatización o inversión paródica, ironiza sobre el tan renacentista tópico de la red de amor, transitado en España con acierto, sobre todo, por Hernando de Acuña.

Como se ha dicho ya arriba, Ficino define el amor como deseo de belleza, entendida esta como el vehículo de acceso (por elevación desde la amada al alma y del alma a Dios) al resplandor de la Belleza divina. El amante es, así, conducido al Bien supremo trascendente a través del encuentro con los ojos de la mujer, los cuales, al impresionar sus espíritus o gesto en el alma del poeta-amante reconoce en dicha belleza la suya propia (la de su alma), vestigio o reflejo de la divina: mediante la imaginación se produce el conocido ascensus.

Por otra parte se reconocen tres grados de amor:

— contemplativo: que tiende al amor divino sin intermediarios

— activo: el que cabe cumplir al ser humano como propio

— voluptuoso: el bestial, propio de los seres que se “ciegan” y transforman en simple deseo carnal el ansia de Belleza. Estos tres tipos de amor, *ferinus*, *mixtus* y *purus* remiten a otras tantos estilos poéticos. Julián Olivares, en su irregular trabajo antes citado (Olivares, 1995), distingue en la poesía de Quevedo entre el *amor ferinus*, vinculado obviamente a la poesía grotesca, el *amor mixtus*, del estilo medio (y pone como ejemplo la composición “Los brazos de Damón y Galatea”) y el *amor purus*, o neoplatónico, propio del estilo alto y que, efectivamente, tanto escasea en Quevedo. No así el obediente a la tópica petrarquista o incluso del amor cortés. La principal aportación de Olivares es el análisis de *Il trattato dell'amore humano*, Lucca, 1567, de Flaminio Nobili, última contribución filosófica a las tesis eróticas neoplatónicas y que Quevedo leyó sin duda.

Quevedo traslada el macrocontexto semántico neoplatónico a su poesía burlesca con lo que subvierte o deforma el orden de la escala hasta el extremo de proponer, oblicuamente, un muy particular ascensus, grotesco, no a la belleza, sino a la avaricia, no al Bien, sino a la riqueza, que habrá de materializarse, obviamente, mediante la satisfacción (previo desembolso) del deseo carnal en una transacción mercantil en que el placer, que ha sustituido al amor, se paga con el dinero, que ha sustituido a la belleza.

Dicho de otra forma, acaso más sintética, lo que en la poesía amorosa era

— belleza (humana)-amor-Belleza suprema,

se trueca ahora en

— belleza (puramente carnal)-deseo-dinero.

Nótese que en el ya citado soneto 571, inversión paródica de la red de amor renacentista, el fin último que se persigue mediante dichas artimañas es que las doncellas se casen “con más ajuar y más doncel dinero”, donde observamos una vez más que el amor, en su esperpentización grotesca, se transforma siempre en ansias de vil metal. Los procedimientos de transformación, pues, son sistemáticos: se basan en la sustitución de un macrocontexto semántico por otro.

Una mirada atenta a este tipo de composiciones nos descubre que ambos (varón y hembra) se mueven por un mismo fin: el afán de lucro. Ella, la portadora de la “belleza-atracción” despojándolo a él de su bolsa a cambio de sus favores. El varón, por contra, venciendo la tentación y porfiando para que el ayuntamiento se produzca graciosa y gratuitamente, esto es, sin menoscabo de su hacienda. En ese juego de sobre y malentendidos se cifra lo más chispeante de las composiciones que comento: voy a determe, siquiera someramente, en los poemas 536, 537, 586, 623, 626, 659, 664, 702 y 706, según la edición citada de J. M. Blecua (Quevedo 1981).

Así por ejemplo el 586 es una clara parodia del macrocontexto semántico platónico. Este soneto en forma dialogada entre un galán y la dama desdeñosa plantea la “comunicación del amor” del pretendiente y las subsiguientes calabazas de la dama manteniendo el sistema de correspondencias normativo. Así, el rostro que cautiva al amante y que lo hace apostatar de la fe, los ojos que matan, la vista que hiere, el pecho robado, el amante que muere... Si leyéramos sólo los requerimientos del galán, el sistema “ortodoxo” se mantendría cabalmente. Es en las respuestas de la dama donde se perpetra la parodia a través de una trasposición de los términos amorios del ámbito filosófico al del dinero. Dice Ignacio Arellano a este respecto en su magnífico trabajo (Arellano 1984: 63): “Se establece un contraste paródico entre el lenguaje del galán (tópico amoroso) y las respuestas de la dama, que resultan siempre peticiones de dinero: la interpretación literal y el chiste satírico ridiculizan los tópicos amorios del enamorado que da palabras pero no moneda.”

Dado que si no hay dinero no hay trato, transforma su desdén en burla: para ello echa mano de la religión; de la tradicional y tónica chanza contra los doctores, reputados de matarifes: “Tus ojos matan todo el mundo entero/ eso es llamar doctores a mis ojos”; así como del tomar al pie de la letra una metáfora lexicalizada: “Tu vista hiere. ¿Es vista puntiaguda?” El afán del pobre amante queda, así, parado en seco ante la solicitud material de la dama, que no para en ardores del alma y busca sólo la ganancia.

En la canción 623, la descripción de la amada, cuyos engaños y deshonras sufre el poeta, pues le sacó el dinero y lo engañó con

otros, se concreta, tras la decepción amorosa, en el gesto, la cara y los ojos:

Mas lo que siento desto  
es ver que tengas ojos en el gesto;  
pues sé de tus antojos  
que se te van tras cada real los ojos  
sin saber despreciar moneda alguna:  
que antes crecen por cuartos, como luna.  
¡Triste de tu velado,  
que, entre tanto doblón, se ve cornado!

en donde, además de los referentes habituales, ojos, gesto, transformados aquí a la busca no de la belleza sino de los reales, elabora un estupendo juego final con la palabra cornado, que alude, a la vez, a una moneda de escaso valor y a su condición de consentido: además de cornudo, pagano, si se me permite a mí también la licencia.

La canción 626 plantea muchas similitudes con la anterior, ya que el poeta se lamenta en ella más del oro que del tiempo gastado en compañía de su dama. Es en la penúltima estrofa donde el poeta usa el esquema amoroso neoplatónico para consumir su parodia. Dice allí:

Por mirar con los ojos/los ojos llevas...

Fuera de contexto y sin lo que también arrastran: joyas y vestidos, estaríamos en la tradición del amor como imán, los ojos que se imprimen en el gesto del amado y lo enamoran. En la sátira de Quevedo, esos ojos pícaros y profesionales se llevan el deseo y la hacienda. Por eso algunas estrofas antes el poeta se puede lamentar, haciendo uso una vez más de la dilogía:

¡Cómo saben mis ojos que te olvidan  
pues me diste en la bolsa las heridas!

en donde bolsa, como es natural, remite al lugar de los ojos donde fue herido de amor y, a la vez, al vaciado de su monedero. Quiero insistir en que SOLO la contemplación simultánea de ambas posibilidades, esto es, del contexto semántico original y su parodia, proporciona el efecto desautomatizador y su dimensión de comicidad: no es sólo una cuestión de agudeza, de dobles sentidos, sino de apoyo en una norma que el poeta necesita, precisamente,

como referente intersubjetivo, o canónico, sobre el que establecer su juego de transgresiones. Sin modelo no hay parodia posible. Y perdón por la obviedad.

La letrilla 659 utiliza el mismo referente: amor (deseo) lexicalizado en los ojos y dinero como forma de conseguirlo:

*Vuela pensamiento y diles  
a los ojos que más quiero  
que no hay dinero.*  
Del dinero que pidió  
a la que adorando estás,  
las nuevas la llevarás,  
pero los talegos no.  
Di que doy en no dar yo,  
pues para hallar el placer,  
el ahorrar y el tener  
han mudado los carriles (...)  
A los ojos que en mirallos  
la libertad perderás,  
que hay dineros les dirás,  
pero no gana de dallos.  
Yo sólo pienso cerrallos,  
que no son la ley de Dios,  
que se han de encerrar en dos,  
sino en talegos cerriles (...).  
Si con agrado te oyere  
esa esponja de la villa,  
que hay dinero has de decilla,  
y que ¡ay de quien le diere!  
Si ajusticiar te quisiere,  
está firme como Martos;  
no te dejes hacer cuartos  
de sus dedos alguaciles.

El importante matiz que añade esta nueva composición, mucho más cínica, si cabe, es que en ella el amante quiere jactarse de poderoso y adinerado pero, a su vez, quiere atrapar a la dama en sus redes no por la paga, sino por la fama de rico, y no para gozarla, sino para usarla en su provecho. En efecto, el tono chulesco y prepotente hace pensar que el amante se ha transformado sin más en proxeneta y que, aprovechando no sólo su be-



lleza, sino su afición a la bebida (“esa esponja de la villa”), quiere utilizarlas para usar su cuerpo como forma eficaz y cómoda de engrosar su talego. De ahí que aperciba a su pensamiento de que no se deje engatusar por ella, y que se mantenga firme en su decisión de imponer, por encima del deseo, el afán de lucro: “no te dejes hacer cuartos/ de sus dedos alguaciles”.

La 664, una letrilla dialogada en redondillas, establece un nuevo coloquio entre un galán y una dama desdeñosa. Se produce idéntica situación que en el soneto 586: si leemos sólo el parlamento del galán, el esquema neoplatónico nos aparece en su plenitud y candidez: el amante desdeñado ofrece su alma. La dama, empero, prefiere su dinero. El juego de réplicas y contrarréplicas es todo un alarde. Véase, incluso, al fondo, una parodia del conocido soneto V de Garcilaso en esta estrofa:

Dama: ¿Podré della sustentarme?  
 Galán: El alma, bien puede ser.  
 Dama: Y¿querrá algún mercader  
 por tela su alma trocarne?

Versos en los que cualquier lector puede seguramente reconocer los del poeta toledano: “mi alma os ha cortado a su medida/ por hábito del alma misma os tengo”. La dama, por supuesto, no se deja convencer por el enamorado idealista: “No haremos buena amistad (...)/ Porque cuando un hombre paga,/ entonces trata de verdad.”

El poema 702, un romance satírico, introduce un nuevo elemento en el juego paródico: en esta ocasión los ojos, cerrados, incapaces por tanto de enamorar, lo están porque la dama no puede abrirlos: duerme la zorra, la borrachera. El hallazgo irónico consistirá en culpar de la misma no a la dama sino a los ojos, a los que se personifica y se les hace roncar: el efecto es, sin más, grotesco; igualmente convierte a las niñas, las pupilas, en monjas encerradas en lóbrega clausura, asomadas al locutorio: una “oscura red de pestañas”. La belleza de los mismos queda así oculta tras el afeite. Finalmente, los ojos, abotargados por el alcohol, se han transformado en limbos: carecen de luz y de gloria.

Por último analizaremos someramente el romance 706: “Quejas del abuso de dar a las mujeres”, nueva descripción de la belleza de una dama para achacar que su donaire sea un cepo con que atrapar

el dinero de los hombres. En este caso el estilete se dirige no sólo a la que sonsaca (brazos que acarician el cuello/ y en la faltriquera paran), sino al que paga y se deja esquilmar con tamañas artes, como queda reflejado en el estribillo: "buen provecho le hagan/ a quien da su dinero/ porque le lleve Satanás el alma." Al igual que en el soneto 586, los ojos, el receptáculo de la belleza y de la atracción, son asociados a los médicos matasanos con un paralelismo que se refleja también en la construcción sintáctica:

Los médicos con que miras,  
los dos ojos con que matas.

Sin ánimo de ser exhaustivo ni de pretender agotar el tema, no he tropezado en la poesía satírica de Quevedo con más ejemplos claros de este tipo de parodia sobre una base neoplatónica. Sólo aparecen dos casos más, con los que termino, en los que cabe señalar una pequeña matización al sistema general que hemos señalado; se trata de los conocidos sonetos 536 y 537, "A Apolo siguiendo a Dafne" y "A Dafne huyendo de Apolo", respectivamente; en ellos, efectivamente, la metáfora lumínica neoplatónica se trueca también en un cínico comercio en metálico. La diferencia con el resto, acaso motivada porque remiten a una parodia mitológica de todos conocida que no se ha pretendido transformar excesivamente, es que en estos dos casos no es él o ella los que aluden a la transacción económica ya que Quevedo mantiene, en su sistema, el amor-deseo del uno y la repulsión de la otra, sino que es el propio poeta quien apostrofa al dios enamorado: "si quieres gozar, paga y no alumbres/ Si quieres ahorrar de pesadumbres,/ ojo del cielo, trata de compralla" (536). De este modo brutal, la neoplatónica metáfora lumínica, encarnada en el propio dios Apolo, queda degradada, infravalorada: el amor, la luz, el Sol mismo, nada pueden para conseguir a la ninfa, que (ibid. 404) aparece en un doble sentido, el mitológico y, al mismo tiempo, el de "prostituta tributaria de un rufián". El uso del lenguaje de germanías degrada más aún el mito. Sólo el dinero, acaso, reblandecería el corazón "esquivo" de Dafne. Pone el poeta, en el primer terceto, el ejemplo de Júpiter, en lluvia de oro transformado para amar a Dánae:

Volvióse en bolsa Júpiter severo;  
levantóse las faldas la doncella  
por recogerle en lluvia de dinero.

En el último terceto, el juego dilógico con “dueña estrella” (alcahueta) invita al poeta a un nuevo consejo, ya que él es el sol, esto es, el rey de las estrellas, que se sirva de una para conseguir los favores de la “ninfa”.

En el siguiente soneto, el 537, Quevedo, con una nueva vuelta de tuerca, explica por qué Apolo no puede comprar su deseo: “su aljaba suena, está su bolsa muda”. Con tan magros reales, al cabo, “el Sol se quedó a oscuras”. El dinero aparece, pues, pero no la avaricia de la dama como su germinador y corolario, aquí ella no toma la iniciativa ni es la causante de la rapiña; vemos, sin embargo, que la “bolsa” es el instrumento esencial, aquí también, para lograr la transacción amorosa ahora que, a todas luces, ni el mismo Sol es capaz de deslumbrar a la ninfa. De esta suerte, mediante la metáfora lumínica, Dafne se transforma en murciélago que huye de Apolo, es decir de la luz. El amante Apolo/sol se queda “a oscuras”, a dos velas, si se me permite parafrasear al poeta, vale decir, sin conseguir sus propósitos y, literalmente, sin luz, es decir, sin amor. Por lo mismo, mientras Apolo sólo ofrezca argucias y no dinero, siga muda su bolsa, Dafne se hará “cortezas duras”.

En el resto de las composiciones de Quevedo que hemos analizado parece persistir siempre el esquema que esbozamos arriba. Comparto, pues, con Olivares (1995: 136) la tesis de que “Quevedo trata el neoplatonismo a la vez seriamente y con humor, revelando una participación personal y filosófica muy intensa.” El juego de la seducción y de la carnalidad seguido desde la obvia cosmovisión platónica que parodia es siempre y estupendamente el mismo: ella busca los dineros de él mediante sus tretas seductoras, él, que ama todavía más su bolsa que su deseo, intenta que los favores sean gratis, o bien, galán verdaderamente enamorado, no repara en que lo único que busca la dama es su faltriquera, no los espíritus bullentes de sus ojos o el dolor iluminado de su alma. En ese sentido no puedo sino estar en absoluto acuerdo con James Iffland cuando, a propósito de otros textos que él analiza, advierte que la dimensión cómica de la poesía grotesca de Quevedo deriva

no sólo de la usual infusión de ingenio, de agudeza, que, en el caso que nos ocupa es, casi siempre, pasmosa, sino sobre todo porque el lector se ve obligado a comparar las deformaciones de Quevedo con el modelo semántico del que parte: "We laugh when we compare this degrading carnivalmirror version of the motif with those we have encountered over and over again in "serious" literature". (Iffland 1978: 150).

Como se ve, el desengaño barroco del amor que podría gravitar aquí en exclusiva hacia la deformación grotesca en sus aspectos más obscenamente eróticos, adquiere una perspectiva deformadora pero en otro sentido, más prosaica si se quiere, acaso permutando lo chocarrero o escatológico de otros textos bien conocidos por un suave cinismo, por una plasticidad avariciosa de la que germina el sarcasmo, cuando se advierte que, salvo en casos muy contados que hemos señalado en nuestro estudio (parodia de los canones de belleza petrarquista y esperpentización grotesca de la conocida fábula mitológica), lo que late debajo de todos estos "casos de amor desengañado y pragmático" es el poderoso caballero don dinero que, con permiso del Dante, parece mover ahora "el sol y las demás estrellas".

El desengaño barroco no es, pues, como hemos podido comprobar, una mera cuestión de agudeza, de ingenio, es la inversión de un paradigma: Quevedo, en su poesía burlesca, y quizá también en la estrictamente amorosa, da la vuelta al tapiz y nos muestra los hilos, el lado grotesco de la trama: la red de amor es ahora una tela de araña viscosa, untada de avaricia, y los amantes que se dejan atrapar por los hilos del deseo perderán no sólo el alma, que es patrimonio de Dios, sino la hacienda. Vale.

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## La mitología grecolatina y su tratamiento grotesco en el Barroco español

M<sup>a</sup> CARMEN DÍAZ DE ALDA HEIKKILÄ

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La mitología grecolatina ha sido fuente de inspiración constante en la literatura y el arte español del Siglo de Oro. Durante el Renacimiento, la representación artística de los mitos, la naturaleza y los personajes de la antigüedad se hace con enorme respeto y fidelidad a las fuentes; en España, y por lo que se refiere a la pintura, este respeto se hace extensivo al siglo XVII; las colecciones reales que fueron traídas de Italia (Tiziano, Veronés, Tintoretto) durante el reinado de los Austrias influyen en que el tratamiento de los héroes clásicos se siga haciendo *a la italiana*, idealizados, resueltos siempre con medida, armonía, belleza y dignidad.\*

Quizás la única y significativa excepción sea la de Velázquez, que sin llegar a lo propiamente grotesco sí representa a los dioses de forma antiheroica o contraria a su iconografía gloriosa. No pretende dar a los episodios mitológicos un aspecto intemporal sino hacerlos más *cotidianos*, representando a los dioses en sus momentos de debilidad,

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\* Dentro de la pintura española del Siglo de Oro los temas mitológicos son relativamente escasos, tanto más si los comparamos con la enorme producción de pintura religiosa; la Iglesia — el cliente más importante de pintura en el XVII, seguida de reyes y nobleza —, no estaba interesada en estos temas, y pese a que los teóricos y tratadistas consideran el desnudo como inherente a la fábula clásica, la censura y la permanente vigilancia de la Inquisición frenaron los encargos de tema mitológico, y de hecho son poquísimos los desnudos.

poniendo de manifiesto sus flaquezas. Y para ello utiliza magistralmente la ironía de sus pinceles.

En el primero de sus cuadros mitológicos, *El triunfo de Baco* (¿1626?) nos ofrece un Baco fofo, macilento, abandonado a los placeres etílicos y rodeado de personajes de baja estofa; una extraña bacanal que sin embargo tiene un cierto aire sacro, como ya señaló Borelius, que estableció una indudable correspondencia entre este cuadro y *La adoración de los Reyes*, aunque sin duda el pintor no pretendía hacer una burla religiosa, ni darle un aire sacro al lienzo (Borelius 1960); Baco aparece imponiendo una corona de pámpanos a un neófito que se inclina en actitud adorante, en un gesto que recuerda una ordenación de caballerescas; no en vano pasa a engrosar la "cofradía" de los adeptos al dios. Velázquez «toma modelo de la realidad más vulgar para convertirla en un bodegón a lo divino... mitológico» (Gallego 1983: 146), o en palabras de Ortega «vuelve el mito al revés» (Ortega y Gasset 1950). El título *Los borrachos* por el que se conoce el cuadro, es muy significativo de ese desplazamiento de todo lo mitológico.

Aunque las influencias entre pintura y literatura no están suficientemente estudiadas y Baco no es uno de los dioses más utilizados en la poesía española de carácter burlesco, es muy probable que Velázquez conociera algunas composiciones de este carácter, de la misma manera que los escritores de la órbita sevillana conocerían sus lienzos. Juan de Arguijo, que tiene un soneto dedicado a Baco, si bien no de carácter grotesco, acudía a las reuniones de Francisco Pacheco que reunía en su casa sevillana una de las más famosas academias de la época; Velázquez trabajaba entonces en el taller de su suegro Pacheco.

Por los mismos años Juan Carreño de Miranda pintó un Baco niño conocido como *La monstrea desnuda*; la modelo del pintor fue la niña Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, «el único ejemplo conocido de retrato mitológico que se hizo en la pintura española del siglo del XVII» (López Torrijos 1985: 339)\*, que aparece adornada con pámpanos y uvas. Cultiva aquí Carreño la misma línea estética de lo deforme que

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\* La niña Eugenia Martínez Vallejo fue traída a la Corte para ser mostrada en público debido a su extrema deformidad. A tenor de los documentos de la época tenía seis años y pesaba cinco arrobas. (Cfr. Moreno Villa 1939).

podemos ver en la serie de los bufones de Velázquez, *La mujer barbuda* de Ribera, o en las caricaturas grotescas de Quevedo.

Velázquez traslada el mito a un contexto de vida cotidiana. En *Marte* (¿1640–1642?) y *La fragua de Vulcano* (¿1630?) vulgariza claramente a los dioses; en *La fábula de Aracne* conocida como *Las hilanderas* (1657?) la lectura mitológica del lienzo está supeditada a la representación realista de una escena de taller. (Sobre el simbolismo y la realidad figurativa cfr. Gállego 1972). En la primera de las obras citadas el pintor desecha la imagen de Marte que nos ha transmitido la iconografía clásica y representa al dios desprovisto de todo carácter heroico, despojado de su armadura, de la que sólo conserva ridículamente el casco sobre una cabeza abatida; un dios sorprendido en un momento de cansancio y melancolía, quién sabe si meditando en la decadencia militar de España — la derrota de los Tercios españoles en Rocroy se produce casi inmediatamente después —, o en las consecuencias que le acarrearán sus amores con Afrodita, de cuya traición sin duda se vengará Vulcano. Brown defiende esta última interpretación (Brown 1986)\*; Marte medita en un lecho desordenado, que más parece propio de mancebía que tálamo de una diosa, cama de campaña o solio del dios de la guerra. No hay que olvidar que a Venus, en las representaciones burlescas de los poetas del XVII, se la describe como alcahueta, ramera y otros atributos de esta índole.

El episodio parece continuarse precisamente en el cuadro de *La fragua de Vulcano*. Velázquez capta la escena en un momento muy específico: Apolo se presenta en la fragua para comunicar a Vulcano la traición de su esposa Afrodita. El dios aparece como un herrero sudoroso, sin ninguna prestancia divina, humillado públicamente ante sus compañeros. Es la representación del marido cornudo, muy próxima a la versión grotesca de la mitología que tienen los escritores españoles del siglo de Oro.

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\* Es el único cuadro mitológico de Velázquez en que aparece un sujeto aislado, quizás para acentuar la sensación de desvalimiento del dios. Marte está caracterizado como un soldado de la época, un soldado de los Tercios españoles que luchan en Flandes, con sus característicos mostachos; sin embargo es una imagen desvalorizada, con las armas depuestas y la expresión abatida.



En el último de sus cuadros mitológicos, *Mercurio y Argos*, representa a Argos como un simple guarda fatigado y dormido, entregado a la mano asesina. Mercurio se arrastra dispuesto a clavar a traición su espada en el pecho descubierto que confiadamente se le ofrece. Más parece un rufián que el mensajero de los dioses, con su actitud aviesa y un viejo chambergo de plumas tiesas en vez del grácil tocado alado.

La interpretación de la mitología que hace Velázquez se aleja claramente de la veneración con que otros artistas han tratado la antigüedad clásica. Los dioses en vez de ser idealizados son envilecidos y aparecen como gente de baja condición. Sigue la línea de una tradición poética española consistente en la ridiculización de las fábulas, un *aggiornamento* muy característico de la cultura española del Siglo de Oro al tratar los temas mitológicos, despojándolos de todo énfasis, como se puede ver en Góngora, Rodríguez de Ardila, Polo de Medina, Cervantes o Quevedo.

La corriente de idealismo que preside todas las manifestaciones del espíritu en el siglo XVI no se agota en el XVII pero en el barroco español aparece con fuerza una línea de reinterpretación de los mitos desde un prisma desvalorizador de múltiples manifestaciones: lo burlesco, lo grotesco, la caricatura, la parodia, la ironía o la sátira. (Cfr. Keeble 1948, Cossío 1952, Cabañas 1948, Morell 1961, Moya del Baño 1966). No es mi propósito abordar aquí una delimitación teórica de estos términos, ni determinar qué composiciones deberíamos incluir en cada una de estas categorías que, por otra parte, participan de un carácter mixto, sino de qué forma los mitos clásicos han sido degradados y qué motivos se generalizaron entre los escritores barrocos, así como añadir algunas reflexiones sobre lo grotesco a las ya aportadas por otros estudiosos (véase Arellano 1984, Iffland 1979).

La actitud de los escritores del XVII hacia la mitología clásica, hasta entonces fuente inagotable de sus composiciones poéticas o novelísticas serias, cambia radicalmente. Libres ya del precepto de la *imitatio* abordan las fábulas con una absoluta libertad, llevando la deformación grotesca a límites extremos. Si en la pintura velazqueña este proceso se verificaba con cierta contención, en la poesía del siglo XVII los procedimientos lingüísticos y estilísticos se aúnan en un afán degradador que no habíamos conocido hasta entonces.

Esta corriente desmitificadora se produjo de una manera casi natural, en parte por razones estéticas (agotamiento de los modelos en

el manierismo...) y también porque el desengaño que caracteriza la cultura del barroco encuentra una de sus mejores vías de expresión en la desvalorización. Las hazañas y episodios de los dioses han sido repetidísimos y se prestan a una «actualización» y transformación «deformadora», a un tratamiento menos reverente, más risible, paródico o grotesco; si bien es verdad que esas mismas fábulas son utilizadas en poemas «serios» e incluso «neoplatónicos»; los escritores del siglo de Oro no tienen nada contra los héroes de la mitología, — de los que se sirven con harta frecuencia, si no es precisamente ese *carácter de héroes*, tan opuesto a la realidad del hombre desengañado o vencido que encontramos, por ejemplo, en la picaresca.

En la proliferación de las fábulas burlescas tuvieron un papel decisivo las Academias (véase Sánchez 1961, Hazañas y la Rúa 1988), cenáculos literarios y artísticos en los que los poetas buscaban reconocimiento y halago, el favor de un noble o mecenas y el apoyo de un escritor de prestigio a cuyo círculo aspiraban a pertenecer. En las Academias se accedía a «la cualificación literaria por un alto grado de tecnificación profesional, esto es, literaria: obras de encargo, ingeniosidades, variaciones sobre temas dados y tratamiento burlesco de temas más comprometidos» (Jauralde 1979); no se pretende la originalidad del contenido sino la del estilo. Al deseo de emulación poética que alienta la parodia no es ajeno lo grotesco en tanto que forma desvalorizadora; las fábulas clásicas son pretexto para alardes de agudeza y estilo, sólo así se explica que, por ejemplo, Castillo Solórzano escribiese reiteradamente sobre la *Fábula de Acteón*, o que Góngora y Quevedo insistan en los mismos temas aún después de muchos años de haber compuesto primeras versiones. En la poesía española del XVII tenemos numerosísimos ejemplos de fábulas burlescas; algunas aparecieron publicadas en recopilaciones tardías y otras muchas sin duda permanecen todavía desconocidas o inéditas.

Entre los escritores españoles Quevedo es quien lleva lo grotesco a sus últimas posibilidades formales y semánticas. Los mitos clásicos le inspiraron poemas serios, pero sobre todo versos de escarnio, parodias crueles. En ocasiones son breves alusiones que actúan como mero soporte para la burla; en otras los mitos cobran mayor autonomía, como en los poemas «Encarece la hermosura de una moza con varios ejemplos y aventajándola a todos», «Declama contra el amor» y «Efectos del amor y los celos». (Quevedo 1981). Y sobresalen en

importancia temática los sonetos dedicados a «Apolo siguiendo a Dafne» (nº 536), «A Dafne huyendo de Apolo» (nº 537), la «Imitación de Virgilio en lo que Dido dijo a Eneas queriendo dejarla» (nº 558) y el romance, «Hero y Leandro en paños menores» (nº 771).

Lo mismo podemos decir de su obra en prosa; en la genial sátira mitológica *La hora de todos* los dioses paganos son rebajados a mortales de la más baja catadura moral, y desde el punto de vista estético extremadamente ridiculizados. Saturno, el *dios marimanta, comeniños*, aparece *engulléndose sus hijos a bocados* (p. 62), Mercurio es el *chisme del Olimpo* (p. 65), Marte habla como el peor de los rufianes, Venus llega *a medio afeitarse la geta, y el moño, que la encorozaba de pelambre la chola, no bien encasquetado por la prisa* (p. 64) (Quevedo 1975).

Góngora escribió varios romances burlescos sobre la fábula de Hero y Leandro («Aunque entiendo poco griego...» y «Arrojóse el mancebito...») y de Píramo y Tisbe («De Tisbe y Píramo quiero...» y «La ciudad de Babilonia...»); encontramos también alusiones en «Ándeme yo caliente...» y «Llegó a una venta Cupido...».

Otros poetas que cultivan esta línea satírico burlesca son Bernardo de Quirós, Polo de Medina, Vicens García, Castillo Solórzano, Rodríguez de Ardila y Salas Barbadillo. Entre los mitos más frecuentemente utilizados con fines burlescos destacan la fábula de Apolo y Dafne, Hero y Leandro y Píramo y Tisbe.

## Apolo y Dafne

La metamorfosis de Dafne es una de las más evocadas en la historia del arte, aunque no en la pintura española del XVII. Quevedo nos ofrece dos versiones, la lírica y la jocosa. En la primera, recogida en las *Flores de poetas ilustres* de Pedro de Espinosa, es decir, anterior a 1603 (en la edición de Blecua aparece dentro de los «poemas líricos» y en James O. Crosby como «Prólogo poético»), apreciamos ya un tono irónico-burlesco, anticipo de sus poemas siguientes en los que hace del mito uno de los blancos favoritos de su sátira.

Dafne bella, no sé cómo  
con tantas flechas de plomo  
puedes correr tan veloz

En el soneto "A Apolo siguiendo a Dafne", Quevedo se centra en la persecución de Apolo, no en la metamorfosis de la ninfa, alejándose así del modelo garcilasiano. Tanto Apolo como Dafne son representados por medio de groseras imágenes, al tiempo que el poeta insiste en el conocido tópico de que sólo el dinero vence la voluntad de las mujeres,

Bermejazo platero de las cumbres,  
a cuya luz se expulga la canalla,  
la ninfa Dafne, que se afufa y calla,  
si la quieres gozar, paga y no alumbres.

interpolando el episodio de Jupiter y Danée, y los amores de Marte y Venus, en este último caso denigrados por la asociación de términos o imágenes culinarias, uno de sus procedimientos más utilizados

en confites gastó Marte la malla,  
y la espada en pasteles y en azumbres.

En "A Dafne huyendo de Apolo" el poeta advierte a la ninfa de las intenciones del dios con tan crudo lenguaje que la espanta y provoca su inmediata metamorfosis, sin que sepamos medie intervención divina. Una versión obscena anterior de este soneto se conserva en un manuscrito de la Biblioteca Provincial de Evora (Barnard 1985: 365–373). El poeta, que compara a Dafne con un murciélago por su aversión a la luz (Apolo, Febo), anuncia a la ninfa las intenciones de su perseguidor con el más procaz y soez de los lenguajes.

Él empreñaros quiere, a lo que entiendo,  
si os coge en esta selva tosca y ruda;  
Júpiter, el cachondo, le da ayuda,  
y el dios maestro de esgrima, el brazo horrendo.

Si sus flechas teméis con tantas tretas,  
con carne os lo ha de hacer: que son locuras  
pensar que os lo ha de hacer con las saetas.

Esto la dije yo en las espesuras,  
y al punto en lauro convirtió las tetas,  
y, arrecho, el pobre Sol se quedó a oscuras\*.

En la segunda versión, más suavizada, Quevedo se burla también de la alquimia y de la astrología, motivo frecuente de la burla y la sátira del XVII.

Tras vos un alquimista va corriendo,  
Dafne, que llaman Sol, ¿y vos tan cruda?  
(...)  
Buhonero de signos y planetas,  
viene haciendo ademanes y figuras

Dafne *cruda* (cruel, «dura de pelar», y pálida porque rehuye el Sol) será, una vez transformada en laurel, un simple condimento de fogón.

En el poema «Encarece la hermosura de una moza con varios ejemplos, y aventajándola a todas», Dafne es *ninfa de los escabeches y aceitunas*; y en referencia a la persecución de Apolo leemos

Si la luz trajo arrastrando,  
como otros suelen la soga,  
tras Dafne el Sol, cuadrillero  
con más saetas que joyas;  
si la corrió como liebre,  
y se corrió como zorra  
de que la dijese: «Aguarda»,  
y no la dijese: «Toma»;  
y si en competencia tuya  
era Dafne carantoña,  
ninfa que los escabeches  
y las aceitunas ronda (...)

Esta asociación con el laurel como ingrediente culinario aparece también en Lope, que en las *Rimas de Tomé de Burguillos* escribe un

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\* En la versión lírica del poema (en *Flores de poetas ilustres, ob.cit.*) Júpiter acude en socorro de Dafne, no de Apolo, convirtiéndola en laurel; en otro momento nos dice que es su padre Peneo, ajustándose así a la fuente ovidiana.

soneto que titula «A las fugas de Juana en viendo al poeta, con la fábula de Dafne»: *¿cuándo serás laurel, dulce tirana?/ Que no te quiero yo para aceitunas,/ sino para mi frente, hermosa Juana;* el Conde Claros dice al Licenciado Tomé de Burguillos en el soneto introductorio: *viva vuesa merced, señor Burguillos,/ que más quiere aceitunas que laureles,/ y siempre se corona de tomillos* (por Tomé) y vuelve a ironizar sobre lo mismo en el soneto «Cuenta el poeta la estimación que se hace en este tiempo de los laureles poéticos».

Versiones burlescas de Apolo encontramos también en las *Academias del Jardín* y la *Fábula de Apolo y Dafne*, de Polo de Medina, y en Salas Barbadillo, en las que ambos acuden a otro tópico de la época: la pasión de las mujeres por pasear en coche; Apolo trata de vencer la resistencia de Dafne diciéndole *mira que soy hermoso y tengo coche*. También Quevedo recoge este motivo en el poema 690:

Lo mejor de las mujeres  
se han engullido los coches:  
cazuelas donde se ven  
solas cabezas y alones

El poeta catalán Francesc Vicens García en los «Avisos del poeta á Apolo, cuand seguía á Dafne» instruye a Apolo en la mejor manera de lograr sus propósitos, y puesto que no consigue ablandar a la ninfa con sus ruegos (los argumentos usados por Apolo están directamente tomados de las *Metamorfosis*), *¿sino que os deixa estar fet un babau!*, le aconseja *donauli alguns trentins(...), porque ja lo valor/ de las donas es tal en aquesta era,/ que en veurer un trenti tornan de cera* (soneto XVIII, Vicens García 1845), dando por sentado una vez más el materialismo de las mujeres.

Como dios de la poesía, Apolo es también un excelente motivo para satirizar a los poetas de su tiempo. Lo utiliza Carvantes en la *Adjunta al Parnaso*, Vélez de Guevara en *El diablo Cojuelo*, Polo de Medina en *Las Academias del Jardín*, Quevedo en *La Hora de todos*, y otros muchos escritores del XVII.

## Hero y Leandro

La fábula de Hero y Leandro está tomada de las *Heroidas* de Ovidio (XVIII y XIX) aunque existen también dos epigramas de Marcial, una leve alusión en Virgilio (*Geórgicas*, III), otra en Estacio y un poema épico en exámetros del poeta y gramático griego Museo (ss. V/VI d. de C.)<sup>\*</sup>; en España es Garcilaso quien introduce el tema de Hero y Leandro con el conocido soneto «Pasando el mar Leandro el animoso...»; Boscán traduce y adapta el poema de Museo (*Leandro*, 1543), a su vez parodiado por Góngora, y Quevedo dedica un poema serio a estos jóvenes infortunados, el que empieza «Esforzóse pobre luz...»; las otras versiones son ya burlescas.

En el romance «Declama contra el Amor» (nº 709) hay una breve y cruel alusión a la muerte de los amantes,

No hay quien, cual él, dos amigos  
un par de güevos los haga,  
guisando el uno estrellado,  
pasando el otro por agua.

pero la fábula se convierte en tema central en «Hero y Leandro en paños menores» (nº 771)

Señor don Leandro,  
vaya en hora mala;  
que no puede en buena  
quien tan mal se trata.

Si con el *don* ridiculiza al héroe, el artículo *la* antepuesto al nombre de la amada la vulgariza

¿Qué imagina cuando  
de bajel se zarpa,  
hecho por la Hero  
aprendiz de rana?.

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\* La *Historia de Hero y Leandro* de Museo, fue publicada por el célebre humanista Aldo Manucio en 1495; a partir de entonces fue muy conocida y difundida. Tanto Quevedo como Góngora citan a Museo como fuente directa.

Mientras Leandro es tratado de tonto, *aprendiz de rana y huevo pasado por agua*, Hero está claramente descrita como ramera, *una perla toda, / que a menudo ensartan*, y de aspecto físico repugnante, *piernas de ramplón, / fornida de panza, / las uñas con cejas / de rascar la caspa*. El joven se lanza al mar: *en puros cueros / va, pues, a esta dama, / que los apetece / más que las enaguas*. Hero le alumbra en la noche con *farol de cocina*, y cuando Leandro desaparece bajo las aguas

Ya Hero lo ha visto,  
y por él se arranca  
todos los cabellos,  
y se mete a calva.

A diluvios llora,  
no en forma ordinaria:  
la nariz moquitas,  
los ojos legañas.

La muerte de Leandro y el posterior suicidio de Hero son «piadosamente» descritos por Quevedo en los siguientes términos:

Cual huevos murieron  
tonto y mentecata.  
Satanás los cene:  
buen provecho le hagan.

Hero se lanza al vacío gritando: *¡Agua va!* y así

dió sobre el aceite  
del candil, de patas;  
y en aceite puro  
se quedó estrellada.

Por su parte Góngora dedica dos poemas burlescos a esta fábula; el que empieza «Aunque entiendo poco griego...», compuesto en 1610, está destinado a servir de introducción al «Arrójose el mancebito...», escrito con anterioridad (1589). En el primero sólo se cuenta la primera parte, no trágica, de la historia; el poeta dice haber encontrado en sus greguescos unos versos de Museo que dan noticia de la historia de tan desgraciados amantes, y en los que fundamenta los sesenta y nueve primeros versos de su romance. Empieza citando la genealogía de los dos jóvenes, muy en línea con la literatura picaresca, provocando un efecto ridículo al anteponerles el tratamiento: *doña*



*Hero/ tuvo por padre a un hidalgo, o (...) era hijo don Leandro/ de un escudero de Abido; pasa a exponer la historia de su conocimiento y secretas relaciones pióla cual gorrión,/ cacareóla cual gallo,/ arrullóla cual palomo, / hízola rueda cual pavo y a describirnos acto seguido los atributos y belleza de Hero, que intercala ingeniosamente con elementos irónicos.*

Se continúa este romance con el que empieza: «*Arrojóse el mancebito/ al charco de los atunes...*», quitándole ya toda gloria con estos dos primeros versos, y fijando definitivamente el tono del poema.\* El cielo desata la tormenta, *se orinaron las nubes y el Griego de los embustes* deja escapar los vientos. Hero pide ayuda a los dioses, *pero Amor, como llovía/ y estaba en cueros, no acude,/ ni Venus, porque con Marte/ está cenando unas ubres*. El cuerpo exánime de Leandro es arrastrado por las olas hasta la playa, y Hero *desde la alta torre torre envía/ el cuerpo a su amante dulce,/ y la alma adonde se que-man/ pastillas de piedra azufre* (el Infierno). Coincide Góngora con Quevedo en tildar a los amantes de *nechos*, y en la comparación de sus cuerpos muertos con huevos fritos o pasados por agua:

El Amor como dos huevos,  
quebrantó nuestras saudades;  
él fue pasado por agua,  
yo estrellada mi fin tuve.

reza el epitafio que la doncella de Hero hace grabar en la tumba de su señora. Este final fue de gran éxito en la época pues además de en Góngora y Quevedo — que lo usa también en «El baile de los nadadores» — lo encontramos en otros muchos poetas. Un soneto de Mateo Vázquez de Leca, recogido en las *Flores de poetas ilustres*, dice así:

buen aliño tuvieron tus amores:  
tú pasado por agua, Hero en tortilla  
y cenóse el diablo el par de huevos.

Tanto Vázquez de Leca como Quevedo y Góngora dan por segura la condenación de los amantes.

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\* La imagen del *charco de los atunes* se hizo muy popular; aparece en Polo de Medina, Castillo Solórzano, Jerónimo de Barrionuevo y Espinel.

## Píramo y Tisbe

La historia Píramo y Tisbe, símbolo de los amantes desdichados, proviene de una narración oriental que recoge Ovidio en el *Libro IV* de las *Metamorfosis*. Quevedo alude a este mito en numerosos poemas; en el ya citado «Declama contra el amor» leemos:

(...) de tintorero  
cobró en el mundo gran fama,  
pues, por teñir unas moras,  
quitó el color a unas caras.

En los «Efectos del amor y los celos» insiste en la misma imagen de su metamorfosis:

Aquellos amantes higos,  
que, pasados a la sombra,  
fueron el uno por otro  
tintoreros de unas moras.

Góngora tuvo especial predilección por este tema al que dedica dos romances, «De Tisbe y Piramo quiero...», de 1604, y «La ciudad de Babilonia...» conocido como *Fábula de Píramo y Tisbe*, obra en la que el poeta culmina la síntesis entre lo culto y popular, lo ideal y lo ridículo, y en la que ya aparece todo el complejo mundo retórico que encontramos en sus obras mayores (cfr. Carreño 1982, Ciplijauskaitė 1975, Alonso y Jammes 1967, etc.).

No se agota aquí la galería de dioses y mitos ridiculizados en la poesía del XVII. En Júpiter se hace mofa de su desmedido apetito sexual; su metamorfosis en toro en el mito de Europa (Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera, *Fábula de Europa*) y en lluvia de oro en el mito de Danae, que aparece ya en *el Romancero General* de 1604, tendrán gran aceptación tanto en la poesía como en la prosa quevedesca (*La hora de todos*). De Galatea, una de las Neréidas, conocemos sobre todo su amor por Acis y desdén por Polifemo; los poemas más famosos del XVII sobre esta fábula son los de Carrillo y Sotomayor, *Fábula de Acis y Galatea*, y la *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea* de Luis de Góngora, que no entran en la categoría de lo burlesco o grotesco. Poco después Castillo Solórzano parodia con gran ingeniosidad la

fábula de Góngora en *Donaires del Parnaso* (1624), con el título de *Fábula de Polifemo*.

También la historia de Pan y Siringa fue utilizada con propósito ridiculizador. En las *Poesías* de Baltasar de Alcazar encontramos el epigrama que reza: *Dicen que Siringa era/ la que después fue jeringa...*; Anon publica una «Fábula de Pan y Siringa» en el *Cancionero de 1628* y Polo de Medina una composición del mismo nombre en su primera colección de *Obras en prosa y verso* de 1664:

Pan, un cierto satirillo  
y deidad tan desmadrada,  
que, en lo menudo del cuerpo,  
no era Pan, sino migaja ...

así como Ventura de Vergara Salcedo, en *Ideas de Apolo*, (Madrid, 1663). En cuanto a Venus en los poemas burlescos es tildada reiteradamente de alcahueta y ramera; así aparece descrita por Quevedo, Hurtado de Mendoza (*Poesías satíricas y burlescas*, soneto X, Madrid, 1876), Salas Barbadillo (en José Alfay, *Poesías varias*), Cáncer y Velasco, «Fábula de Atalanta» (*Obras varias poéticas*, Madrid 1761), y en la «Fábula de Marte y Venus» de Castillo Solórzano (en *Donaires del Parnaso*).

La mayor parte de las composiciones citadas hasta aquí no pueden considerarse propiamente grotescas, pero sí podemos afirmar que en todas ellas hay elementos grotescos. Ya las preceptivas poéticas del XVI y XVII trataron de establecer el significado y diferencias entre lo grotesco, lo satírico y lo burlesco; entre los críticos actuales Ignacio Arellano resume en los siguientes rasgos las diferentes teorías y definiciones: tendencia a lo heterogéneo e incongruente, fusión de elementos incompatibles de diversos reinos de la naturaleza o de los planos cómico y terrible, disarmonía, exageración, presencia de lo caricaturesco, etc. Con frecuencia estos elementos aparecen estrechamente entremezclados dándose la presencia de varios de ellos a la vez, y aunque no son excluyentes tampoco se debe presuponer la coexistencia de dos o más de ellos.

Otros estudiosos coinciden en señalar en lo grotesco la presencia de lo extraño, antinatural y anormal; lo feo, antiestético, estrafalario, de mal gusto; lo monstruoso, desmesurado o ínfimo; burla o ingenio destructor, caracter negativo. Alarcos García, que distingue en Que-

vedo entre el lenguaje como creación grotesca y el lenguaje como expresión de un mundo grotesco, mantiene que «lo fundamental en el grotesco es la creación de monstruos, de naturalezas mixtas, híbridas, logradas mediante mezclas extravagantes de cosas que en sí mismas no tienen relación alguna, de elementos que provienen de planos totalmente distintos» (Alarcos García, Sabor de Cortázar 1983: 628–629).

Lo grotesco implica siempre deformación de la realidad, que se reinterpreta desde un prisma desvalorizador. La degradación de los mitos clásicos se produce actuando tanto sobre lo estético como sobre lo ético. Nótese que las sátiras más feroces no aparecen en las alusiones individualizadas a los héroes — por lo demás lugares comunes o simples referencias culturalistas —, sino en aquellas composiciones centradas en dos o más personajes clásicos: Píramo y Tisbe, Apolo y Dafne, Hero y Leandro, precisamente los más sacralizados por la tradición poética, y que permiten al poeta, al enfrentar un personaje con otro, ironizar sobre las cualidades morales y las acciones de los dioses. Tomemos como ejemplo el ya citado *Triunfo de Baco*; sin la existencia de los borrachos en el lienzo, la interpretación burlesco paródica que hacemos del dios sería completamente distinta. Por otra parte la popularidad de determinadas fábulas burlescas es indicativa de una nueva posición ante la tradición amorosa petrarquista.

En los textos y ejemplos citados hasta aquí he querido señalar algunos procedimientos que producen o acentúan el efecto ridiculizador: sufijos despectivos añadidos a nombres heroicos (*Eneillas*), creación de nuevos epítetos con propósito vulgarizador (*la Chipriota*, por Venus), distorsión de la genealogía heroica (Eneas, *hijo de la gran Ramera*), utilización de títulos, fórmulas de tratamiento (*don Leandro*), acentuación de costumbres criticables (la Fortuna increpa a Júpiter: *Tú que me llamas inconsiderada y borracha, acuérdate que hablaste por boca de ganso en Leda, que te derramaste en lluvia de bolsa por Danae, que bramaste y fuiste “inde toro pater” por Europa, que has hecho otras mil picardías y locuras*) (Quevedo 1975: 68), destrucción del héroe a través de la creación de un nuevo sistema de valores (Hero y Leandro ya no son dos amantes modélicos que arriesgan la vida en aras de su amor, sino una pelandusca y un insensato), descripciones insólitas, aplebellamiento lingüístico, *abre esa boca y garla, que parece que sornas*, increpa Marte a Júpiter (ibid. 64),

caricaturas (Hero arrancándose los pelos), creación de un entorno costumbrista e intensificación de la mezcla de estilos.

Quisiera hacer todavía algunas consideraciones, indicando en primer lugar que la diferencia entre lo grotesco y lo satírico burlesco me parece, sobre todo, una cuestión de gradación, de intensificación de recursos y de distanciamiento cultural, temporal y social con el modelo, si lo hubiere.

Resumiremos que en el lenguaje de lo grotesco se da la presencia de los siguientes elementos y características: *a) fusión entre lo cómico y lo terrible, b) ingenio e imaginación, c) lo grotesco es ingenioso y agudo, pero no gracioso, d) la ironía, e) la sorpresa y el despropósito; f) presencia de lo obscuro y lo soez; g) crueldad. h) la provocación.* La fusión entre lo cómico y lo terrible, lo cómico y lo cruel, excede lo propiamente burlesco. Los retratos devastadores de Quevedo son crueles por gratuitos. Cabría preguntarse si la crueldad, arbitraria o no, es más o menos «explicable» cuando conocemos al personaje retratado. Lo grotesco en mitología resulta menos cruel porque no es gratuito (con frecuencia los hechos de los dioses dan pábulo para la crítica) y por tratarse de personajes de ficción. Pero las caricaturas quevedescas de la vejez, la fealdad o la deformidad son trágicas.

La función del grotesco es poner la realidad en otro contexto provocando desagrado o risa, o las dos cosas a la vez. Es un prisma desde el cual la realidad de lo cotidiano es observada de otra manera. La creación grotesca necesita un *público* sobre el que actuar de forma provocativa o de forma cómplice, buscando el insulto, el despropósito, la sorpresa. A veces se llega a anular la existencia del elemento degradado, al perder toda referencia con la realidad. Las pinturas de Goya (los *Caprichos...*) han llegado a tal grado de deformación o desconexión referencial con lo real, que bien podemos considerarlas como fantasías, “fantasías grotescas” o “fantasías negras”- no hay que olvidar en la expresión de lo grotesco hay un componente de humor negro muy acusado. Por otra parte, cuando lo grotesco está en un contexto artístico, tiene mucho que ver con el absurdo, si bien lo absurdo no siempre es grotesco.

Para cerrar esta breve reflexión, y volviendo a las fábulas mitológicas, podemos concluir en que ciertas agudezas pierden sentido si el lector desconoce las fuentes clásicas o el marco referencial está ya muy desvaído. El efecto grotesco depende de la distancia con el

modelo sobre el que se ironiza. Cuanto más sacralizado sea el modelo, más grotesco es el resultado, más grave la trasgresión\*. La extraordinaria comicidad de la *Fábula de Polifemo*, de Castillo Solórzano deriva de la asociación constante y paródica con el modelo gongorino. Lo mismo podemos decir a propósito de los siguientes versos de Jacinto Polo de Medina:

Aquí es obligación, señora musa,  
si ya lo que se usa no es excusa,  
el pintar de la ninfa las facciones,  
y pienso comenzar por los talones,  
(...)

Era el pie (yo le vi) de tal manera...  
¡vive Cristo, que miento; que no era!,  
porque, por lo sutil y recogido,  
nunca ha sido este pie visto ni oído.  
Era, en efeto, blanco y era breve...,  
¡oh, que linda ocasión de decir *nieve*  
si yo fuera un poeta principiante!

Si desconocemos la fábula de Dafne y su larga tradición en la poesía hispánica, o no estamos familiarizados con la obra de Góngora y al tanto de la polémica culteranista, la interpretación del texto será muy diferente, y por supuesto una experiencia mucho menos lúdica y enriquecedora.

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\* Una segunda lectura en clave políticosocial no me parece ajena a este tipo de trasgresiones grotescas, especialmente en Quevedo y otros escritores satíricos del Siglo de Oro español.

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# The Grotesque and History in Swift and Vonnegut

GIUSEPPINA RESTIVO

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## 1. The Grotesque and the Utopian

Describing his visit to the Island of Sorcerers and Magicians called Glubbubdrib, the protagonist of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* boasts of conversing with the spirits of some of the most famous ancient heroes. Among them he singles out the men of a "sextumvirate" to whom, he says, «all the ages of the world cannot add a seventh». The six men are Brutus (paradoxically appreciated by his victim Julius Caesar), his ancestor Junius, Socrates, Epaminondas, Cato the Younger and Thomas More. No explanation is given for introducing the author of *Utopia*, the only apparition not belonging to ancient Rome or Greece; but More's spirit implicitly hovers over all of Gulliver's adventures.

Each of the four Books of *Gulliver's Travels* deals to some degree with a utopian project, yet the author seems to hesitate to give it form: it is hinted at, postponed and alluded to in fragments of the strange but still human worlds visited by Gulliver. It is finally achieved in the last country visited, but not by the human species. Swift can represent his new formulation of utopia only by inventing a new kind of animal, fantastic horses gifted with reason but not impaired by man's vices. In spite of a common reference to Plato's model, the two centuries separating Thomas More's project (1516) and Swift's emulation in 1725, seem to allow no easy representation of the utopian récit, as if



its possibility paradoxically had grown both theoretically pervasive and more difficult to conceive.

More's self-righteous "invention of history", followed one century later by Bacon's proud project for a scientific utopia in *The New Atlantis* (1626), proves no longer feasible in Swift, whose utopian outlook actually undergoes a process of desemiotization. This process takes in fact the form of an intensely grotesque survey of history and civilization, that, only a few years later, was to lead to Rasselas and its obliteration of any possible plan for utopia. The eponymous protagonist of Johnson's tale, a prince bored with his secluded life waiting for succession, flees with his sister in the hope of finding engagement in the active world, but cannot ultimately define the ideal reign of which he would like to be king. Convinced that any project is doomed to fail, both he and his sister relinquish their "choice of life" in history, to go back to the place they had left: no ideal state or condition seems possible. In Swift the grotesque assaults history and the social institutions, imposing not the end of utopia as such, but what I would call an implicit criticism of modern (or modernist) reason.

Swift has been accused of an excess of rationalism. While on the one hand he actually rejects passions, many emotions and what would be later called the unconscious, partly justifying his accusers, just as evidently he rejects the rigid dominance of mathematics, science and technology, that he sees embodied in the Royal Society of Science (heralded by Bacon's House of Salomon), and he ridicules through the Lagado Academy of Science. A thorough criticism of what will become positivist reason is detectable throughout, along with his determined opposition to all aspects of strong centralized power and organization, from monarchy and court to urban life itself. The ideal model he finally proposes is rural, republican, physiocratic, and this actually reverses many of the tenets of Thomas More's utopia, which was urban, centralized, governed by an elective prince; or, in Yuri Lotman's terms, "syntagmatic" (Lotman 1973)\*. Swift's reason is a complex problem, and it is strictly interlaced with a parallel grotesque view of history. In *Gulliver's Travels* the utopian depends on the relationship between the two.

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\* On Lotman's codes in English Renaissance literature, see Restivo 1996: 41-46.

Grotesque is a term of Italian origin. As every etymological dictionary reports, it comes from the Renaissance decorations imitating those found in the rooms of Nero's *Domus Aurea* in Rome. These appeared like subterranean caves, as in the course of time the ground level had been raised, and they had assumed the aspect of grottos or underground crypts. They were decorated with a variety of persons and animals, intermingled with foliage, flowers, fruit, in fantastic designs that gave rise to a figurative genre, which by 1587 was called *grottesche*. Hence the concept of a mixed composition that, transferred from the figurative field to metaphorical usage, came to describe a discourse lacking a clearly distinct subject. In Webster's Dictionary the term *grotesque* is defined as indicating something characterized by distortions, with striking incongruities in appearance, shape, manner or fantastic, bizarre, ludicrously eccentric, strange, ridiculous, absurd. A theatrical meaning of the term links it to the satirical genre and a mixture of tragic and comic elements, in a unity that gives rise to laughter but not mirth.

The grotesque character of history, that is a description of history as incongruous, unnatural, distorted or monstrous, appears as a recurrent trait in the age of Enlightenment, from Voltaire's *Candide* to Hogarth's etchings or Fielding's novels representing English society, as from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* to Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*. The grotesque seems to play an important and typical role in eighteenth-century thought, although with different results. Indeed, it appears functional to the nature of what Yury Lotman calls the dominant code of Enlightenment. This code is based on the negation of the two basic principles of semiosis, the symbolic function of sign, as "standing for" a referent, and the syntagmatic function, connecting signs. As Lotman points out, this double negation of both the radicals of semiosis, if complete, would lead to silence, but, by acting as a form of criticism of the previous dominant codes of medieval and Renaissance culture, it rather creates the signs of their rejection or desemiotization, of an exposal of the artificial distortions of historical society. Basically, the code of Enlightenment appears to be opposing nature to the artificiality of history, and to criticize actual history as a negative deformation or grotesque.

This criticism can produce a new social and cultural contract implying progress (as in Rousseau), or result in a utopian project. Yet,

if the degree of desemiotization and rejection of history as grotesque is pushed to the extreme, it can push the utopian project itself outside even potential history (as in Johnson's *Rasselas*) and so verge on the absurd. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* seems to alternate both possible outcomes of the code of Enlightenment, the utopian and the absurd, as two parallel specular effects of different forms of the rejection of history.

Swift's constant sense of the grotesque character of history is expressed in *Gulliver's Travels* through a double device: carnivalization (Bakhtin 1965), as conceived by Bakhtin, and reversal. Carnivalization resorts to a range of techniques, such as parody, hyperboles, or a practice of that symbolic reduction that Gilbert Durand has indeed termed «gulliverization» (Durand 1963). Reversal can be intended in the sense of Carl Gustav Jung's *enantiodromia*, or a "running into opposites" (cf. Jung 1921). Both carnivalization and reversal are variously and progressively applied with a deforming and exploring eye. They combine to give shape to Lemuel Gulliver's unusual *Bildungsroman*, both in a social and moral sense, throughout the four books of Swift's fantastic fiction, as we can rapidly consider.

Gulliver starts off as a surgeon aboard the *Antelope*, is later enrolled as both surgeon and second mate, being given a double pay, and ends up as the captain of a vessel called *Adventure*, with a surgeon at his disposal. Yet his social initiation or career seems a mock one, in the sense that it is constantly carnivalized by accidents, pirates' assaults, rebellions aboard that ridicule or debase him. He actually appears as a champion of unsuccessful enterprises: he goes to sea for lack of patients, undergoes various forms of humiliation as prisoner of the Lilliputians, is turned into a girl's toy among the giants of Brobdingnagg, and is compared to the abominable Yahoos on the island of the Houyhnhnms, the Noble Horses who represent «the perfection of nature».

Ultimately he is morally, or so to say utopically, unsuccessful. His experience of the Houyhnhnms' utopia and superior wisdom actually produces a grotesque reversal in him: missing his educators, once back in his country, he turns the universal benevolence they have taught him into a universal malevolence, grotesquely behaving as if mentally deranged, totally alienated from his family. His *Bildungsroman*, in a sense a parody on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, is turned into

a parody of itself: Gulliver qualifies both as a hero diametrically opposite to Robinson, and a failure as a hero.

A constant process of carnivalization and reversal invests every society visited by Gulliver, with a geometry of argumentation being carried out below the entertaining narrative surface.

In the first Book, in Lilliput, the grotesque pervades the diminutive Emperor's claim to absolutism and the politics of his court. Here, a huge process of carnivalization turns candidates applying for high offices into clowns, who gain promotion by rope dancing or jumping competitions or, as in the Treasurer's case, by cutting capers on the tight rope. Home and foreign policy are dominated by the opposition between two parties, fiercely struggling about the way eggs should be cracked before eating them, whether at the large or the small end, this conflict also bringing about a religious schism, and hostility with the confining state of Blefuscu. The Emperor's "benevolence" or generosity, moreover, appears evident when he rewards Gulliver for his services in capturing Blefuscu's enemy fleet: for not annihilating Blefuscu immediately after his deed, Gulliver is condemned — with no trial — to capital punishment, but this is generously turned, by the Emperor in person, into slow starvation, preceded by blinding.

At the same time Lilliput offers a chance for a first glimpse at utopia: while the king (or Emperor) and court are grotesque, other state institutions, or at least the original principles establishing them, are surprisingly suitable for a utopian project. The organization of justice and education is described as exemplary. Justice does not only punish crime, it also rewards virtue to educate people to it (a pedagogical device that only a few years later was to be "delegitimated" by Kant's absolute ethicism, according to which virtue must operate only for its own sake). Moreover perjurers are discouraged, their accusations being turned against them, if proved false, and even ingratitude treated as a capital crime, in order to promote the virtue it disregards, ironically so well exemplified by the practice of the Emperor himself. Justice is expected to be extremely careful: it is represented indeed as having six eyes.

On the other hand, education too mirrors Swift's ideals: it is the same for both sexes as in Plato's *Republic*, it is public, severe in preventing parents from fondling and spoiling their children, or in

avoiding sexual experience, and carefully in keeping with the student's social status.

In the second Book, at Brobdingnagg, the situation described at Lilliput is reversed: the king of the giants is wise, his point of view utopian, contrasted with the protagonist's grotesque description of his (our) civilization and institutions. The king here is a pacifist, and he is as horrified by Gulliver's account of wars and weapons as by the description of the decadent English nobility and corrupt politicians. But the giants' local institutions appear neither perfect nor corresponding to their king's wisdom: civil wars have taken place in the past, there is a standing army in the country, as well as widespread poverty and ill health. In spite of their giantism, the inhabitants complain about their lack of strength and their physical limits.

The giant king's wise comments actually reverse Gulliver's grotesque description of the historical world, but they do not compare well with the king's own country. Here, as in the first Book, grotesque desemiotization and utopia are combined, but with an inverted opposition between a positive king, on the one hand, and a social organization not so positive, on the other.

In the third Book, at Laputa/Balnibarbi and at Luggnagg, the king and his court are, instead, as negative as the rest of the country, all being strongly grotesque. A single-minded attachment to mathematics and music affects the Laputans of quality, who are «so taken up with intense speculations that they can neither speak nor attend to the discourses of others, without being roused by some external taction upon the organs of speech and hearing»: they are, therefore, accompanied by servants, who gently flap them on the mouth and ears to raise their attention when necessary. Everything is dominated by mathematics and music to the exclusion of everything else, and this renders the Laputans «clumsy, awkward and unhandy, slow and perplexed in their conceptions upon all other subjects», while depriving them of imagination, fancy and invention. They are also afflicted by a perpetual «dread in the celestial bodies» and a continuous state of alarm as to the sun's health. Research at the Lagado Academy is as ridiculous or grotesque as the strange geometrical shapes of the houses, or the rules for agriculture and economics. Scientific culture appears as carnivalized as the musical and the mathematical harmony of the spheres the Laputans are versed in

appears absurd: literally so, as the originary meaning of "absurd" is musical, indicating the opposite of harmonious.

And yet, even here, several utopian aspects are hinted at: one of the nobles, Munodi, manages to show Gulliver an ideal farm, as perfectly organized as contrary to the common fashion. One of the researchers at the Lagado Academy happens to be conducting a research on how to select politicians according to their moral virtue and efficiency, although he is looked down on by everybody else. The interplay between the grotesque and the utopian continues, though no longer implying a counterposition between court and country. A new geometry links the mainly negative perspective offered by this country to the mainly positive one offered by the country described in Book four, where the counterposition court/country is not only annulled, but made impossible by the abolition of monarchy itself.

Houyhnhnmland, or the land of Noble Horses and the perfection of nature, is based on the inversion of a scholastic tradition, no less popular at the time than that concerning the harmony of the spheres. Porphyry's Tree, presenting the horse as an example of *animal irrationale*, or brute animal, opposed to man as *animal rationale*, was well-known to university students and at Trinity College, where Swift studied. Swift polemically sustained that man was not so much *animal rationale* as *rationis capax*, and the fourth Book of Gulliver's Travels represents an ironical illustration of this assertion. It turns horses into the natural representatives of reason, while man, being only *rationis capax*, can range from the brutish and highly aggressive Yahoos to the educable Gulliver. A positive utopian society can be achieved in the end, but governed by a race that is truly *rationale* and not man's.

The republican organization of the wise, frugal, mild and vegetarian horses, is ruled by a general assembly, which gathers every three years in order to distribute resources equally and exhort — not order or command — proper behaviour whenever necessary. Houyhnhnmland is described as an ideal society based on reason, where reason means both nature and the exclusion of passions (following Plato's model), but is opposed to any artificial structuring, be it social, urban, scientific or technological.

If the supposed positiveness of many aspects is here debatable, and has been variously criticized, it is important not to confuse rationalism as a defense from the unconscious — its pulsions as well as its pervers-

sions — with rationalism as an artificial form of organization, imposing rigid rules and mechanical constrictions. The society of the noble horses is certainly fully ecological and totally exempt from rationalism in the second sense. Nor does Swift's rationalism imply overreliance on reason as such, as is evident not only in his description of the Laputa experts in mathematics or of the Lagado Academy, but in his comments on Descartes. As pointed out by S. Monk, Swift «was anti-Cartesian from his first published satire for the simple reason that he held that Descartes was self deluded and that man's reason was incapable of the feats that Descartes attributed to it.» (Monk 1968: 77).

Even among the noble horses, the use of reason does not actually prevent mistakes and does not guarantee knowledge. Their utopian world, although comparing well with the human world, is not proof against delusions, ironically accompanied by a degree of grotesque pride: even the noble horses are benevolently but ironically carnivalized. In fact, not only the existence of ships to cross the sea appears "impossible" to them, deprived as they are of all technological progress; they cannot understand the nature of Gulliver's difference and, more ludicrously, cannot see the nearby island off their coast which Gulliver's experience as a mariner allows him to detect with ease. They insist instead on defining it as a little blue cloud, their pride and self-righteousness hindering correct judgement.

Swift's "double reason" and double formula, joining the desemiologization produced by a grotesque reading of history to the utopian plan for an ideal society, is the most important feature of his thought and runs through the whole novel. This form of constant *dialogism* can explain many misunderstandings and critical contrasts. It can also account for the educational aim declared by the author himself and the "vexing" misanthropy he has been accused of, or the repulsion of some critics regarding his "perverted outlook" and "rigid rationalism", in sharp contrast with Norman Brown's famous enthusiastic interpretation of Swift's extraordinary ante litteram intuition of a psychoanalysis of society (cf. Brown 1959)\*.

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\* Swift's double reason — one natural and individual, the other collective and syntagmatic — could well be discussed and compared with Adorno's distinction of *Vernunft* and *Verstand*, of which only the first, *Vernunft*, properly applies to Swift and the logic of the code of Enlightenment.

At the same time, Swift's novel basically contains three paradoxes that must be dealt with, and lead us back to the crucial link between history and the grotesque, on which Lotman's theories can help shed new light.

From Swift's point of view, history cannot be anything but grotesque, unbearable, devoid of reason and nature, the values needed for the foundation of a just society. But the necessary union of nature and reason appears detectable nowhere, and to imagine it Swift had to invent a new species of highly rational horses. He then met with his first paradox: history exists but cannot be "justified", while utopia can be justified but does not exist. This paradox has been exposed by Lotman as basically intrinsic to the Enlightenment code, although he formulates it from another point of view. In fact, he points out that, in this code, history, unnatural and artificial (or grotesque) is not real, even if it exists; while nature, which is supposed to be reality, cannot be really experienced, as it is outside time. This paradox, regarding nature/history or utopia-reason/history appears the more cogent as both history and utopia impose themselves on man: respectively as an outer reality recorded throughout the centuries, and as an inner absolute form of ethic necessity: the same necessity that was later to become the basis for Immanuel Kant's foundation of his *Critique of Practical Reason* and his political thought.

But in Swift there are two more paradoxes implicit in the first. Swift's utopia both rejects and acknowledges the unconscious. By rejecting the unconscious Swift can point to the noble horses and reach his utopia, but at the cost of dehumanization, of a "getting out" of the species. By acknowledging the unconscious he is forced to compare Gulliver to the brutish aggressive Yahoos. As a problematic difference separates Gulliver from both extremes, the definition of his nature ends in the absurd. According to Lotman it is indeed typical of the code of Enlightenment to conceive of human nature as confined by two extremes, as exemplified in Gogol (Lotman: 1968: 5-50; Lotman 1975: 193-248).

A further paradox lies in the ambiguous extension of reason, the basic value of Swift's utopia, both enhanced and strongly limited: as a "building reason", leading to science, it is ridiculed, while it appears positive only as connected with static animality, and amounting to little more than an innate primitive order.



All these paradoxes appear implicit in the very nature of the Enlightenment code described by Lotman. As this code rejects both the symbolic and the syntagmatic connection, on the one hand it leads to a refusal of the unconscious, the most active producer of the symbolic so well exemplified in medieval culture; while on the other, being opposed to syntagmatic "artificiality", it confines reason to individual nature. But this double attitude, that frees culture from the medieval proliferation of symbols and superstition as from the syntagmatic social ties of centralized historical power, may ultimately have to face paradoxes and even the absurd.

In the more realistic *Robinson Crusoe*, on the other hand, the Enlightenment code seems to express naive optimistic self-reliance, based on natural individual resources. Yet even here the Yahoo seems to lurk behind Friday. In Swift's fantastic and grotesque novel a more articulate reflection leads to the Yahoo/Houyhnhnm split, and by placing Gulliver in the gap between the two, exposes him and his tentative *Bildungsroman* to the paradoxes brought about by his own "founding" code.

As we have seen, Yuri Lotman's description of the code of Enlightenment can lead deep into the labyrinth of Swift's baffling and controversial novel, and into its implied paradoxes. Swift may well be «a joker», as Irvin Ehrenpreis defined him, but then his joking would seem to correspond to the inner logic and invention of the code dominant in his age: what's more, this "invention", in its intensity, seems to foreshadow, to a degree, such postmodernist jokers as the American novelist Kurt Vonnegut, whose *Galápagos* could well read as the revised fourth Book of *Gulliver's Travels*.

## 2. Postmodern Neo-Swiftism: Vonnegut's *Galápagos*

Like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Vonnegut's *Galápagos* (1985) appears based on the two principles of carnivalization and reversal. Defined as a cancer of nature, history is desemiotized once more, but carnivalization is now extended to what produces history, man's scheming «big brain», causing both private and public mischief. The grotesque pervades all human behaviour, involves science and knowledge, the highest values in western civilization, as well as individual

self-determination and consciousness, along with technology and the most advanced Japanese computer, Mandarax, that proves useless and is finally destroyed. Ironically, an eighteenth-century quotation from Beccaria, stored in the computer's memory, suggests the implied principle: «Happy is the nation without a history».

A reduction of man's oversized brain, inverting the course of the biological evolution of the species, appears then as the only feasible solution. Vonnegut develops a fantasy of involution or devolution taking place on the islands where in 1835 Darwin, during his voyage on the *Beagle*, made the scientific observations leading him to *On the Origin of Species*.

Acclaimed on its first appearance as «Swiftian in its satire» and «a madcap genealogic adventure» by an author defined as «a postmodern Mark Twain» (respectively in the John Barkham Reviews and by Lorrie Moore in the *New York Times Book Review*), *Galápagos* is divided into two books, *The Thing Was* and *The Thing Became*. The first describes the end of civilization and the second the involutory process. The story is told looking at the earth from the Afterlife, by an American marine's ghost, who has observed events for a million years after their start in 1986. The ghost is a deserter from Vietnam, deceased at Malmö, Sweden, after an accident while working on a passenger ship named the *Bahía de Darwin*, soon destined to become «a second Noah's Ark».

The ship was scheduled for what was intended to be the Nature Cruise of the Century, a cruise taking celebrities (among them Jacqueline Kennedy) to the Galápagos Islands leaving from Guayaquil, Ecuador. But a world financial crisis spoils the project and only six people, not one celebrity among them, are actually present on the day of departure from Guayaquil. In the meantime, war is declared between Ecuador and Perú, soon to be followed by World War Three and the general spread of a disease causing women's sterility. Hence the end of civilization and of the human race, except for the passengers on the *Bahía de Darwin* who survive in the Galápagos Archipelago.

The grotesque hyperbolically haunts every step of the story, from the casual selection of the survivors to the first implanting of their colony on Santa Rosalia Island, made possible by the presence of an American biology teacher, Mary Hepburn, who artificially inseminates

nates all the women available from the only male survivor, without his being aware of it. In the course of centuries the colony thus started develops into a new amphibious species, that is better adapted to obtain food from the sea. This leads to the loss not only of the oversize brain, but of hands and legs as well, replaced by fins. No Beethoven's Ninth Symphony will ever be possible again, neither will Machiavellian manipulations or self-destructive proceedings.

This radical "solution" to the problems of our civilization dialogically responds to other voices in contemporary American literature: in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) Thomas Pynchon had already described our civilization, in strongly grotesque terms, as a huge paranoid mechanism, induced by an obsessive pressure to produce syntagmatic meaning. But the paranoid anthropological inner spring of history could as well be put to use, in Pynchon's view, as an *operational paranoia*. Complementary to the "meaning mania" or need, is to Pynchon the psychic pulsion to counteract gravity, the earth we are tied to, by pointing to the sky, as the missiles alluded to in the title of the book.

Vonnegut ironically resumes Pynchon's image in the courtship dance of the cormorants on the Galápagos Islands, in which the birds stretch their necks «sky-pointing opposite the pull of gravity» — a practice less destructive than missiles — and he reverses Pynchon's image of a paranoid, or obsessively syntagmatic civilization, to a schizophrenic or asyntagmatic one. He is in fact convinced of the impossibility of any control beyond limited local areas, case dominating events, its disruptions enormously increased by an inconsiderate use of nature.

The quality of Vonnegut's grotesque picture reflects this polemic reversal of outlook. Pynchon chases after the grotesque in the dealings of the huge international economic or industrial cartels, at variance with official national policies as with the history taught in schools, or the official siding of the fighting armies. These can be superseded by the real system of financial allies and enemies at work, as during the second world war described in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In addition, Pynchon explores the scientific research and Pavlovian brain experiments, connected with the interests of the cartels, his scientists playing the swindlers tricking the people they are experimenting on, without

their knowing. He also insists on a grotesque link between perverted sexual instincts and the use of high-tech weapons.

Vonnegut, on the contrary, finds the grotesque in the "fictional weakness" of international finance, where rather than cartels there are sudden changes in people's minds, in the psychology of their conventional evaluation of currencies, which can produce a ruinous world financial crisis. He does not consider induced experimental mental alterations or derangements, but "spontaneous" self-directed mental derangements of man's "big brain". Hence Roy Hepburn's stubborn fantasy concerning his involvement in an American atomic experiment, which could "justify" his brain tumor, or Captain von Kleist's incapacity and racial prejudices, as well as senseless killings when the Ecuadorian people starts rioting. On the other hand, this is paralleled by the no less grotesque behaviour of foreign guests at the Guayaquil hotel, who are shown scheming, wasting precious food, still expecting to start their impossible cruise while a starving crowd is rebelling in the streets.

The swindling taking place in *Galápagos*, on the other hand, is connected not with science but with a personal systematic pursuit of money: James Wait goes around courting and marrying unattached well-off women to rob them of their money and valuables, vanishing soon after, a prime example of the multifarious social uses of the human "big brains" Vonnegut insists on. But about the sexual anthropological background of wars and weapons, Vonnegut shares the same sense of the grotesque Pynchon shows in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Jonathan Swift's attack on history, science and the Yahoo still forms the basic model for Vonnegut's novel, though extended in a more radical way. In *Galápagos* sociality is built on cheating, swindling, destruction in public upheavals or wars, just as private proceedings lead to depressive attempts at suicide, as in the case of even the only positive and active character in the novel, Mary Hepburn. Science gets out of control in Vonnegut's fiction, Yahoo aggressiveness and irrationality grow pervasive: but there is no representative of Swift's noble horse. His function has in fact been assimilated by what has paradoxically become the "Yahoo's big brain". Reason appears only as a scheming faculty deviated by wrong ends: what is here called a big brain is therefore destined to extinction,

as it stands for Swift's Yahoo, and its irrationality enormously more dangerous.

This overlapping between the Yahoo and reason, or Swift's horses, consents Vonnegut to transfer Swift's attack on history to the human species and its evolution, turning it into devolution. But how has this assimilation of opposites been brought about? What has produced this new form of the grotesque?

The dominant code of romantic culture appears as the reverse of the Enlightenment code, in the sense that, according to Lotman, it is based on the combination of both the symbolic and the syntagmatic principles, the negation of which was expressed by the previous code. As evident in Hegel, instead of rejecting history, the romantic code extols history as the making of a collective Self, ensuring a syntagmatic link between past, present and future. At the same time each event receives a symbolic meaning from the developing program of history.

The return of the symbolic order produces a reassessment of the unconscious, encouraging the disavowal of individual reason, which was so important and liberating to the Enlightenment code, but is now seen from a negative viewpoint, as a rationalist limit.

At the same time, paradoxically, the syntagmatic quality of the romantic code assigns ample space to collective reason, taking the form of science, positivism, industrial organization, progress, or the Marxist social revolution, as a new way to achieve Utopia. More's and Bacon's old syntagmatic dreams, the former even vaguely pre-Marxist and the latter scientifically premonitory, can now be resumed: a direct line links Bacon's imaginary plans of genetic experiments to contemporary genetic experiments.

Two different concepts of reason are here implied: one individual, the other collective, one negative, the other positive, one opposed to the unconscious and its symbolic activity, the other a means of reaching utopia through constant progress. While these two reasons are distinguished in the romantic code, their intrinsically paradoxical juxtaposition induces conflict or ambiguity as soon as the romantic code interacts with the previous Enlightenment code, still operating. The positivity and negativity of the two reasons — exchanged in the two codes — may produce different combinations, including a total

dismissal of both reasons. As a few examples from the period between Swift and Vonnegut can show, contrasts can be striking.

To Swift, collective reason as embodied in the Royal Academy of Science is contemptible, while he deems positive the rural horse's individual rationality, proof of passion and the unconscious. But Shelley (like Goethe) is attracted by the scientific collective achievement of humanity as well as by the anarchist's force of imagination and inner impulses, both nourishing the utopia of his *Prometheus Unbound*. Hawthorne and Melville, instead, question science and search the individual's "heart": this is a source of utopia for the former (in *The Scarlet Letter*), but of a final radical skepticism for the latter (as in *Pierre*). Jack London's Martin Eden is attracted, on the one hand, by the irrational drive of Swinburne's poetry and of his own emotions, and on the other by science, positivism and collective social action, but ends in disappointment and suicide. As to Vonnegut, the romantic negative shadow cast on reason bears in him its most radical fruit. He fails to distinguish what both Swift and romantic philosophy, or their respective dominant codes, distinguished, though in a very different way and with an intrinsic paradox.

Fusing the romantic rebellion of the unconscious and the symbolic with the Swiftian negative outlook at scientific and technological advancement, Vonnegut feels entitled to reject man's big brain and the evolution of his species. Vonnegut's *Galápagos* may be read as both a huge joke on Darwin's theory and a revised postromantic version of Swift's Houyhnhnmland, where the horse's superior (superhuman) noble reason gives way to the (subhuman) instinct of an amphibious animal. Debasement has substituted the heuristic project, bringing about the dismissal of all theoretical *récits*, of utopia and civilization, in one involutory grotesque stroke.

The paradox we have seen affecting the two dominant codes of Enlightenment and Romanticism, can actually be traced in Lotman's two other dominant codes as well, the medieval and the Renaissance, each based on one of the two semiotic radicals "rejected" by Enlightenment and combined by Romanticism.

The medieval code, as pointed out by Lotman, paradoxically fails to acknowledge concrete, physical reality, in favour of a guaranteed stability of symbolism. The Renaissance code, focusing on what the medieval code had missed — concrete social reality — introduces a

kind of operational reality — reality as it seems or is thought to be — including the illusionistic but effective practices of rhetoric, of *trompe l'oeil* figurations, or of the prince's deceptive politics described by Machiavelli. The sense of a concrete definite "actual reality" is finally lost, as the code misses what it had started to reacquire.

The emergence of paradox — not only in the case of Enlightenment as described by Lotman, but in all four basic codes of Lotman's model of culture, and the failure to-day to ensure the stabilized dominance of one code, as to justify or legitimate it, seem to correspond to, or offer an "explanation" for, the postmodern outlook. Postmodernism could actually be defined as the result of the consciousness of this paradox and of this failure of dominance, allowing for a return of the past and the end of the idea of progress. With some adaptations and extentions, Lotman's model of culture seems to offer a way to explore the workings of both the illusory certainties of the past and the contemporary "necessity" of paradoxicalness. The explanation of postmodernism made possible by Lotman's thought\* could well integrate, from a semiotic point of view, the philosophical definition of postmodernism, as discussed in both Umberto Eco's "pensiero debole", or "weak thought", and by Gianni Vattimo, in whose terms postmodernism is centered on the end of Hegel's *Überwindung*, substituted by Heidegger's *Verwindung*. It might be relevant to note that the grotesque pervading postmodern literature (of which Vonnegut is part) coincides with the emergence in philosophy of the very image that gave origin to the term grotesque, derived as we have seen, from the random association of images in Nero's *Domus Aurea*. To describe postmodernism, in fact, Vattimo quotes, as a starting point for his own post-Heidegger definition of postmodernism, Nietzsche's image of civilization as a junkyard, a heap of bric brac materials and left-overs, in his 1874 essay *Vom Nutzen und*

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\* Lotman's model of culture is contained in a number of fragmentary essays, one of which stands central (see note 1). This is integrated with many specifications expressed throughout his work, in the "semiosphere essays", and in particular in some of the essays contained in *The Universe of Mind, a Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Indiana University Press 1990), with an "Introduction" by Umberto Eco. A general outline of the theory and a study of implications and possible developments are still to come.

*Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (on the “usefulness and damage” of history for life) (Vattimo 1985: 172).

While Swift explores the paradoxical nature of the dominant code of his age and of Kant’s reason, Vonnegut belongs to the age of the postmodern ending of code dominance. A semiotic direct line connects him to Swift, as he recurs to the desemiotization of history, which is typical of the Enlightenment code but is also active, as Lotman points out, in all periods of transition from one dominant code to another (Lotman 1973: 54): in the passage from medieval to Renaissance culture, then from Renaissance to the Enlightenment proper, and to-day, we may add, as a way out of Romanticism.

A connection between the grotesque and moments of deep change or loss of meaning — or desemiotization — is indeed underlined by Wolfgang Kayser in the concluding chapter of his long history of the grotesque from the Renaissance to our century. For Kayser the grotesque «presupposes that the categories which we apply to our world view become inapplicable» (Kayser 1966: 185): «a play with the absurd», the grotesque appears «in the twilight of the transitional moments» and offers a «unity of perspective [...] in an impassioned view of life on earth as an empty meaningless puppet play or a caricatural marionette theatre» (ibid. 186–187).

The “empirical conclusion” Kayser comes to through his long analysis verifies and confirms what Lotman’s codes consent to explicate. From this point of view the grotesque seems indeed to qualify as an elect instrument for both the code of desemiotization (or Lotman’s Enlightenment code) shared by Swift and Vonnegut, and the deeper postmodern or “weak thought” consciousness of the paradoxical, implying the end of dominance. Extending Lotman’s theory of culture, the paradoxical can indeed appear, as we have seen, intrinsic to any specific code: or rather to any absolute code dominance. The necessity of desemiotization as of the end of code dominance appears in this view as inherent to the development of semiosis as such.

A theoretical explanation is now also offered for Kayser’s observation that «the art of our own day shows a greater affinity to the grotesque than that of any other epoch» (ibid. 11). At the same time this affinity seems to parallel the evolution of what Adorno in his *Aesthetics* (Adorno 1970) considers as the only traditional aesthetic category surviving in contemporary art, though with an almost



reversed meaning, as in Beckett's theatre: the sublime. But the deep contiguity — through Freud's *Unheimlich* — of the sublime and the grotesque would require a different further exploration.

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## On Realistic and Grotesque Discourse: E. A. Poe, J. C. Oates, Fr. Tuglas

TIINA AUNIN

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There are a number of different ways of defining the grotesque, but most fail to provide us with a trustworthy degree of conceptual rigor. If, for example we try to extract the essence of the grotesque by means of a comparative analysis of various works of grotesque literature, then we run the risk that our definition will be biased by the peculiarities of the works in question.

The procedure adopted in this essay does not avoid comparison. Through certain images and language used by several authors — E. A. Poe, J. C. Oates and Fr. Tuglas — it involves defining the grotesque as a component of literary discourse. This approach also defines some of the concepts of the grotesque in world aesthetics and formulates a few ideas which support some of these concepts.

What is the grotesque? One of the characteristic features of the grotesque is its imagery which distorts proportion: “characters and objects take on a quality not found in real life when presented in a grotesque manner”. (Cuddon 1991: 393). According to J. A. Cuddon, grotesque decoration in ancient grottoes always combines plant, animal and human motifs. My point is to show that in all three tales treated in this article — Poe’s “The Black Cat”, Oates’ “The White Cat” and Tuglas’ “Popi and Huhuu” — the animal figures (two cats, a dog and a monkey) are central to the grotesque. Suggestive of liminal areas of metamorphosis, an animal becomes an example of communication with something **beyond** our limited world. The animal for sacrifice proves very enduring, it escapes physical collapse, repre-

senting the ever-transcending spirit, the victory of soul over body. "Poe's black cat is suggestive of a continuity which the archaic mind understands as the essence of being", says N. Ravvin. (Ravvin 1992: 11)

Likewise, Tuglas' dog and monkey both exhibit oxymoronic sides of their master, whereas on the metaphysical level, they represent the everlasting essence of human nature at large. The wild, evil monkey gets the upper hand of the dog and turns into a master. All of a sudden, it is imitating the master's ways, "coughing, muttering, holding his hand to his forehead" (Tuglas 1930: 114), and the dog wonders "who was he? A second master, perhaps? Could he be a malicious, sly and evil master who had to be always kept in confinement?" (Tuglas 1933: 115). The sinister laughter and the clattering of bones comes as an answer, and the dog comes to a fearful insight: his kind master would never return, for "he might easily have been kind, but he did not wish to be". (Tuglas 1933: 123)

A fairy-tale beginning of Oates' story suggests a parody. As if to mock the modern interpretations of Poe, Oates characterizes her main character, Mr. Muir, as being "of old American stock [...] susceptible to none of the fashionable tugs and sways of "identity"" (Oates 1993: 72) But as soon as the author's attention shifts from the man to the white cat we are not convinced of the integrity of Mr. Muir any more. Although called Miranda, the cat evokes the question about its sex which "lodged deep in him (Mr. Muir — T. A.) as if it were a riddle" (Oates 1993: 75). The question: "is it a male or a female" proves to be crucial to the plot, and explains a number of grotesque transgressions imposed on the cat. The ambiguity of Mr. Muir's own sex role has also been emphasized by his contradictory feelings towards his wife's lovers of both sexes, as well as by his numerous attempts to murder the cat "... just to redress the balance" (Oates 1993: 83). Like Poe's creature, the white cat embodies the continuity of human desires and the ambiguity of their essence: "he had killed the hateful creature — *and she had not died*" (Oates' italics — T. A.) (Oates 1993: 86). As a consequence of his troubled mind, Oates' character "had forgotten the names for many things", and comes to an insight: "Indeed, not knowing *names* (Oates' italics — T. A.) relaxes one's desire for the *things* (Oates' italics — T. A.) that, ghostlike, forever unattainable,

dwell behind them. And of course his blindness had much to do with this — for which he was grateful! Quite grateful!” (Oates 1993: 94)

In his 1992 essay entitled “An Irruption of the Archaic: Poe and the Grotesque”, Norman Ravvin suggests, that “it is through the grotesque that the phenomena of archaic belief have come down to us most fully” (Ravvin 1992: 2). Further on, he stresses the *tension* (my italics — T. A.) between these phenomena as the universal guiding force of the grotesque. In my article I will argue that the grotesque imagery of the three stories (under discussion) suggests rather a mode through which the opposing forces **contend**. This mode is a neutral territory of a kind with its unifying principles, its manifestation of a secret power, its urge for intergrity. The need to overcome the limits of one’s own identity (through the perverse or through transgression) in order to reach the sacred — this constitutes the unifying principle of the grotesque in Poe, Oates and Tuglas. As a result of their grotesque imagery a transcendent vision of the true state of things comes forth.

The tendency towards a reiteration of the animal sacrifice motif deserves special comment here, since such “archetypal scenarios are reworked, in an effort [...] to invoke states of renewal and return to a sacred realm of contact with the divine” (Ravvin 1992: 5). As was mentioned above, the three stories are suggestive of a mystical disintegration of the self into something greater. What they suggest is “the possibility of blissful assimilation in a transcendent commonality” (Ravvin 1992: 12). The victims die (disappear, suffer), the readers share in what their death (disappearance, suffering) reveals — the continuity of human existence: “He could feel, to a degree, her (Alissa’s or Miranda’s? — T. A.) mysterious *livingness* (Oates’ italics) against his — for which he was infinitely grateful”. (Oates 1993: 96) “Popi could not tell where the boundaries of his life ended and where those of the dream began. He could no longer separate the two extremes of his existence” (Tuglas 1930: 121). “The reality becomes more fantastic for the dog than a dream, a dream becomes more terrible than reality”. (Tuglas 1930: 125). Being convinced that “... perverseness is [...] one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man”, Poe’s narrator comes to a conclusion that committing a deadly sin would place his immortal soul “even **beyond** the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God” (Poe 1984: 225).

In addition to brutal physical punishment: murder, torture, and breakdown, it is the House of the tales which proves a rich source of the grotesque. In all three stories analysed here, the House constitutes a kind of cosmogonic realm. Like the enduring animals, with its ominous endurance, it is an object of sacred power. The power of the House moves individual figures toward transgression and revelation. Why do Popi and Huhuu stay on in the ownerless house? The window is broken, they are free to go. What are they waiting for? One is likely to find the same grotesque mode in the theatre of the absurd. At this point, the language Tuglas uses reminds me slightly of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The passages describing the House also reveal a point of similarity to that which Poe uses in "The Black Cat". Both authors skilfully entwine the horrific and the homespun, the fantastic and the realistic: "Everything seemed to be real, there was something extraordinarily lifelike about the room and its objects. However, many of the things in this room were deceiving. As a matter of fact it contained mostly visions, dreams and fancies". (Tuglas 1930: 112) In Poe's tale everything connected with the House suggests reality, too. But its endurance is deceiving: "... this is a very well-constructed house, [...] I may say an excellently well-constructed house. These walls [...] are solidly put together"; and here [...] upon that very portion of the brickwork [behind which] stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom." (Poe 1984: 230) Here we encounter the grotesque imagination of Poe which, like the horrifying graphics of Goya, is a joyful subjugation of horror. Arising from an aesthetic treatment of reality, it becomes comically deformed reality in its uneven exaggeration.

In conclusion, the ambivalent presence of meaning within the ostensibly meaningless homespun form does constitute real threat. Not for a moment does the reader forget that something unusual, disquieting and incomprehensible is occurring. This threat represents a breakdown of human order and drives both the character and the reader toward a kind of grotesque revelation which has a strong, disruptive and purgative effect. One cannot but agree with Ravvin; in his opinion, the most important thing for a critic to examine is what lies behind the attraction to the grotesque mode, i.e. "its presentation of metamorphosis and uncanny otherness" (Ravvin 1992: 4). Finally, the association of sharply contrasting qualities by the three masters of the

grotesque, their constant shift of the boundary between foul and sacred, evil and good, dirty and clean, realistic and fantastic — all these contrasts elicit a combination of disgust and awe, opening the door to what lies beyond the limits usually observed — to a site of transcendent value.

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# Satire on Religion: the Grotesque Mixture of Sacred and Profane

REIJO VIRTANEN

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## 1. The Grotesque as Profanation

Even in our daily life, outside the theory of literature, we often use the word “grotesque”. In this context, it may vaguely mean “ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant, freakish or unnatural; in short, aberrations from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion” (see Cuddon 1987: 295–296). But such dim definitions do not carry us very far if we want to use exact language when discussing literature.

The grotesque — what is it, really?

The two most famous and influential studies about the grotesque are Wolfgang Kayser’s *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) and Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin explicates his ideas also in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1963).

What the Renaissance scholars first called grotesque, were pictures or paintings that confused the natural conception of the world and broke the normal conception of the species by mixing human and animal features, or carnal and vegetal organisms, together. (Kayser 1981: 21; Bakhtin 1984b: 32) The strange images of the first grotesque forms were of pagan origin (Roman), and immediately incompatible with the orthodox Christian conceptions of the world, too. So, the grotesque deviated — and still deviates — from physical laws or religious norms.

In a chapter of his book, “Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque”, Kayser gives us three definitions that are linked together.

First, "the grotesque is the estranged world". It is our world that is altered into a grotesque scene or tableau, and we feel terrified, because we could not live in such a changed and unreliable world (Kayser 1981: 184). As Bakhtin says, this definition can be applied to some manifestations of a modernist form of the grotesque: Jarry, the surrealists, etc. (Bakhtin 1984b: 48). But it suits very well with modern satire, too. For example, the satire on religion, which confuses or terrifies our minds by breaking our conventional conceptions of religious people, or their rites or beliefs. Anyway, the gloomy effect that is produced is always mixed with amusement or irony.

Second, "the grotesque is a play with the absurd", Kayser says (1981: 187). He sees that a grotesque world is governed by an impersonal power called It (Id), which turns people into marionettes or makes them mad. But as Bakhtin corrects (1984b: 49), the grotesque also liberates man from "the forms of inhuman necessity", by which he means all the authorities that govern people's lives. The degree of liberation varies.

Kayser seems to refer in his third definition to the liberating effect himself by insisting that the grotesque is an "attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world" (Kayser 1981: 188). What he means is that a "truly artistic" grotesque text effects a secret liberation from the ominous forces that estrange and terrorize the world. It is a good description, if we interpret it metaphorically: that in satires the "demons" or "ominous" powers are not always spiritual beings, but that more often it is the animal nature or some socio-economical force that gets hold of people and dehumanizes them.

With these applications, it is easy to join in Bakhtin's thought that Kayser's theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding the grotesque of the twentieth century. And it may clarify "certain aspects of the Romantic grotesque. But it cannot be extended to the other periods of this imagery's development" (Bakhtin 1984b: 51). But what about Bakhtin's own theory? He has not formulated a general theory on the grotesque, either. On the contrary, he emphasizes that he is only discussing the grotesque realism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His ideas about the grotesque are linked with his more general ideas about carnival and the carnivalization of literature.

Carnival is a syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort. Literature that has been influenced — directly or indirectly — by one or another



variant of carnivalistic folklore Bakhtin calls carnivalized literature (1984a: 107). The grotesque laughter is the core of carnivalism. According to Bakhtin the essential principle of this grotesque form is degradation, "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Bakhtin 1984b: 19–20; c.f. Bakhtin 1984a: 122–128). What Bakhtin adds to Kayser's theory is to emphasize the role of laughter, not terror. But more interestingly, he brings up the ideological values implied in cultural formations, and their hierarchical relationships. In this context, degradation means, from the high point of view, 'to lower in dignity or estimation', but from the low point of view, 'to equalize'.

When we combine both Kayser's and Bakhtin's views with the idea that can be abstracted from the original context, we arrive at a new, wider definition of the grotesque. That is, we may understand that the term grotesque refers to a discourse or a story structure (characters, settings, actions, happenings) in which the borderlines separating the different divisions of our Greco-Christian physical-theological conception of the world are violently disturbed or exceeded. Mixing of human characteristics with those of plants, animals or spiritual beings, the animated with the inanimate, the living with the dead characterizes the grotesque. It follows that, it is also grotesque to mix sacred with profane. Profanation is a kind of degradation (see also Bakhtin 1984a: 123). In semio-linguistic terms we might also speak of crossing the borders of analogous contradictory semantic fields: high — low; spiritual — corporeal; ideal — real; abstract — concrete; sacred — profane. (See also Bakhtin 1984b: 19–20)

In every religion, according to Émile Durkheim's theory (1915), the sacred and profane are always the two opposed classes into which all real and ideal things are divided. Furthermore, this division of the world is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends "express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things" (Durkheim 1976: 37).

The encyclopedical meaning of sacred is 'devoted or dedicated to God', or 'separated for God' (see Saarisalo 1965: 894). The sacred is something that has (or rather is believed to have) its sanctity directly from God or is connected with him. In contrast, profane is something

irreligious, unconsecrated, unholy or secular. In some contexts, it is characterized by irreverence or contempt for God, or sacred principles or things. Originally, *profanus* meant 'outside the temple' in Latin.

Not only personal beings such as gods or spirits are sacred, but some objects, too. A rite is sacred; there are sacred words, expressions and formulae that only consecrated persons can pronounce, and gestures and movements that can be performed only by the chosen ones. Of course, human beings and their institutions also can obtain a sacred position through certain rites: religions, churches and their staff.

A purely hierarchical distinction between sacred and profane, for example highness versus lowness, is too general and imprecise to suffice when characterizing their mutual relationship. But what is sufficient is their absolute heterogeneity:

[...] the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common. The forces which play in one are not simply those which are met with in the other, but a little stronger; they are of a different sort. (Durkheim 1976: 38–39)

It is not impossible to cross the borderline between sacred and profane, and pass from one world into the other. But the duality of the opposing spheres is manifested in the manner in which the passage is effected — it implies transformation.

## 2. Grotesque Priests and Morticians

Satire is traditionally "viewed simply as derisive reduction and rejection" (Griffin 1994: 4), that is, as negative. But Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque grotesque has widened the concept. Also ambivalent, i.e. negative-positive, satires are possible (c.f. *ibid.*: 1–5; Palmeri 1990: 1–18). The negative satires only destruct. The ambivalent satires also bring forth something new and better: they kill and sow simultaneously (c.f. Bakhtin 1984b: 62–63).

There is ambivalence in Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* (1927). The author mixes sacred and profane features in the portrait of a modern priest. The grotesque degradation that transfers the spiritual to the material, bodily lower stratum is very well manifested in this satire. Lewis's satire can be divided into several parts where Elmer Gantry's Christian ideology and religious vocation are tested (about the structure of the satire, see Bakhtin 1984a: 114–115). In the test situations, Elmer's character is degraded from religious idealism to greed and sexuality. As a young man, Elmer is a student in a Baptist college. The first chapter presents him as a heavy drinker, a charmer of women and always eager for a fight. He has a profane lifestyle, which is incongruous with the turn of his life to a sacred career. Throughout his life, Elmer is oscillating in a state of grotesque metamorphosis, between the sacred and the profane.

After his religious awakening, which is more an act for gaining social influence than a real emotional experience, he is willing to become a priest. Ironically, he gets his most enthusiastic listeners by borrowing thoughts and phrases from Robert G. Ingersoll, a famous American freethinker. Elmer preaches for the audience in the Y.M.C.A. auditorium:

[---] — what I want to talk about is how if a fellow looks down deep into things and is really square with God, and lets God fill his heart with higher aspirations, he sees that — he sees that Love is the one thing that can really sure-enough lighten all of life's dark clouds. (EG 59)

This sermon combines sacred with profane ideas and contains a leitmotif that will occur again and again throughout the book. In a grotesque and ironic way it refers to the fact that love plays a very important role in Elmer's sacred career — not Christian, but pure carnal love.

While 25-year-old Elmer is finishing his studies in the Mizpah Theological Seminary of the Northern Baptists, the dean tells him about an employment opportunity as a preacher in a country church at Schoenheim. Elmer takes the job. In the new parish, he becomes fascinated with deacon Bains's daughter, Lulu. Very soon he also begins to seduce Lulu. In a grotesque situation, when Elmer is speaking about spiritual matters, he is thinking only about sex. "God,

I've got to have her!" becomes an obsessive idea for Elmer (EG 107). This is only the first occasion where Elmer's eccentricities, the latent sides of his mind, are carnivalistically revealed (c.f. Bakhtin 1984a: 123). After gaining his purpose, Elmer's fascination with the girl turns into derision: "he didn't want to marry this brainless little fluffy chick" (EG 114). Unfortunately, Lulu becomes pregnant. Elmer escapes the "shotgun weddings" by means of a dirty intrigue: he arranges and exposes a situation where Lulu is found in the arms of a rival suitor.

Elmer is fired from Mizpah. He starts to work as a travelling salesman for the Pequot Farm Implement Company. The next test in his sacredness begins when he is charmed by the performance of female evangelist Sharon Falconer (a fake name for Katie Jonas) and gets acquainted with her. Elmer is hired to pretend to be a convert in her revival meetings. The picture of modern revivalism that Lewis's satire represents is profanating. In the text, religious action is identified with cold, fraudulent business. The sacred conventions, which Sharon and Elmer arrange, are massive theatrical and erotic shows open to the public. Elmer's role in the shows is "Increasing Sales with God and the Gideons" (EG 170).

Gaining profit is a new profane feature in Elmer's career as a priest. But he has not forgotten his sexual ambitions: he will find his way into Sharon's bed. For Sharon and Elmer making love is a pseudoreligious ritual where sacred symbols of Christianity and other cults mix with profane myths of erotic pagan goddesses, such as Venus, Frigga, Ishtar and Isis. The highest sexual excitement is aroused in them by profanating the message of the biblical Song of Solomon from a spiritual to corporeal level. This sacred text has already been mentioned as Elmer's favourite in the first chapters of the satire.

After Sharon's accidental death, the Reverend Elmer Gantry joins Mrs Riddle's syncretist sect called New Thought, which is a combination of protestant ideas of love and prosperity and oriental mysticism. As such it is a carnivalistic image, a decrowning double (about the concept, see Bakhtin 1984a: 127) for the Christian sects satirized in the book.

The next step in his career as a priest is to replace Baptism with Methodism. At the age of thirty-two, he seduces and marries an

educated woman, Cleo Benham, who is also a fervent church-worker. The matrimony does not repress the sacred man's lust for other, younger women.

The rest of the satire narrates the story about Elmer climbing up the ladders of his society. He moves to Zenith, a big city, which we already know of Lewis's satire on middle-class businessmen, *Babbitt* (1922). His final mission is to purify the neighbourhood, the nation, and even the whole world from dirty pictures and books, from liquor and unorthodox ideas. The profanating aspect of this sacred task is that he uses it as a cover for actions for his own benefit. The least of which are the violent situations where he eagerly beats evildoers and criminals with his own hands.

With respect to the main character, Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* is very negative. The narration forces the reader to condemn the hypocritical attitude of the priest and laugh with derision at his incongruous behaviour. As a whole, this satire raises the question, whether religious and economical ideas are congruous. The hierarchical structure of a Christian sect or parish and the taboo like preciousness of their sacred matters give an egoistic confidence man an opportunity to attack religious principles and break the religion from inside. But we must also notice that Lewis is telling us secondary stories about other kinds of people. For example, Jim Lefferts, a rationalist free thinker is juxtaposed with Elmer's rotten mind in the plot and also in Socratician synchronicity (about this concept, see Bakhtin 1984a: 110). The portrait of Frank Shallard, a more ideal Christian, makes the book ambivalent in regard to the modern Christianity in general.

Another satire on American neo-religions is Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948), a British book. It is a story of an Englishman in Hollywood, a poet called Dennis Barlow. He has moved to California to write, but instead of such an artistic career, he has to earn his living by working at a funeral parlour for animals, the Happier Hunting Ground. Dennis must arrange a burial service for a relative, who has committed suicide. Dennis falls in love with a lady colleague, who works at Whispering Glades, a funeral parlour and cemetery for humans. In this satire, the sacredness of Christian burial rites are profanated in various ways. Waugh creates carnivalistic *mésalliances*, i.e. grotesque mixtures of sacred and profane values, thoughts, phenomena, and things (c.f. Bakhtin 1984a: 123).

In the first chapter of the satire, Barlow's employer's pompous schedules for burying dead animals are introduced. The same choices of getting rid of the "loved one's" body are available for animals as for humans: "Were you thinking of interment or incineration?' [---] 'Buried or burned?'" (LO 19). The dead dog will have an urn of its own, and a niche in the parlour's columbarium. A pastor will lead the ceremony to bless the deceased's final journey. A white dove, symbolizing the deceased's soul, will be liberated over the crematorium.

The funeral parlour for animals is a decrowning double for the humans' parlour, and it is even more pompous and grotesque. The staff behaves reverently towards the dead pets under the eyes of their owners. Later, the bodies are treated as garbage. This plot situation raises ironic expectations concerning the staff's behaviour in the parlour for human beings. The expectations will be fulfilled. In the test situations of the satire, the real characteristics of this death business are revealed. Everything has been planned to contribute to the trade. The environment at Whispering Glades is a grotesque mixture of Christian holiness and multicultural kitsch: replicas of English country manors and famous churches, bronze and marble statues representing allegorical and erotic themes, mythical characters such as Andromeda or infantile figures like Mickey Mouse. The tombs in Whispering Glades have been classified according to different character types, resulting in places called "Pilgrims' Rest", "Lovers' Nest" and "Poets' Corner".

The operations in the burying business of Whispering Glades are very macabre. The main idea is to make the loved ones' corpses to look alive. The magic of cosmetology and manicure is used to make the dead look better than they ever did in their lifetime. The finishing touches are put on the loved ones' grim faces by making them smile by positing a reshaped visiting card behind their lips. This grotesque masquerade, a sacrilegious treatment of deceased people, is narrated ironically with a most positive, enthusiastic tone.

The characters belonging to the staff of Whispering Glades are grotesque, and such are their names, too. The Senior Mortician is Mr Joyboy, whose name refers to his playful and artistic attitude in using real corpses as a material for his human sculptural works. His favourite assistant is Miss Aimée Thanatogenos, whose name means 'Loved Death-Birth' and refers to her task of make-up for the dead to look

alive. The head ecclesiastic of Whispering Glades is Dr Kenworthy. He is a mysterious priest, about whom we shall know almost nothing, except that he is the founder of this new syncretic religion called the Dream, which specializes in luxurious but excessive worship of the dead. Like many prophets or other sacred men, he has received the religious task from God himself:

I heard a voice say: 'Do this.'  
 And behold I awoke and in the Light and Promise of my  
 DREAM I made WHISPERING GLADES.  
 ENTER STRAIGHT and BE HAPPY. (LO 34)

In this declaration of a neo-Christian sect Dr Kenworthy tells that in Whispering Glades the loved ones are "very near, in Beauty and Happiness such as the earth cannot give". This text is certainly nonsense in its content, but formally it is a profanative parody on biblical styles: the concepts 'beauty' and 'happiness' must be understood not as metaphors for religious peace of mind but as referring concretely to the corporeal resurrection of loved ones' made-up bodies.

The parlour is not only for sectarians but an ecumenic one as well: it claims to be for all Christians. But the racist tendencies behind its democratic facade are revealed: in reality it is only for white people.

There is no ambivalence in the grotesquery of Waugh's satire. The book can be considered as a totally negative criticism of modern Christian societies. It is an allegory for an insensitive and inhuman world. One where money has taken the highest cultural position away from human beings: striving for wealth has been substituted for the idealism of honouring human value. The macabre idea of the book is that loved ones are better dead than alive, because then even their corpses can be exploited as commodities and as manifestations of one's riches. It is just this idea that the name of the book, *The Loved One*, ironically refers to.

### 3. Grotesque Parodies of Sacred Texts

Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) is a story about a male journalist, to whom the title of the book ironically refers to. His gives literary aid and comfort to people who have been betrayed by their

lives. Miss Lonelyhearts, who never acquires a real name, is a postmodern priest on the threshold of the later information society with its radio, television or video preachers. The grotesque life stories in the letters of the unfortunate tell us about loneliness, ugliness, sickness, violence, and rape. In answer to the letters, Miss Lonelyhearts tells about rules of a good life, for example, how to find values of life from the arts, language studies or Christian faith. He himself feels anguished and fatigued with his work. He is searching for a new meaning for his life. The book must be seen as a parody, profanating stories of religious conversion and other related experiences. In parody there is conflict "between the ideological discourse of a source text and its functioning in the new context in which it is placed" (Schwartz 1990: 5). So, in parodies of sacred texts, the story elements or features of discourse can be replaced by profane ones.

West's book ought to be considered as a parody, even if we were unaware of its structure as revealed by the author himself. In his notes on the book, West tells us that Miss Lonelyhearts' "case is classical and is built on all the cases in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Starbuck's *Psychology of Religion*. The psychology is theirs not mine. The imagery is mine" (West 1975, 166). He describes the characterization of Miss Lonelyhearts as "the portrait of a priest of our time who has a religious experience". Of course, that remark is ironic: if the book is a portrait, it is a distorting and ridiculing one. The sacredness that originates from the Jamesian discourse is profanated by the actions of the neurotic newspaperman.

In the beginning of the story, we find Miss Lonelyhearts burned out by his mission as a redeemer. He is sitting at the office of The New York Post-Dispatch reading the sad letters his readers have sent. He is trying to write answers to them. As a boy, Miss Lonelyhearts had been deeply moved by shouting the name of Christ. Now he is trying to get back on the same spiritual level of religious experience.

West has given us keywords for the interpretation of the text (or some chapters), for example maladjustment for the first chapter, deadness and disorder for the fourth and self-torture for the sixth chapter. The term "maladjustment" refers to Miss Lonelyhearts' paradoxical life situation. He would like to be able to give real advice and comfort to the unhappy people, but it is impossible because the staff of the newspaper, especially Shrike, the editor-in-chief, considers his job to



be a pure joke. He finds his job evil, and as James puts it, evilness means maladjustment, "a distorted relationship between a man and his environment" (James 1981, 106). The natural solution James gives to the dilemma of maladjustment is "to change either oneself or the environment". Miss Lonelyhearts changes both. He gives up using words as consolation and begins to comfort his readers sexually. He also changes the place of his work from a writer's desk to women's bedrooms. As compared with *Elmer Gantry*, this is also grotesque eccentricity in the Bakhtinian sense (see 1984a: 123): the story leads the literary priest to find and give comfort not on a spiritual level but only on a bodily sexual level. Instead of acquiring religious ardour in his paper sermons, he is passively driven to taking care of his customers in the same way as prostitutes. Ironically, he does not become spiritually awakened until the very moment of his death, shot by the jealous husband of a customer. In the test situations of the satire, Miss Lonelyhearts's acts of charity are a profanative version of Christ's words "Love thy neighbour".

As a satire, *Miss Lonelyhearts* is dialogical; we, the readers, have to look at the life of the unhappy journalist from several contrasting ideological points of view, simultaneously. From the Christian point of view, i.e. the ideals of Miss Lonelyhearts himself, the object of the satiric attack is the spiritual weakness of human beings that always are disposed to desires of the flesh. From the oppositional point of view, represented by Shrike the anguish of Miss Lonelyhearts is due to his religious mentality. So, the real vices are his Christian thoughts and acts, although, he ironically disagrees with a man about Miss Lonelyhearts. "'I must differ with you, my good Goldsmith,' Shrike said. 'Don't call sick those who have faith. They are the well. It is you who are sick.'" (ML 259)

Miss Lonelyhearts' girlfriend, Betty, is a realist. From her point of view both of the previous are wrong. Betty's character represents "a healthy soul" in the Jamesian sense. (see James 1981, 65–66)

But what is the meaning of *Miss Lonelyhearts* as a whole? Does it carry an ideological message for or against some religious ideas and behaviour? It is not an ambivalent satire. Besides its parodic essence, the book is also a satire that criticizes the modern commercial religion, a grotesque mixture of sacred healing methods and the profane entertainment business. As a rather negative critical parody on Jame-

sian conversion stories, it tells us another story that does not end well. Unlike Elmer Gantry, whose aims in seducing religious girls are egoistic, Miss Lonelyhearts is a victim of religion business himself.

Upton Sinclair's *They Call Me Carpenter* (1922) is a grotesque parody of four famous sacred texts that are closely related to each other, the Gospels. What Sinclair's parody especially uses is the story schedule, characters and situations of the Gospels. Parodies of evangelic style appear only in Carpenter's or some other characters' speeches. The most important subtext for Sinclair's satire is the Gospel according to Matthew.

Carpenter, the principal character, is the parodic double of Jesus Christ in the Bakhtinian sense (1984a: 127). He reincarnates in Western City, a film industry center like Hollywood. In a profanative way, the parody substitutes ordinary labour unionists and socialist thinkers for Christ's sacred disciples and other friends. The most profanative parodic character is John Colver, a workingman, a poet and obviously a terrorist. In the Gospels, John the Baptist preached for the end of the world (Matthew 3: 1-12), but the communist Colver works actively for the destruction of capitalism.

The parodic parallels to the episodes of the public life of Christ are numerous. In the Gospel (Matthew 21: 1-10), the Saviour rides to Jerusalem where people welcome him by hailing in favour. Parodically, Carpenter arrives at the slum sitting on a horse carriage, which means that the text compares the poor people's area with the Holy City. In contrast, the Western City is the dwelling place of rich people, and is often compared with ancient Rome, a city of heathens. Christ drives peddlers and moneylenders out of the temple and calls them "thieves" (Matthew 21: 12-13) while Carpenter chases businessmen and bankers away (TCC 135-136).

In the miracle stories of the Gospels, (see Gabel & Wheeler 1990: 189) we can count stories of healing, exorcism and other manifestations of power like walking on water or multiplication of foodstuffs. The analogous episodes in *They Call Me Carpenter* represent the relationships between social classes. Carpenter heals a slum child who is run over by a rich young man. (TCC 67-69)

Stories of the passion in the Gospels deal with the episodes that range from the last supper to the crucifixion. (Gabel & Wheeler 1990: 189). Christ dines with his disciples. Carpenter eats his "last supper"

in the headquarters of the local socialists. During the supper, the disciples in the Gospel call Christ their "Lord". In the parody the diners call each other "comrades", "brothers" or "fellow-workers" (TCC 182). Furthermore the parody substitutes businessmen for the high priests that arrange the plot against Christ. As soldiers in the Gospel invest Christ with a scarlet gown and a crown of thorns, the mob of Western City pours red paint on Carpenter "so that every body would recognize him as the Red Prophet, they'd read in the papers of", and they call him "The Bolsheviki prophet" because of his friendship with the trade unionists and socialists.

In the Gospel, Christ is resurrected and appears to his disciples and prepares them to bring out the Christian message to the whole wide world (Matthew 28: 9-20). In contrast, the last act in *They Call Me Carpenter* profanates the sacred figure of the always forgiving and loving Saviour: Carpenter, who has entered the secular world to save people, returns to the stained glass window, shocked and offended by what the Christians of a modern capitalist society have done to him.

Satires often parody the most familiar of texts in order to "add to the initial impact and to reinforce the ironic contrast" (Hutcheon 1986: 58). In such cases, the target of the critical laugh is not the subtext itself but something in the represented world. For example, Sinclair's grotesque parody, the degrading mixture of sacred and profane, is not directed at the message of the Gospels or Christ's ethical teachings. It is satirizing modern Christian society by juxtaposing the original ethics of Jesus and the actions of claimed Christians. The book is an ambivalent satire that criticizes the social Darwinist tendency in modern Christian societies to seize the chance of making profits and to forget the poor and the hungry. This metamorphosis of Christianity, in which spirituality and ethics are fading away little by little, is often called secularization. It contains the idea that Christians have substituted egoism for universal love and charity, money for God.

#### 4. Profanation of Sacred Beliefs

In 1909, half a year before his death, Mark Twain released a short fantastic satire called *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*. A longer text, *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, was pub-

lished post mortem in 1952 by his estate. This satire gives us a grotesque vision of the image of heaven that dominated Christian thought in the late 19th century. Twain's satire is still delightful and fresh — the popular beliefs about heaven have not really changed within the last hundred years. Simultaneously, Captain Stormfield criticizes some aspects of the dominant ideology in his society.

Captain Ben Stormfield's journey to heaven begins, of course, at the moment of his death. His body is buried in the water, but his soul begins its flight into the depths of space. The captain travels through the cosmos about thirty years before he enters a gate of heaven. In the foreword, undersigned by the author himself, the captain is described ironically as "deeply religious, by nature and by training of his mother" but also realistically as "a fluent and desolating swearer by the training of his father and by necessities of his occupation" — a typical formal Christian. So, whether a dream or not, the captain's beliefs about heaven can be seen as corresponding to the general beliefs among Christians.

The prominent, modern view of heaven is anthropocentric, which means 'focusing on the human'. The contrasting view is called theocentric, 'focusing on God'. These two different views presuppose also different value systems. According to the anthropocentric view, social life, marriage, work, and even sexuality are eternal — they are "divinely instituted" (McDannell & Lang 1990: 356). In heaven, people will meet their loved ones, relatives, friends, and domestic animals. The idea of life in heaven is modelled on "an idealized life of leisure, service, and spiritual growth". At the end of the 19th century that model resembled very much the ideal bourgeois life on earth.

In satirizing the reactions of Captain Stormfield the text is also satirizing the common ideal model of heaven of an average Christian, and simultaneously his/her everyday thoughts about religious matters. Of course, in every culture, life after death and its setting is seen through the prism of one's own concepts, emotional belongings and ideological value systems.

Just as the (unconscious) supporters of the anthropocentric view, Stormfield, before entering the sacred place, is expecting to meet his kind there. So, he is shocked to notice that the other newcomers at that gate are skyblue, and every one of them has seven heads and only one leg. These strange creatures would be grotesque enough, but the most

peculiar revelations are still ahead. Stormfield finds out that heaven is a copy of the material cosmos, and there are denizens from all its quarters in there. Our solar system, not to mention our planet, is not widely known — but those who know it, have named it, degradingly, the Wart. To his amazement, Stormfield is also told that the worlds that Jesus Christ has saved “are like to the gates of heaven in number — none can count them” — our world is not the chosen one (CSH 26).

Twain’s text deliberately and profanatively mixes profane men into the ranks of holy men, and holy men from other religions into the ranks of Christian holy men. The most delightfully grotesque outline in this hierarchy is that it includes extraterrestrial beings such as the three “celebrated” poets, Saa, Bo and Soof, “from great planets in three different and very remote systems” (CSH 69)

This new vision of heaven, based logically on the scientific world view and knowledge about other galaxies, profanates the Christian idea of the special sacredness of human souls: our position in the cosmic hierarchy is not higher than that of any other creature.

Furthermore, Twain’s satire is criticizing the racist belief, that perhaps is unintentional but typical for people of European origin, that heaven is mainly inhabited by white people. When wandering about in the American corner of heaven, Stormfield notices that he hardly ever meets a white angel — almost everybody is copper-colored, and speaks some strange language. The mathematically logical answer is that “America was occupied a billion years and more, by injuns and Aztecs, and that sort of folks, before a white man ever set his foot in it” — so, the American heaven is also mainly occupied by people other than white people (CSH 75–76).

Like many other Menippean satires *Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven* reveals the undemocratic tendencies implied in some religious preachings of brotherhood and equality. But Twain makes his point in a totally different and original way. In Lucian’s *Menippus or the Descent into Hades*, or Francois Rabelais’s *Pantagruel* the earthly hierarchies were turned upside down. According to them, in heaven the poor will take place of the rich; the kings, bishops and priests will be degraded and so on. In Twain’s book, the modern ordinary Christian view of the ranking order of the deceased is crashed and a new order established — the text is not creating a democratic heaven,

which Jesus used to speak of, but a feudalistic, bureaucratic or almost totalitarian heaven. One part of the heavenly hierarchy consists of “viceroys, princes, governors, sub-governors, sub-sub-governors, and a hundred orders of nobility, grading along down from grand-ducal archangels, stage by stage, till the general level is struck, where there ain’t any titles” (CSH 65). This grotesque allegory can be considered as referring to our own real world: the heaven we imagine is developed according to the earthly reality.

The setting in Donald Ogden Stewart’s *Aunt Polly’s Story of Mankind* (1923) is more realistic: a small town in the United States some years after World War I. It is a satire on bringing up children with Christian beliefs. Aunt Polly has taken the task of telling her sister Susan’s children the story of how the universe was created and how we people became what we are in modern times: “the true story of how man began and how he has been getting steadily better and better” (APS 37–38). As a grotesque satire, Stewart’s text profanates some main principles that western Christians consider sacred. In “God’s great plan”, as the Christian aunt describes it, people first show up as cave men, but by taking remarkable steps forward — Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome, the Christian crusades, European monarchies, the American revolution — they finally reach “the Glorious Present”.

As a character, aunt Polly’s does not represent a fundamentalist Christian who takes the Bible literally. She abandons the paradise episode as a “beautiful, beautiful legend”. Anyway, aunt Polly supports another legend that is typical for us westerners, the idea of the white race and western civilization as the peak of cosmic development, as the fulfilment of “God’s Great Plan”. Aunt Polly’s intentions are revealed by the narrator:

[---] in order that the children might come to appreciate the wonderful world in which they lived and therefore become truly reverent and respectful to their elders who had created this wonderful world for them, she began to tell the children the true wonderful story of the progress of mankind.” (APS 38)

But, ironically, her intentions are absolutely incongruous with the contents of her story. It proves to be all but wonderful, it is story of

bloody wars and other violent actions driven by egoistic will for power and lust for money.

The real ideological attitudes of aunt Polly and her family members are opposed to their own Christian ideals, namely those revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. While Christ with his ethics preaches about equality, aunt Polly considers the modern wealthy people, with their homes, churches and automobiles, as the only "real kind of people". Further, the ethnocentrism of her social class reaches the level of racism: while all people in theory descend from the same primordial cell, the white people are not related to the black (APS 42). So, the profanative picture that the text produces links sacred belief in the Christian mission with economic power. It implies that the task of Christ on earth was not to "bring the peace", but to start the accumulation of the property that well-off people own today and to guide them in their market operations.

But more grotesque, or even macabre, is aunt Polly's attitude towards the questions of war and peace. In the speeches of aunt Polly and the actions of her Christian society, the text links Christianity with militarism. Aunt Polly considers all the wars before and after Christ as inevitable steps in the development of the modern market society; the end justifies the means. All the more, this Christian lady is represented as a very zealous supporter of military activities, even in peacetime. With a captain, a school teacher and a parish priest, she founds a children's army on a Spartan model. It is named "Christian Scouts". Some school children found a rival army, and soon the two armies start to fight each other like real adult armies in a war. The school children's war begins as a propagandistic agon and finally leads to a physical battle on Armistice Day, when the Christian Scouts are parading with a procession that represents the historical progress of mankind. The children's armies are carnivalistic doubles (see Bakhtin 1984b: 127) of those armies that battled against each other in World War I, where all armies in their camp services and home front sermons appealed to the same Christian God for help.

Stewart's satire is very negative in its critique of modern Christianity. Just as in Sinclair's text, it quite openly refers to the ideological combination of Christianity and social Darwinism, which it represents as a grotesque mixture of sacred and profane ideas.

## 5. Conclusion

What are the attitudes towards the Christian religion expressed in the satires studied above? All of them are negative in regard to such modern Christians that hypocritically claim to represent the ideals of Jesus ("loving thy neighbour", "considering all people equal", "being charitable", etc.) but in practice act otherwise. According to the grotesquery of these satires, the minds of modern priests and ordinary Christians are dominated by egoism, hunger for power, greed, sexual lust without love, racism, and undemocratic attitudes. It is the Christian world itself that has strayed from the philosophy of Christ. It seems as though some inhuman power in the Kayserian sense (1981: 185) has taken hold of their minds. Christians themselves would perhaps call it a demon. But the social philosophers might see the characteristics of social Darwinism in those emotions and attitudes penetrated inside Christianity.

Still, there is some ambivalence in regard to Christianity in general in a couple of satires: there are a few idealistic Christians in Sinclair's and Lewis's books. By any standards, there are no good people at all in Waugh's book. In West's or Stewart's satires there are some good people by some standards, but they are not Christians. Twain's satire is the most anarchistic of all the texts, and it may also be considered as the most hostile to Christianity in general.

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## **Horror and the Grotesque: Corporeal Landscapes of Violence**

VICENTE J. BENET

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### **1. The Grotesque in Modernity**

One of the most unsettling things about Mikhail Bakhtin's great book on popular culture and the mechanics of the grotesque is what logically derives from one of its main hypotheses, specifically, one at which the author arrives as a result of a detailed analysis of the assimilation of the concept of the grotesque within the different currents of Western thought. According to Bakhtin, the problem of the grotesque and its aesthetic essence may only be postulated and resolved within the context of popular medieval culture and Renaissance literature. It is during these periods that the depth, force, and multiplicity of meaning of the grotesque in all its varieties come to be revealed, as popular culture was still closely tied to a carnivalesque sort of cosmovision at the time. Without this unity, Bakhtin quite radically adds, things grotesque become one-sided, banal and sterile (Bakhtin 1987: 52).

There are obvious reasons why the subject is so fully developed in Bakhtin's text. The concept of the grotesque, as he sees it, will become more and more difficult to apply in the the 17th and 18th centuries. With the onset of Romanticism the notion will come to be reformulated and marginalized from contemporary mainstream thinking (with regard to the function of the carnivalesque and physical, bodily work, that is). Bakhtin, faced with the dismantling of

his model with the coming of Modernity, is consistently indifferent to any new aesthetic formulas of his notion of the grotesque. During the Romantic period there are still signs of interest in the problem, yet a whole new series of issues was destined to create a rift at the time. The chief symptom of this rift was what Bakhtin called "the degradation of grotesque comicity." (Ibid. 47).

This degradation was brought about by a series of changes related to the appearance of what Bakhtin calls the horrific. In the Romantic period, horror was completely unrelated to the symbols of terror and death which had been the object of grotesque laughter in medieval and Renaissance popular festivals. For the Romantics, horror was something entirely different, a sort of unexpected withdrawal from the world of sense and experience in which surrounding objects might reveal something new and unknown. In Bakhtin's own words (ibid. 41):

"The human world is suddenly transformed into an external world. What is customary and calming reveals its horrifying face... Reconciliation with the world, when it occurs, is carried out on a subjective, lyrical and even mystic level... images of material and corporeal life: eating, drinking, attending to one's natural, physical necessities, coitus and childbearing almost totally lose their regenerating sense and become part of an "inferior life." The grotesque images of Romanticism are generally an expression of the fear the world inspires and they attempt to communicate this fear to readers ("scare them")."

With these changing attitudes regarding the grotesque, the cathartic role of laughter is weakened. The appearance of insanity in the literature of the time as an destabilizing element related to horror is an example of this phenomenon. Another example which Bakhtin uses, and which may nearly be understood as an allegory of the changes we are discussing in all their complexity, is the use of masks. According to Bakhtin, with the Romantic period, masks cease to represent the multiplicity of the human characteristics of the carnival and instead gradually come to be identified with horror and deceit.

One way of illustrating this transition could be to consider the collective scenes painted by Brueghel alongside those of Goya.

At this point I would like to turn to various notions related to the unsettling aspect of Bakhtin's theory mentioned at the beginning of this essay. First of all, it is imperative that we consider the repercussions of the novel element of horror in its Romantic treatment. For the Romantics, horror appears to be the product of an intellectualized vision of reality which is slowly beginning to make its way into the literature of the time. Such intellectualization inevitably implies a separation from the body and group festivities, at the same time that it therefore leads to a process of individualization as well as a latent fear of the world. And this fear, we insist, includes a fear or aversion to the natural acts and needs of the body. It taints everyday experience with a perpetual feeling of strangeness and "exteriority" with regard to intimacy and closeness.

Laughter at the grotesque thus comes to lose its cathartic power, its prophylactic capacity for staving off horror. As Hans Robert Jauss so precisely put it: "grotesque figures — unlike ugly ones — are not comic because they contrast with beauty, but because they are a sign of fear that has been overcome." (Jauss 1986: 321). Nevertheless, in modern literature horror seems to appear independently from any previous capacity to overcome it through laughter. And it is in this fissure characteristic of Romanticism that the burden of Modernity comes into being, as the tensions of the unconscious rise to the surface, uncontained by the classical representational schemata of art and literature. The appearance of the novel in the 19th century as both the compendium and final dissolution of classical genres is perhaps a symptom of this process.

Jauss, on the other hand, has also shown how grotesque laughter was not a point of primary interest in Freudian theory on heroism, since grotesque heroes have no restraints concerning their instincts or pleasure; on the contrary, they give them free rein (*ibid.* 301–302). Nevertheless, no one better than Freud was able to perceive, through the works of Goethe, Hoffmann and other Romantic and Post-Romantic writers that the appearance of horror is one of the peculiar characteristics of Modernity. The concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) in Freud (1919) may be seen as another example of this. It is not just a matter of observing how normal, everyday things may

become unsettling with the unexpected appearance of repressed emotions, as occurs with the uncanny. The real issue is to understand how this phenomenon comes to emerge as a symptom of culture in literature since the Romantic period, and why laughter provides no defense against it. Hence, along with Kayser, we can define the modern concept of the grotesque as something that, without necessarily being so, becomes strange, unbearable, inhuman and hostile.\*

The displacement of this phenomenon within the panorama of contemporary literature is incompatible with the postulates Bakhtin proposes in his theory of the grotesque. Bakhtin places the grotesque on a sort of double path, attempting to summarize its possible (although not altogether probable) position in our time: that there is, on the one hand, a modernist position, related to the avante-garde, which in part follows Romantic postulates and on the other, that there is a realist position which follows the tradition of the popular dimension and grotesque realism. In any case, Bakhtin does not incorporate contemporary literature into his theory, and it is interesting to note, for example, how his treatment of Dostoevski is based on entirely different theoretical premises and methods. Something from his system applied to popular culture and literature seems to have been definitively lost along the road of history, with the result that manifestations of the grotesque no longer correspond to the parameters of the carnivalesque, the exaltation of the body and laughter. Nevertheless, a look at how the experience of horror — as it relates to the body and its representations — has endured, may lead us to new reflections and bring us to a similar conclusion.

## 2. Mass Culture and the Reproduction of Horror

What we are dealing with here, then, is a conceptual problem which will define the framework of our study. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque is directly associated with popular culture and collective

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\* See Bakhtin's interesting discussion of Kayser's text *Das Grotteske in Malerei und Dichtung* (Bakhtin 1987: 46).

laughter, which serves as a defense, in a prophylactic sense, against horror. Therefore, we take it as a given that pleasure, the carnivalesque, and the ostentation of the body are all directly related to a feeling of group membership, to the sensation that laughter is a powerful device which may conquer horror and death in as much that it is shared and forms part of a ritual of group participation. It is this group spirit which allows the limits of the social order to be broken down, at least momentarily, within the cathartic apotheosis of the festival.

There is, however, something in this idea that requires us to reflect on the workings of group diversion in modern culture. There seems to be no moment in history when the tendencies of the popular and the grotesque, as manifestations of culture, have been so clearly expressed as they are within what we call mass culture. If we focus primarily on the first half of this century, and more specifically on the period between wars, we find we are dealing with one of the most profound moments of reflection on these topics. Thanks to new technical means of reproduction, mass culture is available to all levels of society, with their differing tastes and modes of group entertainment. To deal with this phenomenon from a sociological, cultural or even anthropological perspective in order to define the function of the grotesque in mass culture is beyond the scope of this study; however, there is one aspect of it which, since Bakhtin, lies at the heart of all reflections on the grotesque: we refer of course to the body.

Enumerating some of the characteristics of the relationship between the body and the grotesque, Bakhtin remarks that:

“... the grotesque body is a body in movement. It is neither ready nor finished: it is perpetually in a state of being made, of being created, and at the same time it is forever constructing another body; what's more, this body both absorbs the world and is absorbed by it (...) This is why the essential role of the grotesque body is attributed to the parts where it overflows, where it goes beyond its own limits, and activates the formation of another (or second) body: the womb and the phallus (...) All the body's excretions and orifices are characterized by the fact that they are the place where the boundaries

between two bodies and between the body and the world are transcended." (Bakhtin 1987: 285).

Hence, the grotesque body represents a sort of metamorphosis, a continuity and lack of definition which deprives us of our most fundamental experience of the body, its intimacy and individuality. In fact, the individuality of the body is directly opposed to grotesque imagery in that it establishes a sort of closure, a limit which makes it an isolated and finished object, whereas the grotesque image of the body, as discussed by Bakhtin:

"... is made of holes and excretions that create a newly started body; in a certain sense, it is a passageway for the duplicity of a life which is perpetually renewing itself, the inexhaustible cup of death and conception (...) Thus, the grotesque image shows not only the external but also the internal physiognomy of the body: blood, entrails, the heart and other organs. Often, the internal and external physiognomies are even fused into a single image." (Ibid.).

It is important, therefore, to observe the representation of the body to determine how the grotesque functions. The grotesque body is incompatible with individuality. It is scattered, in constant movement. We previously mentioned that from Romanticism on there is a new aspect to corporeal representation which gradually comes to be identified with something increasingly strange or foreign which had to be hidden. At the same time, it was progressively imbued with signs of the uncanny. The effects of corporeal metamorphosis developed within the Gothic, Romantic and Victorian novel have less and less to do with the evocation of morality and mythological tales characteristic of classic metamorphosis. In considering the strictly corporeal dimension of this process, we see that modern metamorphoses are what made way for the first contemporary myths of terror: the Frankenstein monster and Dracula give us a clear example of the relationship between modern horror and the body. Still, in this type of bodily representation there is something fundamentally different. It is difficult to think of Gargantuan as a monster, while Dracula or Frankenstein's creature can easily be seen as monsters. There are two reasons for this: in the first place, they are both grotesque bodies in

mutation, in an intermediate state between life and death. Nevertheless, they maintain their individuality, a sort of closure which turns them into phenomena to be obscenely exhibited. They have something controllable within their limits which allows us to recognize them through an imagery closely resembling what is human. It is therefore not surprising that these creatures have become inexhaustible phenomena of mass culture with an iconography universally recognized thanks to cinema and television. As Leslie Fiedler (1978) has observed, the word monster is etymologically related to *monstro* (to show) and *moneo* (to warn), and its constant borderline nature and resistance to classification are a result of its imaginary characteristics beyond the control of concepts (Benet: 1995, 297). Of course, Rabelais' heroes obviously have nothing to do with cinema. On the other hand, Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley's monsters both share that certain imaginary and intermediate nature that makes them fascinating. Peter Brooks (1993, 217) metaphorically expresses this idea in saying that monsters are something between the postnatural and the precultural. They are the halfway point between, to cite two examples, the white thing Edgar Allan Poe was at a loss to describe in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and the repellent cephalopods and other beasts described in minute detail by Lovecraft in his horror novels.

Modern monsters, on the other hand, are a fundamental mark of horror — the internal horror of a society for which laughter no longer suffices as a therapy for overcoming it. They are images of horror flooding out through the estrangement of the body and experience. Their function in narrative therefore produces a critical reformulation of the relationship between the grotesque and horror, as well as of the role of the body within this relationship. The need to contrive new faces of the grotesque is directly related to a radical change of experience in Modernity, in mass culture, where representations of the body intersect with technology.



### 3. Dancers' Bodies and the Violence of Machines

Though it may provide an interesting focal point for our discussion, the appearance of monsters may not be the sole object of any anthropological and cultural analysis of the body, the reproduction of horror and the uncanny. In fact, horror had its most terrible moment in Europe on the battlefields of the First World War. The confrontation of horror and the body is both grotesquely and sublimely captured in many of the paintings and engravings of Otto Dix and Georg Grosz. What links these images so closely to horror has to do with the modern phenomenon of destructive interdependency, the mutual dependence of bodies and the machines created during the Great War. John Keegan, for example, refers to this dimension of horror and technology in his description of the battle of Somme. On the one hand, the appearance of the machine gun marks a fundamental moment for technology and industry in the business of destruction, not only because of the deaths it brings about but also because of its close relationship to the whole system of industry, modern life and the devastation of experience through technology. In Keegan's (1978, 234) words, "... like an automatic press, it [the machine gun] would, when actuated by a simple trigger, begin and continue to perform its functions with the minimum of human attention, supplying its own power and only requiring a steady supply of raw material and little routine maintenance to operate efficiently throughout a working shift. The machine-gunner is best thought of, in short, as a sort of machine-minder, whose principal task was to feed ammunition belts into the breech, something which could be done while the gun was in full operation, top up the fluid in the cooling jacket, and traverse the gun from left to right and back again within the limits set by its firing platform. (...) the appearance of the machine-gun, therefore, had not so much disciplined the act of killing — which was what seventeenth-century drill had done — as mechanized or industrialized it." (Keegan 1978: 234). The perfect integration of body and machine at the moment of devastation displaces man and reveals a whole new side to horror. Within the framework of technology (through mass production and a changing experience of space and time) (Kern 1983: 89 on), a previously unknown facet of horror is revealed within the normal and everyday. In *Der Erzähler*, Walter Benjamin recalls how the soldiers

returned from the battlefields in silence, at a loss to describe their experience of a theretofore unknown horror. The wealth of literature (and literaturization) on the subject, an attempt to cauterize the experience through memory, is chiefly a product of the late 1920s. Yet the proximity of horror generated nothing but an incomprehensible, yet eloquent, silence. Keegan compares the war experience in the trenches during the battles of World War I with the industrialization of death at Nazi concentration camps: "there is something Treblinka-like about almost all accounts of 1 July, [1916, the start of the battle of Somme] about those long docile lines of young men, shoddily uniformed, heavily burdened, numbered about their necks, plodding forward across a featureless landscape to their own extermination inside the barbed wire." (Keegan 1978: 261). In effect, well aware of the futility of the attack, thousands of soldiers continued to fall during endless offensives that were sure to bring them to their deaths. But the true horror — frequently commented on with regard to the victims of Nazi concentration camps — arises from the docility with which they handed themselves over for sacrifice to technified death, as if they were the fuel that the sinister machine of destruction needed in order to continue functioning.

Something happens in the technological era that brings the subject so close to the experience of horror that it produces an unsettling identification. And the grotesque has much to do with this. Again, it is no longer the kind of grotesqueness which may inspire laughter as a defense against horror, but rather something quite different. In a great deal of modern art and literature the grotesque reflects the mechanized condition of the body and its decomposition through technology. This is in fact a continuation of a process which has its origins in the Romantic period. The body, which had come to be something strange and unfamiliar, is faced with a decisive moment, a turning point from which it can expect nothing but destruction. And all this is occurring precisely at a time when the body, thanks to the glorification of sports, gymnastics and personal hygiene, demands to be exalted and adored in an almost cult-like fashion.

Let us turn for a moment now to another aspect of the body and its mechanistic elaboration. In 1927 Siegfried Kracauer, as a cultural chronicler of the Weimar Republic, analyzed the role of the body within the new culture, reflecting on several of its more superficial

manifestations with a view to examining what was happening at a deeper level. Kracauer discusses the geometric-style dances which were later integrated into musical films in the famous numbers of the American choreographer and director Busby Berkeley. In his analysis, Kracauer observes the existence of formal elements in the dance numbers pointing directly to a technical referent: automatism and simplicity of movements, that is, geometry, discipline of the body, uniformity and sequential precision. Individuality is lost within the collective process, at the same time that the spectacle, with its generally simple aesthetic parameters, is readily understood and assimilated by the spectator. As we observed with Bakhtin, this distance from the body goes back to its estrangement during the Romantic period. We must keep in mind that its clearest exponent is to be found in mass culture, which is not the same as popular culture. A new type of representation, related to technology and the fragmentation of the body, brings about what Kracauer (1995: 76) calls the ornamental use of the body.\* Ornamentation is the hallmark of a type of spectacle and entertainment meant to control the masses. An end in itself, the accumulation of blocks and fragments typical of ornamentation can only make sense when considered in terms of a preconceived, orderly plan. The dancers' movements, for example, are not meant to be erotic. At most they allude to the erotic: "The ass movements of the girls (...) take place in a vacuum; they are a linear

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\* "The bearer of the ornament is the mass and not the people /Volk/, for whenever the people form figures, the latter do not hover in midair but arise out of a community. A current of organic life surges from these communal groups — which share a common destiny — to their ornaments, endowing these ornaments with a magic force and burdening them with meaning to such an extent that they cannot be reduced to a pure assemblage of lines. (...) The patterns seen in the stadiums and cabarets betray no such origins. They are composed of elements that are mere building blocks and nothing more. The construction of the edifice depends on the size of the stones and their number. It is the mass that is employed here. Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure." (Kracauer 1955: 76).

system that no longer has any erotic meaning but at best point to the locus of the erotic." (Ibid. 77).

All this combines to define the relationship to be seen between the grotesque and the exaltation of the physical senses in Modernity, where the body goes from the constant exhibition of its natural state to its ultimate subjection to the iron-clad control of a culture and ideology tied to the laws of technology. It therefore follows logically from this process that obscenity, the cult of the body, violence and pornography should all occupy a space within the fertile terrain of mass culture. The link between diversion, control of the body and the taylorization of everyday experience is a key issue in this debate (Hansen 1992: 107) and part of its necessary revision arises as a result of the body's definitive loss of proximity. Mass spectacles are strictly controlled by a superior geometric will. From carnivalesque chaos and the multiple focal points of attention in popular culture we come to the homogeneity of mass culture as seen from a bird's eye view. In their notes for the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Horkheimer and Adorno (1994: 278) reflect on the curious love-hate relationship which man shares with the body, a state of affairs that will later be carried on into Modernity. The reason for this, say the authors, is the fact that the body, seen as inferior, subjugated and unwanted, brings with it a feeling of alienation.

Yet what we find most noteworthy in Horkheimer and Adorno's reflections is the fact that they end up associating this new treatment of the body with violence. The modern era separates the physical body (Körper) from the living body (Leib), abandoning the notion of the human spirit, in order to thus assimilate it as a possession for commercial use. Man, degraded to the level of Körper, can hence be used as an object of domination, as raw material. The door to forms of cruelty and violence unknown before the era of mass culture is opened once and for all. The manifestation of hostility toward human life culminates with modern violence to the body.

#### 4. Techniques of Horror in Narrative

The identification of the body and violence and a new understanding of the grotesque as it relates to both in modern literature may be summed up in the aesthetic tendency of the period known as New Objectivity. The very name of this movement is a reflection on its aspect of "thingness" (Sachlichkeit), which is directly related to the experience of horror and chaos in mass culture, especially after World War I. In his memoirs of that period in Berlin, Elias Canetti (1982: 309) offers an interesting description of the situation: "Things floated like corpses in the chaos, and human beings became things. This was known as Neue Sachlichkeit ("New Thingness"). Little else could be possible after the long and drawn-out shrieks of Expressionism."

In the origin of thingness, automation, or the bizarre decomposition of the body, there is always plenty of room for laughter. Freud and Bergson were but two of the well-known authors to deal with the subject. But the appearance of the grotesque establishes an anguished link between humor and horror as we may see in the paintings and engravings of dreadfully mutilated bodies so typical of the work of the great artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit. Yet the horror produced by these scenes requires a correlate to make them bearable, something to bestow meaning upon what is apparently a view into the abyss of the ineffable. There must be, we insist, some sort of discourse to protect us from a situation in which meaning collapses into muteness. And it is here, we believe, that the grotesque reappears on the scene. For we do not think it too far-fetched to qualify some of the work of Dix, Grosz or Beckmann as grotesque, as well as the great Nazi films of Leni Riefenstahl. Therefore, in keeping with this idea, it is imperative that we identify the common denominator to be found in all manifestations of the grotesque: the deforming, mechanized or thingified treatment of the body and its violent destruction.

We shall now attempt to show some of these characteristics through a brief analysis of *Imán*, a novel by the Aragonese writer Ramon J. Sender, published in 1930. Sender was a well-known journalist of his day when he decided to write a piece denouncing the barbarity of the war that Spain was waging against local tribes in northern Morocco at the time. In conveying the immediacy of the action, his journalistic tone often outdoes the literary one. As the

author notes in the introduction to his text, his observations are "disorderly, at times too lengthy, often without literary form, collected during my military service in Morocco, during the disaster of '21... This book has no aesthetic or literary agenda. Simple and true, it tells of the Morocco tragedy as any soldier might have seen it...".\* The book does, in fact, tell of the events of 1921, known in Spain as the Disaster at Annual. A reckless offensive launched in the summer of 1921 ended in total loss and the death of an unspecified number of Spanish soldiers and civilians normally cited at approximately 15,000. Sender's novel contains some of the greatest descriptions of horror to be found in the texts of the period. Simply structured, it has three parts: the first deals with boot camp in northern Africa, the tedium, the brutality of the military officials and indoctrination into military life. The second deals with the disaster itself. Like a journey into hell, the main character, an old blacksmith named Viance encounters a series of horrifying scenes as he desperately flees back to his base. In the third part Viance has reached salvation yet he undergoes new degradations that culminate with his discharge and return to his home town, which he finds has completely disappeared under a water reservoir.

Two levels of interpretation may be distinguished within the structure of the novel. On the one hand, the narrative is built up around a specific political aim: the author is criticizing the events in Morocco at the time, and in order to develop this critique effectively he makes use of a series of feuilletonesque devices. The description of the protagonist and his past is charged with elements meant to capture the reader's attention through a direct appeal to his own emotions and a hyperemotional, manichean representation of the world which is characteristic of revolutionary literature, and which may be traced back to the tradition of melodrama in the theater. These are the

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\* Ramón J. Sender: *Imán*, Barcelona: Destino, 1988 (3rd ed.). The prologue as well as the journalistic tone of the novel and its narrative strategies (a homodiegetic narrator who gradually disappears because of the nature of what he tries to narrate) are similar to those in *Flucht ohne Ende*, of Joseph Roth (1927).

parameters which support the political aims of the text and serve to help us understand its final, burlesque scene, in which Viance, destitute and humiliated, watches a cabaret performer as she sings a patriotic song and swings his war medals, pinned to her blouse over her left breast, in time to the sinuous movements of her obscene dance.

Along with this first level, there is another level of discourse which is of greater interest to us in this study and which goes beyond the rigid parameters of the *feuilleton*. Horror is continually assimilated by the grotesque in the descriptions of the disaster Viance witnesses in the central part of the narrative. In this sense, the rhetorical appearance of the grotesque constantly accompanies the description of the devastating scenes he encounters. Notably, the very word "grotesque" is often used to describe the horror. In his escape, Viance comes across two wounded men. The description of one of the wounds is quite expressive: "His pants are red, as if he had urinated blood. He moves away a bit. He loosens his belt and crouches down. Red, thick internal blood. It turns dark yellow and his pants fall open, revealing his open stomach. He sees his own wound. Viance sees in him a grotesque image of tragedy, his sexual organs bared beneath his destroyed stomach. He refuses to look at him. When he finally hears him fall over, he closes his eyes and presses his knees to his chest in the foxhole." (p. 204) At another moment of horror, the grotesque is related to a pile of dead Moroccans killed by the Spaniards: "Then they bring the corpses of the Moroccans out back and throw them down the ravine one by one, so that the rebels see the punishment. There are eighteen or twenty of them and they clumsily fall, gesturing grotesquely." (p. 128) In one terribly dramatic moment we have yet another scene of insurmountable horror:

"Once again that smell of sewage, of decomposing flesh. There must be corpses (...) Shreds of war, blackish stains and suddenly something swift, keen and dirty. A jackal. The spectacle is soon repeated. Two naked corpses, hanging together on the same metal stake that had been thrust through their stomachs. It was feeding time for the jackal. Viance realizes that the naked corpses are not frightening. It must be the clothes, the grotesque appearance of life that being dressed gives them. Nature

has rendered us immune to the fear of the exterior stamp of death, and a naked corpse does not shock us. He takes in the scene without reflecting upon it and continues on, swaggering like a sailor. / The trench continues on down, from time to time repeating the same spectacle. Naked, mutilated bodies; one with its legs cut off at the knees and the insignias of an official in its open mouth... Close by, a swarm of bluish flies buzzes around some dry bushes (...) Among the thistles and weeds as he walks by Viance sees a nearly dried out piece of flesh and continues on, without stopping to notice anything./ (...) He establishes no strategy, he can no longer plan his defense, his escape, nor come to terms with what has happened. "God, so many dead!" He used to call them "stiffs", but now, in his solitude, his view of the horizon limited to a fringe of sky up on high, he is filled with sudden respect." (Ibid. 145-146).

We have selected these three fragments for several reasons. The first is strictly empirical: the contact with horror makes the grotesque blossom as a recurring adjective within the rhetorical mechanism which sustains the description. But our true interest lies elsewhere, in the fact that the grotesque appears as a necessary epithet linked to the image of the violated body, of what has been destroyed to the point that it has lost the essential characteristics of a human being and been transformed into a sinister image. What is unnerving is that there is still a trace of something human left in these torn apart, naked bodies. Still, the consequence to be deduced from these meticulous, though syncretic descriptions is yet another image of the absolute horror that has gone before, leaving us with nothing but a landscape full of bodily remains. The reader's experience of the scene is guided by a kind of focalization which gradually comes to dissolve the narrator's voice to the point that it nearly disappears behind the horror of the description. And this is perhaps the most important effect of the narration in the novel. The guiding influence of the protagonist as he leads the reader through the narrative, through his descent into hell, gradually weakens until it finally comes to a breaking point marked by the character's inability to name or interpret what he sees. This is where the grotesque comes into play: the limits of horror may be established only through



this succession of images and not through reflection or interpretation, as the character has gradually come to lose his capacity to reflect or interpret in the course of his journey.

This is why it is not enough for the images to be merely insufferable: the important thing is for the gaze of the observer to be totally bereft of concepts, morals or empathy with which to interpret what lies before him. In this way, the grotesque becomes the best possible allegory for horror: the body comes apart to the point of caricature — which is nothing more than a representation of the sinister face of death, beyond its conventional symbolization. In Sender's novel, the whole process of horror begins with a previous scene, the moment before the destruction which the reader never sees. Instead, we are left with nothing but the grotesque imagery of its consequences, the bloody remains of tortured bodies creating a landscape of horror. In other words, what is truly grotesque here is the stark presentation of human wreckage as the consequence of something unseen. Sender gives us verbally what Goya and the New Objectivity artists give us visually.

## 5. Conclusion

In his book *In Bluebeard's Castle*, George Steiner declares that violence to the body is a key element of modern culture and its literary manifestations. The violence so typical of the works of the Marquis de Sade, says Steiner, is directly related to the period of budding industrialization in which the author lived, with his palaces of pleasure and torture mirroring the factories and laboratories of the time. And it is this same type of association which does much to explain other phenomena such as the presence of horror in literature since Romanticism.

Hence Bakhtin's proposal regarding the function of the grotesque since Modernism: as laughter loses its prophylactic power, and both the feeling of group membership and the carnivalesque vision of the world begin to fade, the grotesque, as we see it, is progressively transformed until it becomes intimately related to horror. The relationship between technology and the body will bring with it a relatively new effect in literature (as well as in the audiovisual and plastic arts)

characteristic of Modernity. When Walter Benjamin explains how the soldiers came back from World War I in silence, more lacking in experience than when they had left, he describes an image which we believe is crucial for comprehending how the grotesque functions in contemporary literature: the image of the human body on the borderline between horror and silence.

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## El tratamiento de lo grotesco en la obra de Tommaso Landolfi

ALESSANDRO BALDI

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En el número 1 de *Interlitteraria* ya tuve ocasión de ocuparme de un aspecto de la obra de Tommaso Landolfi (1908–1979)\*, el tratamiento

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\* En los años treinta numerosos literatos italianos estaban interesados por las literaturas extranjeras y colaboraban en revistas literarias mediante traducciones. Otros, aunque publicaban ya escritos de creación, traducían como medio de vida. Las revistas literarias que se publicaban en Florencia apoyaban esta labor y, entrando en polémica con el régimen fascista, cuya política cultural iba estrechándose cada vez más, publicaban regularmente las traducciones de las principales obras extranjeras. En Florencia se toleró la existencia de un clima de rebeldía intelectual. La situación relativamente aislada de la ciudad, su vocación agrícola y artesanal, la convertían en el lugar idóneo para la reunión de los intelectuales. Allí no iban a poder influir sobre las masas de las grandes ciudades industriales ni sobre las masas agrícolas. La belleza y la magia de la ciudad no les habría consentido darse cuenta de que estaban encerrados en un gueto en el que era más fácil controlarlos (R. Luperini, 1985). Landolfi no residió constantemente en Florencia y produjo, en realidad, la mayor parte de sus obras y traducciones en su pueblo natal, Pico Farense, provincia de Frosinone. En cuanto a su técnica de traducción, siempre afirmó que quería respetar al pie de la letra el texto original, aun cuando se puede apreciar en cada una de sus traducciones su personalidad y estilo inconfundibles (I. Landolfi, 1996, p. 12). Las traducciones landolfianas poseen, pues, un especial interés, que surge precisamente de esta tensión entre la intención del traductor de respetar la voluntad creativa del autor

del amor (Baldi 1996: 176–183). Ahora pretendo concentrar mi atención en otro aspecto relevante: el tratamiento de lo grotesco que es una constante en la obra de Landolfi, sobre todo cada vez que el relato afronta motivos con implicaciones metafísicas, como los que se derivan de la visión antropocéntrica de las relaciones entre la vida y la muerte. He aquí el relato de Landolfi, «Il racconto della piattola»:

Io, piattola vivevo in un bosco folto e mi vi aggiravo beata; quello era veramente il mio regno. La mia vita scorreva felice, traevo per il mio nutrimento colla massima facilità dalla terra il suo rosso succo, deponevo la mia progenie in sicurezza nel proprio involucro a piè d'un tronco, e insomma nulla turbava la nostra fiorente colonia. Ma un giorno sentii la terra raggelarmisi sotto, il suo succo, pari a una linfa stagnante, si rapprese e acquistò un gusto di morte. Nel gelo, in un mondo rabbiato dunque finii. Ora, di questo non voglio incolpare nessuno, neanche chi ci ascolta di lassù: può darsi (sebbene io non lo creda) che così dovesse essere e che sia stato bene. Ma voi, uomini che intravedo nell'ombra, perché mi guardate in atto superbo? Tale sarà anche la sorte dei vostri simili un giorno (T. Landolfi 1991: 356).

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y, al mismo tiempo, de la imposibilidad de prescindir de su propia personalidad.

A continuación enumero las traducciones del ruso de T. Landolfi:

*Narratori russi*. Raccolta di romanzi e racconti dalle origini ai nostri giorni, a cura di Tommaso Landolfi, Milano, Bompiani, 1948; Nicolaj V. Gogol', *Racconti di Pietroburgo*. Introduzione e traduzione di T. Landolfi, Milano-Roma, Rizzoli, 1941; Milano, Rizzoli (BUR), 1949; Aleksandr S. Puskin, *Poemi e liriche*. Versioni, introduzione e note di T. Landolfi, Torino, Einaudi (I Millenni), 1960; *Racconti russi* tradotti da T. Landolfi, Firenze, Vallecchi (Cederna), 1960; *Teatro e favole*, Torino, Einaudi (I Millenni), 1961; Michail J. Lermontov, *Liriche e poemi*, Torino, Einaudi (NUE), 1963; Fëdor M. Dostoevskij, *Ricordi dal sottosuolo*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1964; Fëdor I. Tjutcev, *Poesie*, Torino, Einaudi (Gli Struzzi), 1964; Nikolaj S. Leskov, *Il viaggiatore incantato*, Torino, Einaudi (NUE), 1967; Lev N. Tolstoj, *La morte di Ivan Il'ic*, Milano, Rizzoli (BUR), 1976.

El relato se publicó en la revista *Literatura*, año V, nº 3, julio-septiembre de 1941. No se ha encontrado el manuscrito, pero su composición puede remontarse a 1937, — ya que pertenecía a un conjunto de cinco cuentos al que se le dio el título global de “Variedades no literarias” — y al margen de dos de esos autógrafos, fechados «[Pico, 13? giu. 1937]», aparece una clara referencia al “Cuento de la ladilla” «[La historia de la Muerte al fin y al cabo. Véase anexo]» (I. Landolfi 1991: 1002).

Landolfi a menudo en sus escritos, desarrolla el tema de la muerte y otros de carácter metafísico, pero posiblemente el motivo ideológico no ha sido el que más ha influido en la elección. A continuación intentaré mostrar como nuestro autor se sintió atraído por las enormes posibilidades estéticas que le daba este tema. Quiero decir que lo más relevante que se produce en relación con la muerte del huésped de la ladilla es que ésta, por primera vez, toma conciencia de su propio estado de parásito. Pero tampoco eso es el fin, sino más bien el pretexto que permite arrancar una narración muy seca, pero de imprevisible desarrollo. Vamos a verlo.

¿Por qué lo que está vivo muere? ¿Cuál es el sentido de la muerte de todo lo que está vivo? Estas son sólo dos de las innumerables cuestiones a las que el hombre, desde siempre, pretende dar una respuesta sin conseguirlo, sintiendo miedo ante fenómenos a los que no encuentra sentido. Piensa que Dios es el Lugar de la verdad y en Él busca la verdad última que sirva para dotar de sentido a las cosas. Dios es para algunos verdad y sentido, Aquel para quien no hay secretos. Quien cree tiene un Modelo que imitar. Quien no cree que haya que buscar en Dios la verdad última es considerado como un huérfano por parte de quien cree. Quien no cree, o se siente de verdad huérfano o se rebela y hace exactamente del Modelo de los creyentes el Anti-Modelo. A su manera, tampoco renuncia a la convicción de que exista una verdad absoluta. Si pudiera renunciar a esa convicción viviría con los misterios que rodean a la existencia sin tener que desvelarlos o sin tener que negar su existencia y se dedicaría a estudiar tan sólo aquello que tiene sentido conocer (Savinio 1981: 1).

La ladilla, ante los misterios del mundo, no recurre a ninguna de las actitudes características del hombre; no desea saber si es necesario morir, ni si es algo bueno o si en cambio forma parte de un designio inescrutable de quien escucha desde allá arriba, de Dios. Considera

que sea la existencia de Dios, sea la naturaleza positiva de la muerte, son problemas de orden metafísico y que difícilmente podrían ser aclarados, pero, al mismo tiempo, no desecha la importancia de estos interrogantes: la única solución factible es adoptar una actitud posibilista. No es esto sin embargo lo más importante: lo que importa es que se ha alterado un equilibrio y que con ello van a desencadenarse una serie de reacciones que afectan también a quien se encuentre en ese momento en la posición de observador del suceso, de la muerte en este caso.

La ladilla aun no está muerta, está reflexionando sobre la muerte del huésped que, indirectamente, va a provocar la suya. La muerte a la que se refiere la ladilla no aparece como un drama individual sino como un drama colectivo, que afecta a una colonia que fue floreciente un día. Su voz es la de una colectividad donde la muerte de algunos individuos no puede ser considerada un mero hecho privado. Resulta ser algo que no es contingentemente funcional para la vida material de la comunidad, sino algo que aparece ya asimilado, dentro de una concepción rítmica del tiempo, en el flujo del devenir.

La individualidad de la ladilla es pública y exterior, el sentido de su vida es claro, nítido, común a la naturaleza de su especie "ladillesca" y compartido por todas las demás ladillas: merodear satisfecha por su reino y ver como transcurre su vida feliz, dado que le es fácil obtener el alimento; simple la procreación, y que nada enturbia la tranquilidad de la próspera colonia. Este paraíso terrenal no lo va a perder ella sola por haberse creído en algún momento más grande que el propio Dios, sino porque así suele pasar cada vez que un ciclo se concluye. Y todo esto no está enunciado por ningún ideólogo interno a la narración sino que se percibe a través del adjetivo que nos presenta una de las características del hombre: su actitud soberbia (Bachtin 1979: 363-364).

No sucede lo mismo con el hombre que es presentado tan sólo a partir de uno de sus atributos, la mirada soberbia. Un hombre privado que concibe la posibilidad de vivir un destino excepcional, que no es concreto y sensible, y que le puede alejar del resto de la comunidad. Este tipo de conciencia le permitirá sentirse autorizado a expresar un juicio moral — sobre las implicaciones relativas a la presencia de la ladilla — y a perder de vista la cuestión general sobre el hecho de que también él, en cuanto ser vivo, comparte con los demás seres vivos —

también con la ladilla — la mortalidad. Pero, además, pierde de vista otra cuestión importante, que su muerte no afecta al destino de su especie, ya que su vida cesa sólo después de haber asegurado la supervivencia de toda su especie. Así pues, la búsqueda individual de salvación espiritual en la identidad resulta grotesca en el mismo momento en que la palabra de la ladilla logra parodiar toda la cultura caracterizada por esa mirada en actitud soberbia propia del hombre de este relato.

Intentemos hacer una breve reconstrucción de la historia para lograr encuadrar mejor a este hombre. El punto de vista de la ladilla domina el relato y nos ayuda a identificar el tipo de hombre al que dirige su admonición. El cuerpo humano, en la intimidad de cuyo vello ésta vivía, carece de vida. El cadáver se puede encontrar sobre una mesa de un obitorio, donde algunos hombres de medicina lo observan, o bien, en las manos compasivas — pero bajo su mirada moralmente despiadada — de alguien que lo está lavando y vistiendo antes de su sepultura. En una primera inspección superficial la ladilla resulta localizada. Los ojos del piojo púbico, que es el sujeto enunciador del relato, y los de sus observadores se encuentran. La ladilla nota en la mirada humana el sarcasmo y la desaprobación producida por el descubrimiento de que el cadáver está infestado por un inmundos parásito que se transmite por vía sexual.

Los dos seres, cuyas miradas se cruzan, no comparten los mismos sistemas de valores y del encuentro de sus dos diversas visiones de la vida se genera un nuevo significado. La ladilla no concibe la muerte porque seguirá viviendo a través de su especie, tal vez en el pubis de los mismos que la están juzgando. Pero registra todos aquellos cambios que para el hombre significan muerte y que para ella tan sólo son una falta de felicidad, de abundancia y de seguridad. Sin embargo, a la ladilla no se le escapa, como sucede al hombre, que tales cambios son un destino común. No podría ser, en realidad, de otro modo, ya que para provocar la situación grotesca hace falta que se conozca lo que el hombre piensa de sí mismo, de modo que pueda ser ridiculizado mediante la inversión paródica. Landolfi crea este tipo de escritura porque no organiza el espacio y el tiempo en función de modelos rígidos y definitivos. El personaje landolfiano no está encerrado en tales esquemas, no está obligado a vivir el tiempo que le ha sido concedido entre un pasado y un futuro predeterminado en el cual tiene

que cumplirse. El tiempo que vive es un presente no teleológico sino fruto de la interacción de su pasado y de su futuro.

Este personaje habla por sí mismo y no es vehículo de la ideología de su redactor: no expresa verdades predeterminadas, manifiesta su propia personalidad, su individualidad de personaje enunciatario. No aparece definido psicológica, social o ideológicamente, sino que su configuración emerge a partir de las relaciones que establece dentro de la narración. En definitiva, el autor no se sirve del personaje como trámite para armonizar sus propias tensiones éticas y estéticas; habla con el personaje y no del personaje, al tiempo que respeta la diversidad que caracteriza a cada uno y que hace que su relación sea significativa relación de interés y, por tanto, de conocimiento recíproco, no de control demiúrgico (Bachtin 1968: 41).

Este modo de proceder garantiza un irresistible humor grotesco, pues la voz de la ladilla no es homologable a la del hombre, y ambas no se confunden en ningún tipo de síntesis superior. La ladilla ve el mundo donde vive de un determinado modo, y es este determinado modo de ver el mundo, más que la ladilla como individuo, el que provoca la evidencia de qué ridículo es este modo humano de ver el mundo. En definitiva, la ladilla no mira nunca desde un punto de vista superior, no se presenta como un ente que sabe, que entiende y comprende más que los demás entes que figuran en la narración. De este modo, permite coexistir los significados opuestos y el hombre, que aquí resulta burlado, no es en ningún caso ridiculizado con desprecio o con un franco sarcasmo.

De este modo Landolfi rechaza las reglas del juego: no confía en la palabra humana y, para él, ni siquiera en el lenguaje se cumplen todas las posibilidades de lo cómico, sino en la tensión frustrada hacia lo que no se es, hacia lo diverso de sí mismo. En el caso que nos ocupa, la ladilla puede quedar tal como es: diversa, sin la angustia de una necesidad imperiosa por crearse una identidad mediante una relación jerárquica con todo lo demás. Será la mirada interesada que le dedica al hombre la que le permitirá observarlo en una ridícula actitud de juez. El hombre, de hecho, no se da cuenta de que es él mismo y, al mismo tiempo, es también otro, que sus palabras interfieren y son condicionadas por las del otro. No se da cuenta de que esta negación de sí mismo no implica la integración espiritual del inferior en una totalidad superior y absoluta.



Así pues, la ideología no se constituye como núcleo aglutinante del relato, que más bien avanza siempre sobre materiales bajos y finitos, nunca mediante elementos de ideario alto e infinito. Desenmascarar la ideología es la labor del acto de comunicación en su realización misma, e implica la afirmación de la verdad inmanente del relato, no mediante relaciones de tipo pseudológico-deductivas, sino mediante la serie de interacciones entre los personajes. El resultado de este desenmascaramiento es nuevo mundo posible hecho de palabras. Y es importante que la palabra pierda la rigidez de la seriedad y se dinamice en el discurso, así como que la palabra definitiva no sea pronunciada.

Los hechos narrados en este relato no aparecen ordenados por un narrador; son presentados dramáticamente mediante la palabra narrativa de la ladilla, a la que se amolda el autor, pero sin identificarse necesariamente en ella, dejándola interrelacionarse con la de los demás personajes. La ladilla no tiene por que desempeñar un papel privilegiado, deja a los otros la iniciativa de decidir por ella y asume una actitud pasiva, y de esta manera alcanza su conocimiento del mundo. No es el artífice de sus acciones, el mundo dispone de ella y los hechos la toman por sorpresa imponiéndose según las leyes de la casualidad. Ni se espera nada de ella ni se le pide nada; ella, sin embargo, adquiere conciencia del mundo, y al activar su conciencia proyecta sobre aquél una mirada crítica e indiscreta, testigo, aun sin participar en los intentos de dominarlo, pues le resulta demasiado extraño como para juzgarlo, incomprensible.

### **La estética di Landolfi**

En el relato predomina el humor porque su narración no se basa en una clasificación de las diferencias que identifican, sino que supera las diferencias reconociéndolas coexistentes, bajo la forma de contradicción en cada uno, aunque sea con combinaciones peculiares. El ser que se genera mediante este proceso no es cómico ni trágico, sino humorístico, es decir, mantiene la profundidad de la figura trágica sin presentar la sencillez de la cómica; es inobjetivable, pues se distancia de cualquier modelo de base con el que podríamos clasificarlo. A

pesar de ello, el sujeto enunciador, en nuestro caso la ladilla, aun siendo difícilmente objetivable, se puede definir a partir del hecho de que es capaz de sentir la duda y el escepticismo. Esto no significa que debemos renunciar a la idea de poder obtener un perfil del personaje, antes bien, éste se va delineando siguiendo los movimientos de su conciencia. Tales movimientos, en este como en tantos otros relatos landolfianos, llegan hasta la blasfemia y la apostasía, manifestaciones verbales muy serías que, sin embargo, son desenmascaradas mediante la risa que provocan las palabras de la misma ladilla: la cautela con la que ésta niega que allá arriba exista alguien que nos escucha se presenta como una mentira que se dirige el Yo a sí mismo, en un intento de alejar una verdad no conveniente. Negarse la posibilidad de acceder a la fe en la existencia de Dios es, en nuestra cultura, condenarse a refundar el sentido de la propia existencia. Se trata de una labor inabarcable, prometéica, destinada casi seguramente al fracaso. La verdad es que negar a Dios es negar la necesidad humana de consolación; negar esta necesidad es mentirse a sí mismo y esta mentira suena de un modo siniestramente grotesco, sobre todo para quien la pronuncia.

La mentira de la ladilla, tan humorísticamente metafísica, consiste precisamente en la cautela con que afirma que no cree que allá arriba exista alguien que nos escucha. No pretendo poner a prueba su buena fe o defender la tesis de que allá arriba exista verdaderamente alguien que nos escucha. Tan sólo deseo resaltar — analizando la forma en que se presenta la mentira — por qué se puede producir un auto-desenmascaramiento que nos induce a experimentar un sentimiento de compartir de aquel dolor existencial que puede determinar la exigencia de enmascararse. Afirmar que no se cree en algo no es negar su existencia, y si algo puede existir es también posible que se produzca la creencia correspondiente. Se trataría, pues, de un problema de esperanza, y la caridad impone que no se niegue la esperanza ni siquiera a una ladilla.

Ninguna esperanza se puede justificar lógicamente, ni se puede valorar como verdadera o falsa; sin embargo, queda como un modo de refutar una evidencia demasiado dura de admitir. Los hechos, al menos, no se podrán refutar dos veces seguidas, porque, si no, hará su aparición la mentira, que es aquí una reducción del contacto entre el yo y el mundo, que se basa en falsos presupuestos de ignorancia de los

hechos del mundo. Respecto a éstos sería éste el modo de intentar conservar cierta libertad, si bien la adquisición de la conciencia de la propia ignorancia de los hechos del mundo presupone un anterior conocimiento de éstos. He aquí el por qué las palabras de la ladilla se vacían, el suceso pierde transcendencia, de modo que, cuanto más cómicamente las palabras resultan vacías, más se presenta como transcendente el suceso, más serio y pleno. El enunciatario hace exorcismo grotesco de esta plenitud seria y transcendente — en este caso de la muerte — sin reírse nunca en el fondo de lo que dice. Tampoco cree en la posibilidad de que sea incurable la enfermedad que diagnostica a partir de la mirada que el hombre le dirige: la soberbia. La enfermedad es, pues, la condición que permite la justificación a sí mismo del propio malestar, respecto a sí mismo y respecto a los demás. El diagnóstico no niega al hombre la posibilidad de lograr la salud, que consistiría en la total justificación-aceptación de sí mismo. Ello no implica necesariamente el respeto de una norma, sino más bien la admisión de las propias necesidades; es decir, superar el estado en el que la salud es considerada como el emplazamiento dentro del respeto de una ley y de un orden generales determinados donde poder aceptar la vida como algo positivo e indiscutible. Estado que se considera de locura o debilidad: dudar de lo que aparece presentado como si fuera en un cierto modo, porque no podría ser de otro modo, y por el que se justifica la condena y persecución de todo aquello que no aparezca presentado como supina, acrítica y dócil aceptación-persuasión (Guglielmi 1986: 44-45).

Este tipo de salud es muy variable y la voluntad de saber puede ser un virus letal. Hace falta resguardarse del conocimiento, dado que puede implicar una perniciosa infección, que la salud se puede perder en cuanto se pongan en duda las creencias en las que se apoya, creencias que funcionan como anticuerpos mágicos. A tal fin no es necesario no saber, sino hacer como que no se sabe. Y si es cierto que este tipo de concepción de la salud se basa en la cancelación de la enfermedad mediante la eliminación del síntoma, entonces analizar la salud, en el intento de apropiarse de ella, se convierte así en una enfermedad. En definitiva, la mentira se prefigura así como una medicina.

La ladilla no afirma o niega su propia salud, porque no conoce la enfermedad, y la muerte para ella no es sólo un momento determinado

del ciclo cuya repetitividad le resulta evidente. Los otros momentos precisos de su vida cíclica fueron vivir con felicidad, comer con abundancia, reproducirse sin temor a enemigo alguno. Y el hecho de no negar o afirmar su propia salud le ahorra una paradoja: su vida es a un tiempo interior y exterior; participamos de ella a través de su palabra, que no servirá para producir la serie de coartadas normalmente necesarias para lograr el objetivo de la salud, aun cuando no se consiga superar el estado de la enfermedad. Y la enfermedad, paradójicamente, no se puede superar de verdad, ya que creer que uno lleva consigo los signos de cualquier enfermedad, de cualquier pecado original, acaba siendo el lugar en el que buscar y encontrar justificaciones a las demoras y a las transgresiones que nos concederemos y a las que no estamos dispuestos a renunciar.

Siendo una convicción, la enfermedad es, en cierto modo, la salud: aunque la salud constituya el éxito y la enfermedad el fracaso, ambas se someten a una ley por la cual el único que hace oír su voz con una postura dogmática y autoritaria es quien triunfa. Pero esta tragedia puede expresarse de forma cómica, a través de una representación que, al contrario, atribuya el éxito al inepto y el fracaso al que es hábil, traicionando en cualquier caso las expectativas de consecuencialidad y desmintiendo las reglas sobre las que se basa el buen gobierno del mundo. En nuestro cuento/nuestra representación, la ladilla asume el papel de protagonista y se erige en modelo de sabiduría para el hombre, ya que ha quedado interrumpido el curso normativo de las cosas. La ladilla viene ennoblecida a través de una momentánea exaltación físico-metafísica, y es sólo la mirada de superioridad del hombre la que alude a las connotaciones inmundas que se le asocian. Esta nueva situación podría darse por buena/el nuevo estado podría consolidarse como cierto y constituir un nuevo patrimonio cognoscitivo; lo que es una momentánea exaltación físico-metafísica puede absolutizarse y convertirse en algo serio. Comenzaría entonces, a partir del axioma "el hombre-mira-con-actitud-de-superioridad", un proceso de reorganización que difícilmente llevaría al debate del problema de fondo de la posibilidad o no de que en este mundo existiese un cierto orden. Y el problema, al quedar sin debatir, se resolvería identificando vida y enfermedad, por un lado, y curación y muerte, por otro (ibid. 82).

De esta manera se llegaría a identificar el mejor de los mundos posibles con la ausencia de mundo a buscar la salud — la erradicación de la enfermedad, es decir — a través de la muerte, que nunca deja en el pensamiento occidental de ejercer su poder de atracción. Estaríamos así frente a uno de los círculos viciosos de los que parece difícil salir y que en nuestra civilización produce el constante aplazamiento de la solución de los problemas.

Sin embargo, Landolfi no fuerza la naturalmente sana índole de la ladilla y su ennoblecimiento no se desarrolla en reificación ontológica, sino que queda el simple enfoque de un personaje, es decir un fenómeno funcional a la narración y que no pretende crear nuevas entidades ideales. En este caso, se utiliza a la ladilla para recordarle, irónicamente, al hombre que en estas épocas más vale el sentimiento de desgarramiento del yo que el de la soberbia. Esta es la señal de que, para Landolfi, se ha madurado el proceso de emancipación del pasado simbolista y naturalista. Su elección no titubeará tampoco cuando el neorrealismo reavivó maneras compositivas ya obsoletas. Seguirá desarrollando su propio estilo más cerca de la tradición anticlasicista y antitradicionalista que los paradigmas de contemporáneos dominantes. Esta coherencia le costó la exclusión del mercado editorial y la marginación del debate crítico literario y de la investigación académica.

La emancipación, no el rechazo integral o la negación, del simbolismo y del naturalismo para alcanzar una sutil forma humorística en Landolfi se caracteriza por utilizar como material justamente lo que la literatura hegemónica considera un desecho, después de haber extraído y concentrado la esencia idealizada de los individuos de los que se ocupa. Da forma narrativa a la materialidad de la vida, a los aspectos esenciales de las cosas, descompone el orden y no recompone el desorden, experimentando la infinitud de las posibilidades combinatorias: no persiguiendo un valor estético convencional, sino el anulación de cualquier código, dentro de una forma que, muy a menudo, no llega a ser, en sí, concluida. Rompe la secuencialidad logico-temporal, asocia imágenes que contrastan entre sí y que no son similares, propone la incongruencia, la imprevisibilidad, la multiplicidad de la vida en contra de las síntesis unificadoras normalmente perseguidas en literatura. Mira desde abajo, no persigue un fin moral, sino más bien da voz a un personaje que se ríe de sí mismo y del rol que le ha tocado dentro de la narración, se ríe de la misma comedia y de su propia

imagen ridiculizada: la conciencia de sí mismo le permite reírse incluso de su propia nulidad tan éticamente digna, tan políticamente correcta...

Las palabras de los personajes puestos en escena por Landolfi no se imponen las unas a las otras y la risa individual se transforma en risa compartida: se considera ridículo el personaje, y con él se ridiculiza — subrayando la aporía a la que esta ridiculización conduce — la idea romántico-hegeliana-positivista de totalidad: la risa se hará entonces filosófica y brotará de las representaciones. No de las representaciones en sí mismas, sino de las paradójicas colisiones de distintas perspectivas.

La hegemonía de la ideología de lo verdadero ya no está reconocida por Landolfi, que recurre a la retórica para subrayar sus aporías y para parodiar los monstruos engendrados por el abuso irracional de la lógica. Este hombre que escribe frecuente los reductos del arte, porque reconoce a la estética una mayor capacidad de hablar de su propia visión del mundo y de producir significados que a la Historia y concibe el libro como un objeto que puede ser juzgado sólo por sí mismo.

El análisis de la obra de Landolfi nos conduce a proponer la hipótesis que él considera el arte capaz de producir el sentido que le falta a la Historia. Es como si lo que ocurre en la cotidianidad, aunque pueda parecer absurdo, esté dotado de una verdad fáctica que el mero hecho de acontecer le da. Lo que se produce en el campo artístico, en cambio, no está dotado de la misma verdad fáctica y justamente para compensar esa carencia se produciría aquel *surplus* de sentido que el arte tendría con respecto a la Historia.

El humorismo landolfiano, en cuanto humorismo auténtico, amplifica la estridencia de los mecanismos de la realidad, y evidencia el hecho de que las relaciones interpersonales y las ambientales, se escapan a cualquier proyecto. El proyecto de cristalizar en un orden lo que es caos se fundamenta en una idea hipostatizada según la cual el hombre es una especie zoológicamente clasificable, y en el texto analizado puede ser visto tras la actitud soberbia del punto de vista externo a la ladilla. A este personaje también, como a todos los suyos, Landolfi le ofrece una posibilidad de rebelión genuina, no exigirá nunca que el personaje renuncie a sí mismo y se reintegre al orden establecido. Lo abandona cínicamente a la ineludible y trágica

situación a la que las opciones elegidas le condenan: la artificialidad de esas situaciones no será nunca un procedimiento literario finalizado en sí mismo, sino un elemento estático, sin el cual el edificio de la narración se derrumbaría.

Así pues, del conturbante monólogo ladillesco; de la absurda y macabra representación, de la burlesca parodia del moralismo teorizante y del género sublime; de la evidente infracción de un tabú lingüístico que linda con el mal gusto, de todo esto brota un nuevo significado. Landolfi consigue evidenciar el sentido implícito en el sinsentido o el sinsentido implícito en el sentido, en perfecta coherencia con su ideología, pero sin llegar a enunciar un sistema ideológico, sin llegar a recurrir al doloroso grito expresionista, por ejemplo, y devalúa, de esta manera, significados cristalizados y autorizados, produciendo nuevos significados.

Para él ninguna representación seria puede ser confundida con la realidad por el mero hecho de ser seria, puesto que no tendría sentido plantear el problema de la relación entre verdad y representación: la distancia jerárquica de la seriedad no permite la equiparación entre arte y vida, puesto que cada lenguaje, aunque sea específico, no se escaparía de una propensión fabulatoria.

Partiendo de estas premisas Landolfi coge del léxico, de la sintaxis y de la retórica de cada lenguaje canónico, incluidos el científico y el teológico, los mismos materiales utilizados miméticamente por el realismo, pero les niega la capacidad de evocar la realidad y los trata como un simple soporte escenográfico.

Considerar reales las imágenes que mediamos culturalmente o producimos individualmente determina desdoblamientos y simulaciones, mientras que si recurrimos al pensamiento estético lograríamos desvelar los elementos teatrales de lo social, desvincular los objetos de las clasificaciones y de las identificaciones habituales, mostrar la necesidad y arbitrariedad de la cultura.

Landolfi observa la fragmentación del sujeto: a la poética de la ensimismación sustituye aquella de la destrucción de formas y esquemas preconstituidos y atribuye un papel renovado a la reflexión que puede ser espejo de las imágenes del artista, o bien componente crítico-negativa de la obra. Entiende la realidad como efecto de la actividad de reflexión en su propio hacer, sus manifestaciones inmediatas parecen grotescas y humorísticas, y él las coge y las representa.

En este relato, el autor muestra cómo el no ver depende del rechazo del observador y de su actividad sublimante. Así no es cómico en sí, sino más bien grotesco y por lo tanto no se prestaría a la ironía, a la sátira y al humorismo. Estos elementos entrarán en acción en el momento en el que se les pondrá en relación con una idea formalizada de la realidad reconocida por el buen sentido común. La idea de la realidad a la que cada uno se refiere, será comprendida después de mediaciones lingüístico-culturales, y es, por lo tanto, una verdad ficticia y convencional.

Si intentamos utilizar esa verdad para desarrollar un razonamiento consecuente, sacaremos a la luz los límites de sus fundamentos lógicos, puesto que produce locura y delirio. La actitud de recurrir a la lógica consecuente e íntegramente puede llegar a insinuar profundas dudas con respecto a los límites intrínsecos del racionalismo. Para integrar esos límites, tanto en el relato como en la vida cotidiana, es necesario recurrir a lo que carece de lógica y que, por lo tanto, es equívoco.

Lo que resulta imposible es superponer el mundo y la idea que de eso uno tiene para asimilarlos subrepticamente, puesto que la idea asimilada de tal modo al objeto al que se refiere se convierte en algo rígido y se reifica en un orden ideológico que acabará por imponerse en un segundo momento a la realidad factual.

En este caso, la ladilla evita el riesgo porque se mueve por debajo de las leyes; en cambio, su hombre-tierra del que ha vivido y el otro hombre que está juzgando los comportamientos de su congénere ya muerto, están sujetos a las leyes no escritas de la moral, que uno trasgredió y el otro se encarga de que sean observadas. Uno fornicando y el otro cometiendo el más grave de los pecados capitales de la teología católica, el de la soberbia, las transgreden. La ruina de este último está vaticinada por la ladilla, que puede decir lo que el soberbio sólo puede pensar, por estar debajo de las leyes humanas: negar la existencia de Dios. La ladilla, gracias a su ateísmo, tiene garantizada la libertad, escapa al terror y prescinde de la salvación. El hombre por la misma afirmación se condenaría a castigo eterno. La fe de uno, garantizaría a otro la posibilidad de mantener su poder a través de la usurpación, con fines aterrorizadores, de las prerrogativas divinas. El hombre, pues, es puesto frente a la verdad metafísica última por la



ladilla y, de tal manera, se le expropia de su mundo, en el mismo momento en que se alude a la existencia de otro mundo posible.

Los valores morales arraigados en el rechazo del cuerpo, valores que pretenden ser válidos y comprometedores, son objeto de burla del humorista, que los transforma grotescamente, presentándolos a través de sus personajes, como obsesiones, mitologías privadas o intemperancias del yo. No pueden servir como modelo porque no dejan de ser valores fantásticos y mistificadores: la normatividad se convierte en el blanco al que apuntar. Comunicados culturalmente y socializados, estos valores cristalizan en las conciencias y se manifiestan a través de la mentira: y en la fantasía pura, en el lugar de la imaginación de la diversidad, se pueden destruir mejor, con una carcajada, su letal poder de coerción (M. Bachtin 1968: 82).

El objeto que viene diseccionado por el humorista es virtual, y se formaría en la zona que se halla entre lo verdadero y lo falso como tercer miembro imposible, que inútilmente intenta imponerse en un mundo dominado por una lógica veritativa bimodal. Estos héroes se resisten al humorista que no reconoce los fundamentos sobre los que reposa la verdad de la existencia del personaje y, además, se opone a todas las formas de arte canónicas, y convierte cada problema de forma en un problema de contenido.

El humorismo de Landolfi, en cuanto genuino humorismo, es una experiencia individual de desenmascaramiento de las aporías a las que llegan las síntesis historicistas, del error del realismo conceptual, que consiste en dar cuerpo a las abstracciones. Su peculiar humorismo se manifiesta a través de la refutación del historicismo y a través de la propuesta de la recuperación de la libertad de la experiencia: el recurso al hecho humorístico lo adopta como expediente antintelectualista, y por su trámite se manifestará su peculiar actividad creativa que nunca acabará siendo convencional.

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## Naming the Unnamable: Black Humour in Beckett's and Orton's Plays

KERSTI TARIEN

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Black humour is a notion that is used not only in the theory of literature but also — and quite frequently — in everyday life. We all at least like to think that we will recognize humour if we come to it, but how black has humour to be to be described as “black humour”? What is actually meant when stating that the situation or phenomenon could be described as characteristic of black humour?

One of the essential qualities of the literary term “black humour” seems to be its vagueness. Almost every reference book before giving any definition remarks the elusive nature of term.

If we turn to dictionaries, we find that black humour has been defined as “the use of the morbid and the absurd for darkly comic purposes in modern fiction and drama” (*A Handbook to Literature* 1972) Then it has been stated that “black humour also called black comedy is a writing that juxtaposes morbid or ghastly elements with comical ones” (*Britannica* 1989). And black comedy is “a type of drama without affirmation, based upon the belief that nothing is to be believed and all ends are illusions.” (*Dictionary of Literary Terms* 1970, ed. J. T. Shipley).

All these definitions appear to find some common features in black humour e.g. gravity of the matter and peculiar irrelevance between the matter and the handling.

The term was coined by André Bréton in 1939 when the “Anthologie de l’humour noir” was published. Bréton did not give the exact formulation to the notion, stating somewhat vaguely that black

humour is a higher spiritual revolt against accepted values and systems (Bréton, 1992) There are 45 authors included in this anthology, among them names like Swift, Kafka, de Sade, Rimbaud etc.

Reference books usually connect with this term authors like Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, Franz Kafka, Günther Grass, Joe Orton. The notion of black humour has also been applied to the dramas written by Samuel Beckett and other playwrights of the theatre of the Absurd. The authors included in the pedigree of the black humour vary, but mostly one can find names like Aristophanes, William Shakespeare, Rabelais, Swift and Voltaire, Thomas de Quincey, Lewis Carroll, Flaubert.

These were some of the many definitions that black humour has been given by the various reference books and dictionaries. In spite of its recent identification — despite the ancient predecessors — this notion has also been an object for some substantial scholarship. After Bréton the term was, but also somewhat carelessly, applied to a group of authors, mainly of American origin. First of the many to follow was the editor of a collection of short stories and excerpts from novels, Bruce Jay Friedman, who titled the collection *Black Humor* in 1965. Among the authors who contributed to it were Edward Albee, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth, J. P. Donleavy and others. Friedman later claimed that the group had no program, no manifest, and that every writer mentioned had his special and unique characteristics and could not be collected under the same umbrella-term. Friedman's strictness-lacking definition (he described this group of writers as being "in darker waters somewhere out beyond satire") was further elaborated by Robert Scholes in 1967. Scholes identified black humour with the recurrent intellectual reaction of artists to the limitation of realism. To Robert Scholes belongs the much quoted statement that the black humorist is not concerned with the problem what to do about life but how to take it. Scholes described black humour as an universal attitude of mind, periodically emerging in the history of literature (quoted from Schulz 1975).

Max Schulz tried to narrow the range when he claimed in his monograph *Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties* (Schulz 1975) black humour to be "a phenomenon of the 1960s, comprising a group of writers who share a viewpoint and an aesthetics for pacing off the

boundaries of a nuclear-technological world intrinsically without confinement” (Schulz 1975: 5)

According to Schulz’s theory black humour is not an outcry against the complex world as black humourist is not against the world, he is not trying to criticize it, or to make it better. Our universe lacks the cohesion and unity and an ordering system. It is an urban city-world, where no one could really know who the fellow next to him could be. A human being is always alone, although trying to establish contact with other aliens but failing every time. Still, this external disorder, one could say chaos, is but as Schulz says, “a home”, for a black humorist. This kind of a depressive situation does not let the black humorist despair because he is always struggling. He is “coolly presenting individual efforts to realize oneself in relation to the outer world, with the focus less on the individual than on the bewildering trackless choices that face the individual”. (Schulz 1975: 7)

All versions of reality are mental constructs to the black humorist, nothing has intrinsic value, no principle is aprioristically truer than another. Falsity obtains only when he mistakenly assumes that one verbal construct morally or intellectually pre-empts all others. Black humorist sees life as a maze that is multiple and endless rather than unitive and conclusive.

The black humorist’s world picture could equally well be described as a Borgesian labyrinth and as an undiagnosed illness. Schulz claims that the world of black humour belongs to his compatriots. According to his concept English or German writers are peripheral to black humour because of their presupposition of “a set of social, as well as moral and ethical, values, a substantive goal toward which the protagonist progresses” as in German *Bildungsroman* or English comedy of manners. Canadian scholar Patrick O’Neill in his study “The Comedy of Entropy: Humor/Narrative/Reading” also concentrated on the theory of narrative fiction. O’Neill uses the notion of entropy as a metaphor for the crumbling of ordered systems, the breakdown of traditional perceptions of reality, the erosion of certainty in contemporary thinking.

While the notion of black humour is a bit problematic — due to this questionable blackness it has or has not got — it has been a label even too suitable to use and its application has sometimes been quite misleading. So O’Neill offers a new term — the comedy of entropy.

Entropy has an interesting connection with information theory where it could be described as disruption of information or "noise" but also as a measure of lack of information. So the forces of chance and of antichance coexist in a complementary relationship. The random element is called entropy, the agent of chaos, which tends to mix up the unmixed, to destroy meaning. The nonrandom element is information, which exploits the uncertainty inherent in the entropy principle to generate new structures.

The relation between literature and play is with a great importance for O'Neill's theory. For play, games, humour and literary discourse are seen in O'Neill's theory as depending upon the hypothesized existence of worlds alternative to the everyday world for its very existence. They are play worlds because they are hypothetical projections. They are distinguished by the observer's perception of the relationship between the hypothesized world and the real world. Humour is possible only when the observer becomes fully aware of the discrepancy between the two worlds, when his attention is focused primarily on the relationship between the ludic world and the real world.

Potential humour situations are always characterized by a perceived incongruity between the diegetic and the extradiegetic worlds. For the potential humour to be actualized, however, another level must be posited, an extradiegetic perception that "treats the perceived incongruity as a diegetic text, in which attention is focused on the incongruous relationship between two worlds". O'Neill states that both humour and literary discourse are reader-constituted, humour is in the eye of the perceiver.

These are very brief, and by no means exhaustive, descriptions of the two complex studies in black humour which share a common interest in the narratives of contemporary fiction. Here and there even the impression is given that all postmodern fiction can be described or renamed as comedy of entropy or black humour. So the term is not only vague but has also got elasticity among its qualities.

Both Max Schulz and Patrick O'Neill emphasize the role of narrator. Schulz names the blurred narratorial distinction among the narrative strategies of Black Humour. In the theory of entropic comedy the role of a narrator or a perceiver of incongruity between the real world and the fictional world gains primary importance. The

narrator's or authors interplay with various narrative levels is in the case of drama moved to a different level — that of characters or narrative agents. For drama is mimetic: what is conveyed to the reader of narrative by the discourse of the writer is in drama imitated by the gestures and utterances of an actor.

Cesare Segre has written about the shared elements of theater with narrative. He says: "The mediation of the I-writer has been eliminated and diegetic exposition dominated by the writer is absent. This does not mean that diegetic elements are not present in the theater. It is superimposed on HE, whereas in narration it is HE which is superimposed on I." (Segre, 1980) So HE elaborates the reality narrated, replacing it with a discourse, I-s (the actors) are obliged to be real and move within a stage reality. The most important difference between narrative and theater, however, lies in the fact that in theater action is realized in discourses, so discourse is a mode of action. The spectators' task is to reconstruct what has not been said or represented.

Joe Orton's plays not only make it difficult for the audience but also for the characters of the play. For it seems like each character who enters the scene, drags merrily along his or her subworld or narrative domain or reality and starts acting according to its rules. The audience laughs because there are many characters and many different worlds or realities which are the sources of confusion and collision.

The characters' subworlds lack coherence in Black Humour dramas because the narratorial blur of novels is presented as the change in the concept of character. The world-picture of black humour described by Schulz — the multiple, endless world where all possibilities are equally possible — and by Patrick O'Neill — theory of the erosion of certainty — have not left for a character of drama the possibility of possessing a distinctive self.

That is why in the world described in black humour novels or dramas the identity of a human being is in constant danger of becoming changed or modified. For even a description of a character given by another character makes the former seem to be totally changed. We can even say, the description will be a character too, and intrinsically different from the original. For this reason things get out of control in Orton's play *What the Butler Saw* (1969): it turns out that the disguising has brought to life a number of new characters and the question is how to make them disappear again.

It is equally impossible for a character to find any connection at all with the former self. For the characters are unable to fix their incessantly changing selves. It is the constant flow of identities that they are experiencing.

The character's goal in the world of black humour is not to realize the "American dream" but rather to gain self-confidence, stability and authenticity in the world where it is very difficult to understand in whose/which reality one is at the moment. The reality is only a perception that everyone has of it. This stubborn striving for certainty and stability is also the target of the black humour laughter.

Even if the character has been put into a role by somebody else it gives temporary assurance, meaning and significance to his/her life. However, this is not the "happy end" of a comedy: the character is actually in the situation that the audience considers to be disastrous. This is the case, for example, of Joe Orton's play *Loot*. In this play the action revolves around the loot of the bank robbers in the house of mourning, where the corpse and the murderers join in a macabre dance. The deceased, Mrs. McLeavy, has left behind a mourning husband and a son who happens to have robbed a bank just before his mother's death. Hal, the son, and his friend and fellow-criminal Dennis are trying to find a safe place for their loot as the police are tracking them down. The most secure place for the money happens to be the coffin. There is more criminal action going on. Namely the nurse, who took care of Mrs. McLeavy during her last days, has actually murdered her to get her place in Mr. McLeavy's house and heart. When the police arrive, undercover as a Metropolitan Water Board authority, it turns out that instead of putting an end to this show, the corrupted police officer starts helping the criminals.

The characters are shocked only by every, even the tiniest, shade of difference from the norms of decent behaviour. For example Hal does not want to undress the corpse because it was his close relative, but Hal is at the same time the one who suggest the use of coffin as a hiding place. The police officer does not want to be seen without a hat in front of a lady because "it would be discourteous", at the same time he does not hesitate to use violence and actually enjoys it. So, language and action seem to be moving in two opposite directions.

Language plays have an important role in the world of Joe Orton's plays. Although it is possible to say that "the whole play is a collage



of stereotyped banalities that pay lip service to the prevailing values of society" (Charney 1981), words are not just meaningless commonplaces but more like weapons that can also be used to influence the identity of a character. An act which attempts or manages to threaten an identity may be justified by the most common reason like the importance of considering the opinion of neighbors, society, etc. Social, ethical and moral values become instruments of those who use them in the opposite way — not like in German *Bildungsroman* but to gain through the principles, which so far have been considered good and useful in society, the goal which the audience usually defines as a crime. "The bad" will not be punished, "the good" ones are those who suffer in the end.

When everyone in *Loot* seems to be involved in some kind of criminal action, we can still find one law-abiding citizen — Mr. McLeavy. He is referred to as "such an innocent" man, who is not familiar with the ways of the world. Finally is he the one who will be arrested and it is suggested that he will also be murdered in prison.

All the characters of *Loot* are driven by some desire. For the criminals, oddly enough, it is the desire for decency, some sort of respectability. Behind that struggle for a *comme il faut* life we will of course find financial desires: the nurse wants to marry a wealthy man, the police officer wants fame and money. It seems that Mr. McLeavy is the only one who has not got any plans at all. He is relying on the suggestions and orders of other characters: e.g. when should he marry again, how long should he mourn his wife etc. McLeavy gets himself arrested because he innocently believes that behind decorum there really exist good will, honesty and fair play. In fact, the expressions like "people expect this", "people will talk", and "we must keep up appearances" not only create the actual code of behaviour but also rule the world of the characters of *Loot*. That is why *Loot* is a good example of a peculiar usage of language, for there we can clearly draw the line between those characters who command and understand this jargon full of commonplaces and the characters who fail to get the meaning, because they mistakenly believe that spoken words possess a subtler and deeper significance.

Martin Esslin sees Orton's most serious shortcoming in not having "any positive creed, philosophy or programme of social reform (Esslin 1981). What Esslin disapproves of in Orton's plays is what Max

Schulz considers the main characteristic of Black Humour. While there is no striving for social reform, no belief in a better or improved future for mankind in Black Humour, there also is no desire to tell through characters voices how this world should be run.

In Joe Orton's play-world there is so much going on that any attempt to summarize it fails. In Samuel Beckett's oeuvre we will find an elaborately constructed universe, every work giving a complex structure of metaphors describing the relationship between a human being and his world. At first glance it is even hard to see how the notions like comedy or humour could be associated with the cold and, one could even say inhuman, atmosphere of Beckett's plays. For this is the world where one has to face the fact that communication is destined to fail and because of this loneliness is mankind's fate. Not only is it impossible to know another human being, it is extremely difficult to define oneself as a coherent and constant, unalterable personality. But man, desperately trying to make sense in the senseless world, pursuing his quest without a realizable goal, is... funny.

One device for producing a comic effect is the **seriousness**, the punctilious carefulness with which the pursuit of the characters has been described. This minute strictness, a comical striving for accuracy that constantly refutes the confident statement just made. Peter Bürger has compared this seriousness to an earnestness of a clown who juggles with an egg with seemingly meticulous carefulness but lets it drop after all. (Bürger 1982).

The powerful image of the loss of identity is old Krapp from the play *Krapp's Last Tape* (first performed in 1958), who is listening to the tapes systematically recorded throughout his entire life. For it is not the existence of a human being that has been questioned here but the existence of an unalterable identity that stretches back to the person's past and connects it with the future. In his essay on Proust Beckett wrote that "individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time" (Beckett 1960: 15).

Krapp has even got a technical device for storing his self-portraits and self-commentary: the tape-recorder.

The characters in Joe Orton plays end up representing certain types, e.g. corrupted policeman, mad psychiatrist accusing everybody

else of madness etc. In Beckett they portray more likely the Humanity itself — a whole reservoir of types. Beckett uses isolated moments in time (sections stored on Krapp's tapes), which are seemingly insignificant but actually help to put together a coherent individual. But as the connection between the individual episodes and a larger whole remains unverified, it is impossible to put the pieces together. Almost all Beckett's characters (Krapp among them) have a compulsive need to express themselves. Krapp tries to tell stories in order to link the two kinds of self-awareness: the past and the present one. For Krapp is listening on his 69th birthday to the tape he recorded 30 years ago. Another former or still younger Krapp, who must be 28-29, is evoked in the narration by a 39-year-old man. The identification of the present Krapp (69 years old) with the former ones causes problems. Not only have Krapp's dreams, ambitions and plans changed, there are misunderstandings even on the vocabulary level. Krapp has to look up in the dictionary the word "viduity" he once used (Beckett 1965: 18).

Keeping a diary is in itself certainly not a humorous action. What produces here the comic effect is the attempt or belief that the ungraspable is within reach, could be captured and the essential meaning of existence revealed. Krapp observes his past selves with amazement. One of the most significant feeling of his 39th year is a memory of holding a black ball. He was then sure that the feeling would never evade him, but actually there are no memories left. Krapp who keeps saying that he is glad that the misery, the youth, the other selves are past and unreachable is deceiving himself. At the end of the play, while listening once more to the tape, he hears himself saying: "Perhaps my best years are gone (---) But I wouldn't want them back." (Beckett 1960: 28). According to the stage directions, after this statement the motionless Krapp keeps staring before himself. He has just heard an affirmative statement that he knows is not true.

The expectation that outside the mourning house in *Loot* or outside Krapp's den there is something certain that will provide the much needed and feared stability, is false. In the world of black humour it is deceitful to think that it is possible to be able to name and thus master the mysteries of the self and the world, that naming the problem means solving it. The fact that naming is impossible is acknowledged

with horror, but the situation is endurable when the humour, even though black one, has been adapted to it.

Martin Esslin has said that "Beckett's dramatic oeuvre, however dark its subject matter, is essentially comic, black comedy, tragicomedy, but ultimately comedy... (---) Beckett looks at the world and at himself in a mood of savage black humour, gallows humour in the true sense of the word, aware of the inevitability of death and the eternal elusiveness of human identity which turns each consciousness into a split self — an observer who is constantly observing himself as his own object of observation." (Esslin 1985).

Patrick O'Neill claimed that humour is reader-constituted. This means that in order to actualize a potentially humorous situation there has to be a perceiver: a reader or a spectator. Beckett then anticipates it by showing the audience the possible reaction — this gallows humour with which his characters acknowledge their situation in the world.

These Joe Orton's and Samuel Beckett's plays date back to the period of the 1950s and 60s, when postmodernism emerged in world literature. Beckett and Orton are authors whose names have often been associated with the notion of black humour — one cannot really say, though, that their humour is exactly similar. In fact they seem to have moved in two opposite directions: Orton to endless multiplicity and Beckett to extreme minimalism. When in Orton's farces the identities have been created by other characters from outside, then in Beckett drama it is to the skull of a human being that this incessant flow of identities has been confined.

I have not touched upon the question of direct influences here, for example of Beckett on Orton, but have merely tried to describe the use of black humour in these plays, concentrating not only the juxtaposition of the ghastly and morbid elements with the comic ones but more on the changed concept of characters. The case of the confused identities reaches back to the "play in play" type of dramas. Here, however, we have been dealing with something that goes farther than that: the characters are unable to obtain a fixed identity. Moreover, it has been put under the question if there exist any permanent or durable qualities. This is why naming is so difficult. In Orton's plays it causes trouble and confusion, while in Beckett's plays it is altogether unthinkable. The audience has been left only with one certain fact: at least the actors who are conveying these images are real.

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## El funcionamiento de lo grotesco en la literatura mexicana

JULIETA HAIDAR,  
MARÍA DE LA LUZ SEVILLA GONZÁLEZ

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*La Catrina* de José Guadalupe Posada

### Introducción

En este trabajo, nos enfrentamos con la problemática de repensar lo grotesco en la actualidad, a fines del siglo XX y del milenio y de explicar su auge en la producción artística mexicana y en general. Por los objetivos de este artículo, no podemos considerar las manifestaciones de lo grotesco en la semiótica visual pictórica, lo que sería muy

interesante por su peculiar presencia en la producción de dos artistas plásticos mexicanos, como son José Guadalupe Posada, artista del grabado y José Clemente Orozco, uno de los pintores más representativos del muralismo en México.

Por lo anteriormente expuesto, nos limitamos a analizar el funcionamiento de lo grotesco en la obra de tres autores mexicanos representativos: Salvador Novo (poeta, ensayista, cuentista y cronista de la ciudad); Rosario Castellanos (ensayista, cuentista y poeta) y Juan José Arreola que ha sido definido y reconocido como uno de los mejores cuentistas contemporáneos.

### Problemáticas analíticas

El desarrollo de una reflexión teórico-metodológico sobre lo grotesco presenta muchas divergencias y discusiones principalmente para establecer las características de este funcionamiento estético, con el objetivo de diferenciarlo de otros como el absurdo, lo fantástico, la ironía, el humor, etc. Por lo tanto, tuvimos que recurrir a varios autores, tanto los ya clásicos, como Mijail Bajtín y Wolfgang Kayser, así como otros más contemporáneos para intentar llegar a una posición más clara sobre este fenómeno, que tiene ya una larga vida, con variaciones y repuntes en algunas épocas, como la del romanticismo y actualmente en las últimas décadas del siglo XX.

En efecto, existe un gran dificultad para definir lo **grotesco**, por su polisemia. Más allá de presentar una trayectoria histórica de los cambios semánticos del concepto, que tan rigurosamente sintetizan, en base a varios autores, De Diego y Vázquez (1996), nos interesa detenernos en algunos elementos analíticos que proponen y que ayudan a explicar y entender mejor estos funcionamientos. Muchos estudiosos de lo grotesco aceptan la propuesta de Kayser (1964) sobre su etimología: viene de 'gruta', al encontrarse en el siglo XV unos extraños frescos bautizados como 'grottesche'. Este origen del concepto lo remite a la dimensión de lo subterráneo, de lo misterioso, de lo malo, de lo oscuro. Sin embargo, Castro Morales (1996: 114-115) denuncia la ausencia de una teoría estética de lo grotesco, lo que ha dificultado su análisis. En realidad, según este autor, detectar los rasgos, los recursos formales

afines a lo grotesco — como las técnicas de reducción, exageración, o caricaturización — no son suficientes para dar cuenta de este fenómeno.

El funcionamiento del grotesco presenta una dinámica propia, que casi hace imposible su delimitación y ubicación dentro de cualquier parámetro, justamente porque su rasgo más fuerte es el de escapar a todos los cánones, de ir contra las reglas en todas sus dimensiones, lo que constituiría una primera característica. Lo esencial de lo grotesco, según Urrutia (1996), radica en la transgresión, en la destrucción del lenguaje por la manipulación de las formas. Lo grotesco, al romper con las reglas, con los cánones, obliga a concebirlo como un campo de sentido totalmente abierto, como una **semiosis infinita y peculiar**.

Tal dimensión de lo grotesco, presente en la vida, en el arte, en todas las prácticas socio-culturales, lo transforman en un fenómeno trans-histórico, transcultural, transsocial, transestético. En este sentido, preferimos plantear que existen **funcionamientos grotescos** en las obras que analizamos, más que concebir a lo grotesco como un género literario, ya que esta categoría implicaría obedecer a reglas, lo que se opondría a su misma esencia.

Algunas definiciones, que lo consideran como el campo del caos, del desorden, de la aberración, de la exageración, de la deformación, dificultan en términos operativos separarlo de otras expresiones artísticas, como el surrealismo, el expresionismo, el humor negro, el cubismo, entre otras. Sin embargo, mientras que la sátira y la caricatura deforman solo para corregir y moralizar, remitiendo a la perfección, lo grotesco como categoría estética no persigue objetivos moralizadores, ni la perfección. Como ejemplo de esto, están los planteamientos de Barrera (1996: 82):

La monstruosidad, la deformación de la naturaleza humana, constituyen aquí uno de los principales elementos de la estética grotesca.

La excesiva fascinación por el estudio, por la producción y la recepción de lo grotesco constituye una problemática interesante a considerar. Una posible explicación es porque este funcionamiento está presente en nuestra cotidianidad, pero de manera inconsciente y esto explica también su presencia en la literatura, en el teatro, en la pintura, en la escultura, entre otras producciones artísticas. Reconocer la posibilidad del grotesco en la vida misma, es aceptar la situación ambi-



valente, incongruente de la condición humana, de la propia historia de la humanidad (mejor dicho, de la deshumanidad) con la cual nos enfrentamos en estos momentos. Kayser (1964) advierte que “lo grotesco es el mundo distanciado”, en el que las cosas raras o chocantes pueden crear un efecto de risa o de comicidad, pero a su vez crean el horror, por su misma probabilidad.

Otra explicación de la emergencia del grotesco en el mundo moderno se encuentra en De Diego (1996: 138–139), quien reflexiona sobre este tema desde la categoría psicoanalítica de la perversión, que emerge con mayor fuerza con la decadencia de la burguesía, de la misma humanidad desde muchos siglos. El erotismo y la muerte en sus manifestaciones más grotescas son productos de este imaginario decadente. Para huir del aburrimiento decadente, de la neurosis, se trata de buscar el desequilibrio, lo anómalo. La perversión sádica deja la huella de los nuevos valores decadentes: lo horrible, lo grotesco, lo mórbido.

En efecto, lo grotesco hace emerger una reflexión contrapuesta a la cartesiana. No es el orden, lo racional lo que define la condición natural del mundo y de los seres humanos, sino que como el caos siempre está y se hace presente a cualquier momento los seres humanos procuran desesperadamente reestablecer el orden. Esta tensión se resuelve, de alguna manera, con lo grotesco que produce una orientación diferente en la búsqueda del orden y logra con sus dispersiones, tensiones y contradicciones producir momentos de catarsis tanto con la hilaridad como con el horror. Esta cualidad explica no solo el interés por su investigación, sino también su presencia en las prácticas cotidianas y artísticas.

La falta de armonía, lo caótico, lo exagerado, lo deforme, lo extravagante, lo anormal produce en los receptores varias sensaciones: de extrañamiento, de risa, de horror, de repulsión.

Estas diversas recepciones conducen a lo inconsciente y hacen posible que los sujetos logren verse como seres humanos oscilantes entre el orden/caos, lo cómico/lo trágico, lo normal/ lo anormal; permite al sujeto darse cuenta de su contradicción (cf. Urrutia 1996). El estereotipo de esta situación es la demencia, tema muy recurrente en lo grotesco, campo semiótico de la oscilación entre sentidos contradictorios y opuestos, que dan cuenta de la situación trágico-cómica de la humanidad. De ahí, que podemos postular como característica básica del grotesco, la coexistencia de sensaciones y sentidos contradictorios.

Lo grotesco, en un sentido más general, puede considerarse como un principio de desarmonía, un subgénero de lo cómico, una categoría estética y una concepción del mundo. Por lo anterior, la enumeración de las características propias del grotesco constituye una lista abierta que abarca: lo monstruoso, lo indescriptible, lo indecible, lo incoherente, lo fantástico, lo extraño, lo subversivo, lo exagerado, lo deforme, lo trágico, lo cómico, etc.

Como categoría estética moderna, lo grotesco aparece en el siglo XVIII cuando se lo considera como una desviación de lo clásico, como la dimensión de la comicidad, del desorden. Pero para Todorov (en: De Diego y Vázquez 1996), al contrario, lo grotesco se ubica en los inicios de la estética moderna, lo que se hace más evidente en el XIX, con el romanticismo.

La producción semiótica grotesca crea un imaginario colectivo en varias dimensiones: en **la espacial**, son los subterráneos o sus homólogos; en lo **temporal**, lo nocturno o la oscuridad; en **los personajes**, animales salvajes, siniestros bestiales, seres híbridos, criaturas monstruosas, diablos, fantasmas; en **su estilo**, la oscilación entre el humor y lo trágico (cf. De Diego y Vázquez 1996).

Ampliando estas propuestas, están las de Pérez Pérez (1996: 89-90) quien plantea la necesidad de precisar este universo imaginario. Presentándose como deformación hacia lo monstruoso, lo macabro, lo cruel y lo cómico, al mismo tiempo el grotesco se construye como una estética de la yuxtaposición, en la cual siempre predomina una voluntad de transgresión, de provocación, en un proceso de subversión estética. (A nuestro juicio, no es propiamente una subversión estética lo que ocurre, sino otra estética fuera de lo bello, de lo sublime). Lo grotesco constituye una estética del desbordamiento, porque en él se conjugan varios códigos opuestos, para romper con el código de lo sublime.

En su estructura profunda, lo grotesco contiene lo canónico contra el cual se arremete en toda su producción. Este planteamiento encuentra determinada similitud en lo que propone Basáñez-Ryan (1996: 30):

cualquier ámbito espacio temporal puede servir o estar capacitado para establecer las condiciones de posibilidad para la generación (ocultamiento, oscurecimiento de partes de la realidad), así como para la aparición (iluminación de lo oscuro y liberación de partes de la realidad) de un fenómeno grotesco.

En lo grotesco, se puede encontrar muchas veces una sintaxis lógica y una significación absurda. Lo anterior nos introduce en el problema de la dimensión formal y de contenido de estos funcionamientos, aunque sepamos claramente que no se pueden separar. Con el riesgo de equivocarnos, planteamos que el soporte semiótico de lo grotesco se encuentra más en la forma que en el contenido. En la dimensión de la expresión, como tendremos oportunidad de ejemplificar con los análisis, lo grotesco privilegia (De Diego y Vázquez 1996) no los cánones arquetípicos de la representación del cuerpo, sino las protuberancias, los orificios exagerados y se concede mucha importancia a los procesos digestivos articulados a los sexuales, etc. El cuerpo grotesco por su deformidad, exageración, aberración, monstruosidad se evidencia mejor en las producciones visuales.

Otro aspecto, que merece mención aparte, se relaciona con el cómico grotesco, frente a otros tipos de humor. Lo cómico se articula directamente con una teoría de la risa, que ya tiene bastante aportes, desde el famoso texto de Baudelaire. Por todo lo expuesto hasta el momento, en realidad la risa grotesca, la comicidad grotesca no se homologa con la risa espontánea, justamente porque como hemos enfatizado varias veces, lo grotesco es una estética de la oscilación entre lo trágico y lo cómico, entre lo normal y lo aberrante.

En relación con lo anterior, Zamudio (1992: 70) plantea que sigue vigente la polémica en torno a la legalidad moral de la actitud humorística en la vida y la literatura. En realidad, la polémica tiene como trasfondo lo racional, ya que con el humorismo se rompen las normas establecidas, se entra en el terreno de lo sancionado.

La risa como fenómeno artístico, según Domenella (1992: 85) ha preocupado siempre a los estudiosos de estética por su dificultad en aprehenderlo y sistematizarlo. Lo cómico supone una voluntad de hacer reír y comprende el conjunto de técnicas empleadas con dicho objetivo en diversas semióticas: literatura, pintura, música, etc. Marcos Victoria (en este texto: 85-86) sostiene que el reino legítimo de lo cómico es lo "breve, lo fugaz, lo instantáneo, donde lo trágico solo penetra con tiento y temor, es no tomar en serio, y es en este no tomar en serio donde lo cómico establece una distancia crítica frente a la realidad". Con lo cual, definitivamente la risa no puede tener solo una simple función catártica positiva, sino también de toma de consciencia.

En una breve síntesis analítica procuramos reflexionar sobre los varios problemas relacionados con lo grotesco, con el objetivo de poder abordar este funcionamiento en concreto en algunos escritores mexicanos.

**Salvador Novo** (1904–1974), fue cronista de la ciudad de México y tiene una visión desconcertante y agresiva sobre los personajes, los atributos físicos y las costumbres de su época. En los años setenta, sorprende a una sociedad moralista con su actitud irónica, cómica, dramática y con tópicos que hacen cuestionar a los valores existentes. Su libro, *Sátira. El libro ca...* (Novo 1978) del que tomamos algunos ejemplos, fue escrito en la última etapa de su vida, mostrando un ingenio y humor producto de la madurez que se refleja en su escritura. En su poesía donde describe una mujer vieja, chimuela y poeta muestra su punzante ironía (1978: 57):

Muestra que transportaron desde Suiza  
como vaca ejemplar y literaria;  
prolongada vejez de la araucaria  
¿crees que no tu peluca se divisa?

¿A quién vas a dejarle María Luisa,  
aquella dentadura hipotecaria  
que aplicaste a la glándula mamaria  
cuando se ataba el can con longaniza?

Tú brindaste !oh feliz! hospitalaria  
acogida en tu cueva estercoliza  
de un siglo a la oropéndola urinaria.

Tu juventud pasó como la brisa  
que el radio lleva en honda estrafalaria.  
Entre tus piernas queda una poetisa:  
(Es fulana de tal que gargariza).

Novo crea hilaridad y no sólo juega con atributos físicos, sino que también hace alusión a las secreciones, excreciones y olores, ligando de esa manera lo animal con lo humano, lo carnal con lo espiritual. Kayser (1961: 24) plantea que “el rasgo más característico del grotesco, es la mezcla de lo animal y lo humano”.

En la siguiente poesía intitulada "Crisol", que significa recipiente, Novo hace alusión a personajes que son calificados en la historia mexicana como traidores (1978: 61):

Como encuentra el gargajo escupidera,  
cieno el reptil, albergue los ladrones,  
hallaron los versíferos ramplones  
común deleite en única trasera.

Olieron la nutrida pedorrera  
de Héroes de Nacozari, y Obregones  
y Caudillos que en pautas y renglones  
el culo de Bojórquez escurriera.

Dios los crió. Y en medio del camino  
un solo arriero organizó su trino,  
que en revista mensual rebuznifica.

Gentuzas asnal, solípeda y bellaca,  
aquello en que fermenta nuestra caca  
no le llaméis Crisol que es bacínica.

El autor crea en su poesía una imagen que lleva a la risa en un primer momento y al horror al mismo tiempo, ya que produce en el lector una fuerte reacción. La tensión que se crea con los opuestos, el grado de conflicto existente y la característica de irresolución entre los **aspectos eufóricos y disfóricos**, ejemplifican la dinámica propia del grotesco, como hemos señalado.

El siguiente ejemplo se refiere a su pareja homosexual, recreando un encuentro amoroso (1978: 109):

Nos volvemos a ver. Año tras año  
soñé con encontrarte en mi camino.  
¡Sol de mis ojos, luz de mi destino!  
¿No quisieras, mi bien, tomar un baño?

Nos encontramos uno al otro extraño:  
Gordo tú, flaco yo — ¡mundo mezquino!  
Y me complace ver — ¡oh, desatino! —  
que hay cosas que no cambian de tamaño.

Te quiero como antaño te quería:  
con pasión, con dolor, con amargura,  
cual si este siglo hubiese sido un día.

Quiero corresponder a tu ternura:  
Levanta tu barriga, vida mía,  
que me voy a quitar — la dentadura.

La descripción de atributos como la fealdad, la gordura, la vejez, la calvicie, la falta de dientes, la falta de estatura etc., son retomados por Salvador Novo que juega con los valores y los tópicos imperantes, al centrar su atención también en la homosexualidad, en la prostitución y en todo aquello que agrada a la supuesta ética social.

Mediante la ironía, el sarcasmo, el horror y la burla, al final de sus poesías suele provocar en el lector, al mismo tiempo, una situación de risa y reflexión, como observamos en el siguiente poema (1978: 89):

A una pequeña actriz, tan diminuta  
que es de los liliputos favorita,  
y que a todos el culo facilita:  
¿es exageración llamarle puta?

Por mucho que se diga y se discuta  
ella es tan servicial, que cuando cita,  
las vergas que recibe de visita  
ornamenta con una cagarruta.

Cuando logra que un golfo se la embuta,  
en gritos de placer se desgañita  
y gráciles piruetas ejecuta.

Y satisfecha abrocha su levita,  
y corre al excusado y le tributa  
los górgoros de mecos que vomita.

Con la lectura de este último poema, es muy pertinente lo que plantea Kayser (1961: 513): “Igual que lo puramente cómico tampoco lo grotesco tiene nada de directamente genérico sino que es una categoría de percepción, una categoría de la concepción del mundo y de su configuración”. En el grotesco hay una disociación entre una realidad objetivada y una imagen o apariencia, que están en constante tensión, hay una conexión entre lo individual y el mundo social en el que los

sujetos están inmersos, lo que posibilita crear como plantea Kaiser-Lenoir (1977) “un universo propio de pautas éticas y estéticas”.

**Rosario Castellanos** (1971), reconocida escritora mexicana, nace en la ciudad de México en 1925 y muere trágicamente en Tel Aviv a los 49 años de edad; su muerte prematura, sin embargo, no impidió una prolifera producción literaria que abarcó casi todos los géneros. Su libro “Album de Familia” presenta claramente, en la macro-operación narrativa, el funcionamiento de lo grotesco. Este texto contiene cuatro cuentos, en los que Rosario Castellanos coloca como personaje principal versiones distintas de la mujer de la ciudad, mexicana, contemporánea, de clase media. Por motivos de espacio, nos dedicamos a analizar uno de los cuentos, ya que en los otros tres, el funcionamiento de lo grotesco es bastante similar.

En el desarrollo de la narración retrata imágenes cotidianas, que hacen surgir la risa más de una vez, pero que al mismo tiempo lleva al lector a la reflexión, creando una serie de imágenes patéticas y estableciendo varios puntos de tensión entre lo vivido (lo que es) y lo que debe ser (la apariencia).

El primer cuento del libro se llama “Lección de cocina”, en el cual describe una situación cómica, aberrante y lastimosa a la vez: la de una mujer joven, recién casada, cuya profesión es la literatura, que se enfrenta a una nueva identidad “la de ser esposa” y tener que actuar frente a los demás con el estereotipo que existe en relación al género femenino. El nudo del cuento se centra en torno al problema de cocinar una carne, con todos sus avatares, pero esto no pasa de un pretexto para reflexiones de varios órdenes sobre el matrimonio y la subordinación de la mujer. El cuento se desarrolla en primera persona, lo que permite la emergencia de muchas marcas significativas de la enunciación; además, es muy sintomático que no aparezca su nombre. Con lo cual, realmente este personaje constituye el estereotipo de una mujer urbana mexicana, de clase media, lo que se materializa en su discurso:

La cocina resplandece de blancura. Es una lástima tener que mancillarla con el uso. Habría que sentarse a contemplarla, a describirla, a cerrar los ojos a evocarla... Que me importa. Mi lugar está aquí. Desde el principio de los tiempos ha estado aquí...

... parten del supuesto de que todas estamos en el ajo y se limitan a enunciar. Yo, por lo menos, declaro solemnemente, que no estoy, que no he estado nunca ni en este ajo que ustedes comparten ni en ningún otro. Jamás he entendido nada de nada. Pueden ustedes observar los síntomas: me planto hecha una imbécil, dentro de una cocina impecable y neutra, con el delantal que usurpo para hacer un simulacro de eficiencia y del que seré despojada vergonzosa pero justicieramente.

Kaiser-Lenoir (1977) analiza esta doble realidad que los seres humanos, tanto el hombre como la mujer viven, y que en todos los casos es denigrante:

Pero la viven a partir de pautas impuestas por un sistema que a través de... sus instituciones se ha construido para sí (construyéndola para todos los hombres), una imagen de sí misma que la realidad niega, como para poder ignorar toda contradicción y de esta manera, complacerse en un reflejo imaginado y cuidadosamente construido para engañar la miseria y mantener el orden.

Se trata de una realidad objetivada pero no única, sino contrapuesta, ya que se sustenta en códigos de la ética social que modelan la "forma correcta" del comportamiento, a partir de pautas normativas, lo que por supuesto no se integra al funcionamiento de lo grotesco. Por lo cual, desde otra perspectiva se justifican la violación de estos códigos éticos impuestos desde el poder, para que los sujetos puedan tener una existencia menos patética. Como se ejemplifica en este cuento:

No nacimos juntos nuestro encuentro se debió a un azar ¿feliz? Es demasiado pronto aún para afirmarlo. Coincidimos en una exposición, en una conferencia, en un cine club; tropezamos en un elevador... Hace un año yo no tenía la menor idea de su existencia y ahora reposo junto a él con los muslos entrelazados, húmedos de sudor y de semen. Podría levantarme sin despertarlo, ir descalza hasta la regadera. ¿purificarme? No tengo asco. Prefiero creer que lo que me une a él es algo tan fácil de borrar como una secreción y no tan terrible como un sacramento.



Rosario Castellanos rescata la tensión que existe en ese sujeto femenino, esta mujer de la ciudad de México: trabajadora, intelectual que quiere romper los modelos establecidos por una sociedad hecha por hombres y para hombres, donde el matrimonio y la maternidad son elementos que sirven para someterla y anularla. La claridad de su situación hace aun más patética su existencia. Podemos observar en este texto las ambivalencias que existen y los elementos incongruentes que se dan en lo grotesco: como el de la ironía, de lo patético, de lo extravagante en una situación tan cotidiana y normal como cocinar, y lo trágico-cómico que surge de esto. Beda Allemann (1983: 385) plantea que “la ironía obtiene su cualidad específica en la transparencia de lo dicho, lo seductor es que se deja percibir otra cosa, que no se dice literalmente y en eso estriba su capacidad dialéctica y reflexiva”.

Mediante lo grotesco Rosario Castellanos traduce y trasmite la angustia del personaje y a través de la ironía muestra su doble virtud: mientras que explícitamente el discurso manifiesta un sentido, implícitamente es otro sentido paradójico el que queda y que es el auténtico:

Cuando dejas caer tu cuerpo sobre el mío siento que me cubre una lápida, llena de inscripciones y de nombres ajenos, de fechas memorables... quisiera susurrarte al oído mi nombre para que recuerdes quién es la que posees.

Soy yo ¿pero quién soy yo? Tu esposa, claro. Y ese título basta para distinguirme de los recuerdos del pasado, de los proyectos para el porvenir. Llevo una marca de propiedad... Yo rumiaré en silencio mi rencor. Se me atribuyen las responsabilidades y tareas de una criada para todo. He de mantener la casa impecable, la ropa lista, el ritmo de la alimentación infalible. Pero no se me paga ningún sueldo, no se me concede un día libre a la semana, no puedo cambiar de amo. En mis ratos de ocio me transformo en una dama de sociedad que ofrece comidas y cenas a los amigos de su marido, que asiste a reuniones que se abona a la ópera, que controla su peso, que renueva su guardarropa, que cuida la lozanía de su cutis, que se conserva atractiva... que se desvela y que madruga, ... que corre el riesgo mensual de la maternidad... y que en sus noches solitarias se niega a pensar

por qué o para qué tantos afanes y se prepara una bebida bien cargada y lee una novela policiaca con ese ánimo frágil de los convalescientes.

En este fragmento, encontramos algunas características de lo grotesco que propone Thomson (1972): a) La desarmonía producida por el conflicto de género, de clase, de la heterogeneidad; la ausencia de armonía es creada por la fusión incongruente de lo cómico y lo trágico en un mismo espacio, tiempo y personaje; b) El efecto que causa al lector, esa reacción a la tensión presente entre la risa y el horror, mantiene un relativo equilibrio en la recepción y c) La presencia de lo extravagante y lo exagerado en los atributos físicos, materiales y en las acciones del personaje.

**Juan José Arreola** (1952, 1972) es reconocido como uno de los mejores cuentistas mexicanos, creador de poesía en prosa, ensayista y sobre todo un mago de la palabra. Juega con el absurdo, con una visión cómica y trágica del hombre, produciendo un trastocamiento chocante: lo animalesco de las actitudes humanas y lo humano de las actividades de los animales: el autor juega con el orden, el desorden, con la ética, con lo inmoral. En su producción literaria podemos citar varias obras como *Confabulario*, *Palindroma*, *Varia Invención*, *Bestiario*, *La feria*, *Arte de letras menores*, *Memoria y olvido*, *Hombre, mujer y mundo*, *Poemas y dibujos*, entre otras.

'Balada' es uno de los cuentos que componen el *Bestiario* (1972), en el cual encontramos las características dialécticas a las que Thomson hace alusión: la desarmonía y el conflicto, el juego de la ironía, la exageración y el trastocamiento de dos dimensiones, supuestamente separadas, lo humano y lo bestial.

### BALADA

El gavián que suelta su tórtola en el aire y gana las alturas con el estómago vacío; el barquero que tira por la borda el cargamento y recobra su línea de flotación; el bandido que arroja la bolsa en su carrera y se salva por piernas de la fortuna o de la horca; el primitivo aeronauta que corta para siempre las amarras de su globo y saluda y

se despidе desde la canastilla agitando su sombrero de copa sobre la muchedumbre pedestre. Todos me dicen: mira tu paloma.

**Ya puede ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo.**

El que abriéndose las venas en la tina de baño dio rienda suelta a sus rencores, el que cambió de opinión en la mañana llena de estupor y en vez de afeitarse hundió la navaja al pie de la jabonadura (afuera, en el comedor, lo esperaba el desayuno envenenado por la rutina de todos los días); los que de un modo o de otro se mataron de amor o de rabia, y los que se fueron por el ábrete sésamo de la locura, me están mirando y me dicen con la sonrisa extraviada: mira tu paloma.

**Ya puede ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo.**

Mírala desde el vértice del amor propio, girando en barrena, dándolo todo al diablo, descendiendo con pocas alas y con mucho bodrio. Mírala cumpliendo con la íntima ley de su gravedad, cayendo en la piara, enganchándose en los cuernos, entrando por el hocico empedrado de colmillos, yaciendo en los lomos calientes y desnudos. Desplumada ya por los pinches, espetada en el asador del cocinero indecente; trufada de anécdotas para el regocijo de los vergantes y el usufructo de los follones.

**Ya puede ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo.**

## ENVIO

Amor mío: todas las pescaderías y carnicerías del mundo me han enviado hoy en tu carta sus reservas de materiales podridos. Náufrago en una masa de gusanos aplastados, y con los ojos llenos de lágrimas inmundas empañó el azul purísimo del cielo.

**Ya puedes tú ser del chivo, del puerco, del caimán y del caballo.**

La falta de armonía, las reacciones de extrañamiento y contradicción que se crean en los receptores son producto de la fusión entre lo cómico y lo trágico, de la extravagancia, de la exageración, que llevan constantemente de la risa al horror, pues el sujeto se siente como parte de estos funcionamientos contradictorios, al verse reflejado en situaciones limiares de la condición humana.

Como habíamos planteado al inicio del trabajo, el mundo que nos muestra el grotesco es caótico, lo que no nos es lejano, aunque produzca extrañeza, ya que refleja el mundo real, las vivencias cotidianas: en éstas se producen al mismo tiempo el horror y la hilaridad. Constantemente, se juega con la condición contradictoria humana, como se materializa en este segundo cuento "Anuncio" del libro *Confabulario*:

Dondequiera que la presencia de la mujer es difícil, onerosa o perjudicial, ya sea en la alcoba del soltero, ya en el campo de concentración, el empleo de Plastisex es sumamente recomendable...

Ahora nos dirigimos a usted dichoso o desafortunado en el amor. Le propondremos la mujer que ha soñado toda la vida: se maneja por medio de controles automáticos y está hecha de materiales sintéticos que reproducen a voluntad las características más superficiales o recónditas de la belleza femenina. Alta y delgada, menuda y redonda, rubia o morena, pelirroja o platinada: todas están en el mercado...

Tenemos listas para ser enviadas todas las bellezas famosas del pasado y del presente, pero atendemos cualquier solicitud y fabricamos modelos especiales...

Nuestras damas son totalmente indeformables e inarrugables, conservan la suavidad de su tez y la turgencia de sus líneas, dicen que sí en todos los idiomas vivos y muertos de la tierra, cantan y se mueven al compás de los ritmos de moda...

La boca, las fosas nasales, la cara interna de los párpados y las demás regiones mucosas, están hechas con suavísima esponja, saturada con sustancias nutritivas y estuosas, de viscosidad variable... Usted puede emular los placeres de Salomón; haga una mixtura con leche de cabra y miel de avispa; llene con ella el depósito craneano de su Plastisex, sazónela al oporto o al bene-

dictine: sentirá que los ríos del paraíso fluyen a su boca en el largo beso alimenticio...

Lejos de representar una amenaza para la sociedad, la venus *Plastisex*, resulta una aliada poderosa en la lucha pro restauración de los valores humanos. En vez de disminuirla, engrandece y dignifica a la mujer, arrebatándole su papel de instrumento placentero, de sexófora para emplear un término clásico. En lugar de mercancía deprimente, costosa o insalubre, nuestras prójimas se convertirán en seres capaces de desarrollar sus posibilidades creadoras hasta un alto grado de perfección (pp. 82-88).

El funcionamiento de lo grotesco en este cuento crea una sensación de extrañamiento y de acercamiento al mismo tiempo. Por un lado, se trata del objeto prohibido de la sexualidad, que sale de las relaciones cotidianas, las cuales ceden lugar a lo incomprensible, aberrante, deformante, y sin embargo no se encuentra fuera de lo que ocurre en nuestro mundo contemporáneo, supuestamente desarrollado. Lo grotesco da cuenta de esta situación trágico-cómica de la sexualidad artificial, que alcanza sus límites más refinados y deshumanizados con la cibernética, con la cual lo grotesco alcanzará horizontes todavía no vislumbrados.

Frente a la dificultad por definir las fronteras y las características del funcionamiento grotesco, nos parece poco productivo plantear subtipos en base a sus características, como el grotesco cómico, el satírico, etc., como proponen algunos autores. Después de la confrontación de tantas posiciones, nos parece que lo grotesco tiene como principal característica poder condensar varias estéticas: 1) en primer lugar, las que se sitúan fuera de lo canónico, las no normativas: lo prohibido, lo exagerado, lo deformado, lo monstruoso, lo horroroso, lo repugnante, lo perverso, lo desarmónico, lo caótico, lo extravagante, lo anormal y 2) en segundo lugar, las que siguen los cánones, lo permitido por el poder que funciona en la producción estética: lo cómico (la risa), lo sublime, lo bello, lo normal, etc. Pensamos que son estas tensiones entre polos opuestos que coexisten, y que no se resuelven porque estamos en un campo semiótico de oscilación, lo que en última instancia nos puede hacer vislumbrar una posible teoría de lo grotesco, como funcionamiento multiforme y complejo.

En síntesis, lo grotesco constituye la reproducción en el arte en general de la caricatura trágico-cómica de la humanidad, que hasta estos momentos todavía no consigue producir horizontes para su misma sobrevivencia. Y mientras esto no se resuelva, lo grotesco es un funcionamiento que continuará estando presente tanto en las prácticas cotidianas como artísticas.



*Las Masas* de José Clemente Orozco

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## **Fixing Anti-Values and Creating Alienated Illusions**

**The Grotesque in the Work of Estonian Writers Arvo Valton and  
Vaino Vahing from the Sixties to the Eighties**

REIN TOOTMAA

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### **1. The Grotesque and Reality**

At the end of the 1960s Estonian literature began to use a system of images which did not pretend to recreate reality in the forms of reality itself. Literature was looked upon as a model related to reality, with its own independence, where prevailing relationships and situations could be changed and transformed in artistic interests. In modelling reality the grotesque became one of the favourite techniques, allowing life and man to be as if "found anew", getting closer to the substance of things and occurrences, and at the same time rejecting and mocking the enemies of the ideal and warning against dangers to the individual produced by the development of a mass-oriented society.

Great changes took place in the structure of images. As the artistic principles of organization changed, conditionality grew and the description of man's inner world emerged in the foreground. The grotesque, revealed both in stylistic elements as well as in the pervading attitude of the author, penetrated above all the structures of short prose.

In Estonian short prose between the 1960s and the 1980s, Vaino Vahing and Arvo Valton excelled in relating reality in a conditional,

grotesque way. The former is by education a psychiatrist, the latter an engineer. The difference in formation has had its effect on their world conception and creative methods. As an engineer, Valton likes to construct, and to play with his own constructions. On the other hand, Vahing the psychiatrist dissects and analyzes his dissection. Generally, Vahing approaches his subject from the universal human aspect, while Valton is more interested in humanity in time.

Although this difference in orientation brings about great dissimilarities in their works, there is a much in common in their stories, too, especially in the use of the grotesque. In his letter (May 1979) to the author of this article, Valton acknowledges that his grotesques emerge from the fun of doing odd things, as if by itself. Vahing, on the other hand, has consciously created the grotesque, but he thinks he has not always succeeded in doing it. At the same time he has said that common everyday life is, for him, grotesque enough so that out of it the grotesque spontaneously springs into his works. (From a conversation with the author of this article in 1980).

Considering the differences in the works of these two writers, the following list of structures of the grotesque could be presented as an outline: 1. The grotesque of reality. The grotesque manifests itself in the open and hidden forms of reality. 2. The grotesque of mixed reality. The forms of reality are disordered: times, spatial relations, etc. Real relations of time, space, order, cause and consequence, etc. are ignored by mixing up the forms of reality. 3. The grotesque of exaggeration. It is achieved by exaggerating elements of reality, thus modifying it. There is no fantasy. 4. The fantastic grotesque. It is brought about by exaggerating elements of reality into fantastic proportions or bringing in outside elements of fantasy.

The classification given above arises as a result of studying the works of Valton and Vahing, but may be also useful in case of other writers and dealing with the grotesque in general.

## 2. The Pervading Grotesque

In the short stories of Valton, the pervading grotesque takes shape in the collection *Kaheksa jaapanlannat* (1968), where the author writes, for instance: "People are the feeders of pigs. It is possible they have

been bred by the pigs, to do that. The main function is feeding pigs." ("Aruanne") Also, several later short stories are full of similar wonderings, rich in fantasy and perception, about certain objects (a nail, a stool, etc.).

The same type of non-story without any noticeable plot can be seen in Vahing's works, too, but unlike in Valton, thoughts are aimed at more abstract issues: falsity and love. Criticism has noted that Vahing discovered disorder and lack of motivation in this world most people think of as ordered and motivated; he showed that reality itself is contradictory and grotesque. In the collection *Võõras linnas* (1980) he no longer fabulates and fancies but exaggerates aspects of life into the grotesque, manipulating with general concepts like deed, purpose, non-existence, happiness, destruction, law, etc. Interpreting phenomena through his distorting mirror, he brings out the paradoxes hidden in these phenomena. E.g.: "The real purpose of every deed would be that the deed wouldn't be needed any more."; "And happiness had to be abolished, so that we couldn't question it by talking about it."; "Law is the most primitive thing man has ever invented." ("Must päev musta tindiga")

A separate group in the writings of the two authors consists of stories criticizing the mechanization of scientific work. The scientists in Valton's short story "Kaks paari pastlaid" (1968) argue whether a poor man of the past can be defined by owning one pair of peasant's sandals, or two. In his short story "Teadlane" (1972) Valton describes a scientist completely devoted to science: from the age of 13, he has regularly measured the parts of his body and noted the functioning of his organs, analyzing the results and finding equations that should become the basis of a new branch of science; in his old age he is confronted by the problem how to measure himself at the moment of his death. To appreciate in a society of technocrats and bureaucrats the value of man — the crown of nature — Armen in the short story "Humanist" (1972) calculates the parts of human body into their equivalent in money; the basis of his calculations is the amount of useful work an organ does for its owner in his lifetime. In these stories the character starts to fight some minus-system existing in reality by means of an even worse, exaggerated minus-system; thus a new, alienated illusion replaces disillusion. In one of his stories Vahing, too, writes about a scientist behaving like a machine, an automaton,

during his lectures. An openly negative opinion is given to the machine-like style of working. The negative aspects of scientific work, their inhumanity and comicality are being exaggerated to the maximum. These are pure social grotesques containing an openly explicit message.

However, in case of the permeating grotesque it is often impossible to interpret the story in a clear-cut way. For instance, Valton, in his short story "Kuradi armuke" (1973), writes about a woman having a relationship with the Devil himself. The author has left behind the real world and created another, a new imaginary reality, where paranormality and unnaturalness have become a rule. In these stories nothing can be definitely understood, there will always be loose ends.

In some of the short stories the author participates as an objective onlooker, implying the story is fiction. In this way the writer consciously destroys the artistic reality created by himself, with the purpose of making the readers think more about life and themselves instead of accepting solutions invented and offered by others. E.g. in the short stories of the collection *Pööriöö külaskäik* (1973) he often leaves it to the reader to decide what, actually, is what — prophet or madman, murdered or murderer, whether there was a dead musician, did the witch perish or turn into something else, etc. In some of his later stories Valton literally turns to his readers, inviting them to think with the plot of the story. For instance Viitoli, the main character of the short story "Dublant" (1980), is a "man of no consequence", who on his own initiative replaces the dead body of a famous actor, finally facing the choice of being buried as actor or spoil the biggest game of his life and return to unpleasant reality. The author gives no solution, but ends with the question: "What do you think one of you would have done in such a situation?"

Discussing the subject of love and crisis in married life, Valton ends up with the absurd in creating grotesque situations and alienated illusions. Thus in the short story "Mustamäe armastus" (1978) love emerges between a man and a woman watching each other from their facing windows of Soviet-style standard apartments in box-like houses; the watching is so intense that the woman gets pregnant from it and gives birth to a child. As an explanation, the author writes: "Wasn't it the ideal marriage men sometimes dream of, to be sure of someone and, at the same time, free." The characters of the story still

feel the lack of something, of the physical touch; nevertheless, in his next story "Laternad", lamp-posts Albert and Tiina stand side by side and feel secure; it is an ideal relationship, absolute faithfulness, because they cannot be faithless to each other, being unable to move.

If Valton is more interested in noting and deforming results, Vahing shows the sources of marital drama. Already in his first stories we can find the contradiction and the grotesque of human nature; love, for instance, is expressed in a mixture of such antagonistic needs, emotions and instincts as the desire to possess, the boredom and indifference following an orgasm, the fear of losing the other, the despondency of loneliness, jealousy, self-pity, etc. Criticism has defined Vahing's heroes as characters with hypertrophied love of themselves. Vahing himself thinks that both the maker and the hero of literature must have hypertrophied mental life. The hypesthetic man has never been the object of serious literature, whereas the hypertrophied man has always been. In a longer short story of Vahing, *Lugu* (1970), the main character Kuslap is surprisingly honest: he never pretends, never plays games or hides anything, but follows his inner feeling painstakingly. At the beginning of the story he is ready to do anything to win back his love; soon he cools down, becomes jealous, then angry, even mean, and ends up sad, remaining honest with himself and others. At the same time, in the reader's mind there is the background of hidden feelings, falsity, dishonesty and common morality. The coexistence of these different levels creates the outspoken grotesque of reality.

Writing about love, Valton in his later short stories relies on black humour (also based on the grotesque: connecting what cannot be connected). Thus in the short story "Söber" lonely women make love to a skeleton; the skeleton breaks and the women fight over the bones. In addition to every possible mix-up (elements of the grotesque of reality, mixed reality, and exaggeration), the author gives the story a deformed pun: "Thus the morale: had the three women lived in unity, they could have all together caressed a complete skeleton." Or, another version of love created by Valton: a man starts to follow a woman he likes on the street, walks in her footsteps to her apartment, sleeps with her and leaves without a word. No verbal communication between the man and the woman, and no explanation by the author as to what is going on. In Vahing's "Ralli" (from the collection of stories

*Näitleja*), too, a man finds himself in an intimate relationship with a woman who acts strange. This happens after the woman's racer husband has died driving into a tree. Instead of mourning his death the woman feels relief and freedom so great that she starts a sexual relationship with the first man she meets.

Both writers have used dreams in their work, Vahing mostly as a source, Valton, usually, as a model of reality. While Vahing transforms the stuff of dreams into the actual, Valton does it the other way round — he makes reality dream-like. Because of this there is more dream-story grotesque in Valton's work. In the collection *Läbi unemaastike* the associations of dreams, distorted motivation and clumsy situations are connected with the conscious commentaries of the author; the stories themselves are emphatically mythical and symbolic. The critic Andres Langemets has suggested that the awkward situations in these stories stem from the "complicity, multifariousness, and inconstancy of the situations, and the corresponding narrowmindedness, rigidity, triviality of the main character's abstract thinking... It is the difference and opposition between the thinking mechanism of man and the depth of the systems of life." (Langemets 1976) The structure of the dream landscapes is complex: dream-like situations are blended with real ones, the plot is intertwined with long deliberations, there is a pictorial flow of consciousness, action and humour. The writer accentuates the general chaos, the incidentality of situations, the optionality of cause and the ephemerality of values. In a letter to the author of this article (May 1979) Valton writes: "Everything, even value, is temporary, local, pertaining to an individual or a group, there is nothing eternal, global (global is just a tiny bit bigger than my problem of this moment)." The stuff of dreams is life, a mishap becomes a hope, a hesitation turns into a success and vice versa. Vahing has written: "The simpleminded think we do not prepare our own dreams. Yes, we do, and up to the details!"

Thus the dream-like stories by Vahing can be reduced to reality as the background that gives birth to dreams, and as such, they are more cognizable than Valton's merry dream stories of casualness, often making the readers perceive only their lack of cognition.

The stories of the pervading grotesque are based completely on the authors' distorted sense of reality. Valton: "But of course any phenomenon has its funny, stupid, grotesque sides, and the effect of the

grotesque is created by bringing these to the fore and enlarging them” (May 1979). Vahing: “Life is so grotesque for me” (March 1980). One sees moments of grotesque in life, the other thinks life itself so grotesque. Depending on the differences in perceiving reality, the grotesque of exaggeration prevails in Valton and that of reality in Vahing.

### 3. The Grotesque in the Plot

Besides the pervading grotesque, one can also find a partial grotesque on the level of the plot in the works of these two writers. In their stories, the background is mostly the reality we all know, with an “built-in” grotesque plot to enhance and show better the message of the author.

In Valton’s works we come upon grotesque plots in his first collections already. For instance in the short story “Isabella” (1966), the behaviour of a horse is suddenly discussed at a workers’ meeting and found objectionable; it is decided that the horse should be taken on the collective’s guarantee to re-educate it. In several short stories from that period Valton depicts honest and hard-working people who never use by-ways and dishonest means; exactly this is why they fall victim to the relationships established in practical life. They are caught in the wheels of the bureaucratic and mechanistic machinery, as implied in the title of a collection *Rataste vahel* (1966). In his next collection of stories *Karussell* (1968) life is compared to a merry-go-round turning mechanically, while someone accustomed to the situation is no longer trying to stop the machinery, but keeps going round and round without a care.

It is interesting to follow the gradual forming of a grotesque plot in Valton’s short story “Rohelise seljakotiga mees” (1968). Suddenly a man appears from nowhere and begins to read a book out loud in a railway station. As this activity is not directly dangerous to the society, the man cannot be prohibited to do so. However, his action receives the alerted attention of the corresponding authorities of a totalitarian state; committees are formed to deal with the phenomenon, to struggle against spontaneous reading of books in railway stations; reading out loud is intended to be continued on an organized basis

with trained readers, etc. But the man disappears as unexpectedly as he came. With him disappears the phenomenon to be struggled against; the trained readers have to find other jobs, the rostra built especially for reading books out loud will stand useless, etc.; the dumb machinery grounds to a halt, because everything is peaceful again. Thus, by hyperbolizing the mechanical reaction of officials to an unknown phenomenon, a grotesque plot is achieved.

Analogous in structure is Valton's short story "Salmonella" from the same year. There a man who has ended up in a hospital for contagious diseases starts to fight the mindless and formal hospital system by means of a still dumber system. He demands educational political lectures from the management of the hospital, wants to organize socialist competition between the wards etc. Comical situations turn out; there is a lot of laughter and fun. But behind all this there is protest against any over-regulation that oppresses the individual. The grotesque is created by the coexistence and opposition of two minus-systems; the main character has only the choice between dumb and dumber.

A number of Valton's short stories with grotesque plots are based on the opposition of mechanical and creative thinking/communication. In the short story "Üks tund võitleva ateistiga" ("An hour with a Militant Atheist"), a propagandist-atheist endeavours to explain to a thinking person that there is no God; the strongest argument he constantly uses to persuade the other is the phrase "Believe me!"

In Valton's short stories the mechanical conception of life and the strength of habit is represented both by masses and individual characters. Many of them are so inhibited by their customary way of life and attitude of mundane consciousness that they are no longer interested in what is actually going on. If anything new is born, it is still approached according to old habitual patterns. The absurdity this inertia can lead to can be seen in Valton's short story "Tõrviku-kandja". In this weird tale a man is taken for dead to the mortuary. Awakening and not understanding where he is, he tries to wake up the dead, but they will not. The watchman who hears his shouts comes to explain to him that he is dead, has to go back to his shelf and lie still, he cannot be let out, because otherwise the watchman would have a body missing in the morning.



As Valton likes to imagine and construct, such strange situations in his short stories abound. There are grotesque plots in Vahing's works, too, but as he more often dissects reality than creates models of it in his stories, his grotesque plots are not very bold; they are rather studies of human relationships. Vahing thinks Valton mocks life by his grotesques, but life, in his view, is a much more serious game than that of grotesques.

Anyway, a game! On a certain level, in a certain sense, it surely is. In his confessions Vahing often plays with himself, too; his game is a personal one. Valton, on the other hand, mostly plays and manipulates the more universal attributes of existence. So, in different and similar ways, both shock and surprise the readers; Valton does it as a rule by playing with the thinking mechanisms of the readers, Vahing by playing on the complexes of their minds.

#### 4. The Grotesque in Character

Many grotesque characters created by Valton and Vahing belong to the structures of the pervading grotesque, being organic parts of them and thus subject to the work as a whole. A grotesque character in a work that is not entirely grotesque amplifies the one-way aspirations of the writer or is a formal method serving his need to play, a stylistic element in the pattern of a short story.

In both authors we can find somewhat grotesque characters already in their earliest works. What makes the character grotesque is bringing a character's hidden nature into the everyday morality affecting the consciousness of the reader or the micro-climate of the story as a background. For instance in a short story by Vahing "Ei tea kust tulnu" (1976) the character behaves grotesquely only when he realizes that the mechanical way of thinking has become a habit for him; after that, his actions and radical self-analysis are odd just according to the fixed commonsense patterns in the reader's consciousness. Similarly, the behaviour of the woman in "Ralli", starting a sexual relationship with any man, is grotesque only on the background of moral codes, not in itself.

In Valton's short stories "Hea inimene" and "Kalamees" (1968) grotesque characters are created by exaggerating the strength of

human nature and habit. In the first we see a man too good by his nature to say no to any requests. So he gives a helping hand to a thief and a chatterbox, advises people in their quarrels and also satisfies the fat wife of a sailor in the evenings. In the other, a man is so much a victim of his habits that he, indeed, tries to fish in a rain puddle. The characters are mild and just a little funny in their behaviour, victims of their nature, no danger to other people. Ten years later we already meet principled fanatics in Valton's short stories, intensely acting to bring their ideas into life: an anarchist ignoring traffic regulations in principle, a fanatic who has evolved a queer project of a barrel society eliminating all freedom except the freedom of thought. In these characters, opposites, ideas and reality are united, whereas no side has been labelled positive or negative. Thus these stories have an ambivalent structure of meaning, broken illusions arising from ruin.

In Vahing's works some of the most successful characters are weird artistic types finding "spiritual orgasm" in some special way: one by disturbing the intimate moments of his friends and acquaintances, the other by throwing busts or other small statues to the pavement, the third by a needlessly detailed analysis. The one who disturbs lovers' intimate moments always turns up at the culmination, causing impotence in the caught pair; the fussy analytic mostly irritates women, lacking the desire to have sexual relationships with the other sex, but enjoying only verbal invasion.

Similar strange characters are numerous in Valton's work, too. Thus a messenger announces only that he has a message; what the message is about he does not know. In the story "Tagasi" (1972) a lawyer attains natural existence by barking and growling at a bone. There are also several characters in Valton's works who achieve catharsis via creation and fear; others who get it from some absurd action, destroying energy, for instance. Valton has described characters we usually call pathological, schizophrenic. Thus one of his heroes steals books from the store, thinking it not a theft but just taking; a woman tries to persuade her partner in a casual conversation that she is not a herring. In both stories the grotesque is based on the characters' deformed usage of words.

In Vahing's works there are also characters who usually behave in normal and customary ways, but who suddenly do something crazy. Thus Katspool in the short story "Federation Proceedings" stuffs a

magazine bearing that name — he has just got — into the garbage bin in the central square of the town; very early in the morning, a doctor and his wife waltz in their nightclothes etc. The behaviour of these types, again, appears grotesque only against the background of triviality. They are, so to say, eccentrics just once; in their future there is little chance of some queer occurrence. This, however, cannot be said about most of the grotesque characters of Valton and Vahing; they are left by the authors in an endless grotesque play.

### 5. Grotesque in Metaphor and Style

The writer's attitude to reality dictates his expression; the type of the grotesque determines the style and the images. The grotesque of reality and the fantastic grotesque require an expressedly meta-logical-grotesque style.

In his polyphonic short story "Avaldus" Valton tries to define man on different levels: "He /the man/ hasn't come into being, has no function and the associations are expressed by pushing, resulting in his disintegration"; "Man is a member of society, because the monkey didn't want to be a monkey any longer but wanted to develop further and knew the law of necessity". In his later works, too, Valton has made numerous attempts to define man and life, both directly and by the grotesque.

The first story of Vahing's first collection of stories ("Kaemus", 1972) is full of grotesque metaphors. "Behind the rosewood cupboard burned the eternal fire /.../ Somebody must have spilled the garbage pail in the vestibule — floor slimy and bread forgotten in the toilet again." The title story of his second collection introduces black humour: "The people at the wedding wanted to kill me. They said they had feasted and picked quarrels with each other long enough, now was the time to kill a stranger."

Both authors also have dialogues based on distorted associations. Valton's short story "Vernanda leib" has its core in the distorted semantics of the word "bomb" and in associating it with other things based on the extreme relativity of values: "Here I have a clockwork bomb. Wouldn't you want to trade it for a loaf of bread?" — "Going crazy, nowadays. The prize of a whole bread for a mere bomb."

In Valton's works the richest in the grotesque of metaphor and style is the collection *Läbi unemaastike* (1976), where the specific nature of dreams has given the author more freedom to play games. A few examples: "I knew a boy was waited for, I came (was born) the second, the unnecessary. Perhaps on my own initiative"; "in the hall, they give a speech, talk about the importance of wakefulness, all the listeners are asleep". Mixed up are different planes and meanings of words. Just like it is impossible to be born on one's own initiative, a sleeper cannot be a listener etc. The creative nature of thought is complicated, it is hard to adequately express in words. Vahing thinks in one of his stories on the relationship of thought and language: "What meaning do the order of words and bits of sentences have, if our thoughts are fragmentary and disconnected". He finds an interesting connection between syntax and love. Both should be perfect, but just as the order of words in a sentence is seldom perfect, so is love.

The introduction of mystic and ghostly elements in Valton's works also stresses grotesque style and metaphor. In fact, his stories about reality are very similar to his dream stories. For example: "The woman's mouth sucks him strongly to herself, becomes bigger and bigger, and then slowly sucks the whole man into herself" ("Kummituste maja"); "The man drooped, became smaller and smaller. And that's how he perished. Well, maybe he didn't" ("Painduvuskatse"); "In the cracks of the wall remained the ringing laughter of a child, it glowed in the recent feelings of the stool" ("Taburet"); "On Sundays he secretly went to the race-course, changed into a horse himself for the time of the races and won at least a rouble at each race" ("Telk Harjumäe nõlval").

Vahing's confession-like stories "Kirjanik" and "Näitleja" contain grotesque metaphors of complex semantical structure. They are based on emotions and thoughts that are hard to put into words. The author has said that these can be understood as the grotesque, but in fact there is no grotesque, because these are his honest feelings, although in language they appear grotesque, for instance in the sentence: "I want to sleep with the typewriter". The author explains it: "I wonder where did this thought come from? Apparently from sitting at the typewriter, dreaming about sexual relationships with a typewriter at the time most people drive to the park near the city to have sexual relationships." In a short story, written three years later, Vahing gives his feedback to

the readers: "And anyway I am accused of compromising the typewriter in my last story, telling I sleep with it! Well, so I wrote, but is it, then, embarrassing to a machine (any machine, even a tower-crane)? As if that weren't enough they say I occasionally sleep with a kinescope, too! A taken-apart TV kinescope! I am not angry and don't want to excuse myself, because even if I sleep with a kinescope, it is a delicate kinescope of foreign make found in the stormy waves." It seems that the symbolic metaphor of a kinescope gets a wider meaning, in which the broken illusion is united with a new alienated one. In the grotesque of style and metaphor, realistic and playful-romantic elements are often blended in an organic way. Neither of the authors has a consistently grotesque style; metalogical-grotesque imagery appears side by side with autological reflection of reality. In the case of Valton, grotesque style and metaphors appear more often in his later works of romantic tendency, in Vahing they occur more evenly throughout his writings.

## 6. Summary

The structures of the grotesque in the work of Arvo Valton and Vaino Vahing have their similarities and differences. From the aspect of the specific meaning of the grotesque they have more in common on the content plane; the formal structures are extremely different, as in their relationship with reality the authors differ from each other.

Already in the early work of the two writers we can notice a significant difference in communicating the material: Vahing describes ("Reality is so manifold that it is very hard to perceive it. Some phenomena can be explained, but most of them only described", April 1980), while Valton strives to explain as well, though he does not claim his explanations are unambiguous. As the writer himself confesses (May 1979), "things, phenomena, cannot be defined unanimously".

In the work of these two writers the grotesque as a literary phenomenon serving comic, tragic or other aesthetical purposes has its origin mostly in the society (as far as human being is a social animal). It can be experienced socially and it has a social meaning. Its function

is usually social criticism. Besides the social grotesques we can observe a playful-romantic type of the grotesque emanating from human nature and universally human topics.

The works of Arvo Valton and Vaino Vahing prove that the grotesque in modern literature expresses the struggle of the individual for his ideals. It crystallizes in art by fixing and exaggerating anti-values, as well as by creating alienated illusions to balance them.

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## The Carnavalesque and Colombian Television Comedy Series

ÁLVARO RAMÍREZ-OSPINA

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There is a work on film analysis which I will partially follow in approaching some Latin American ways of telling stories as differentiated from the main stream trends in Hollywood and Europe. I am referring to the extended application of Mikhail Bakhtin's critical methods to contemporary Brazilian cinema, made by Robert Stam in the fourth chapter of his book *Subversive Pleasures*.

In this lucid historical examination of the strategies devised by Latin American writers and filmmakers "in search of a language at once accessible, innovative and deconstructive" to address their audience and their own discontent with the status quo, I have found an interesting point of departure.

By reflecting on Latin America as a peripheral, marginalized world with its reference centers of power and culture in the US and Europe, Stam agrees with other Latin American intellectuals that find in Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque the key to the specificity of Latin American cultural production. It is my purpose to bring forth some elements (drawn from my own experience and from direct knowledge of recent Colombian cultural productions) that sustain and confirm this concept.

While describing and analyzing carnival, Bakhtin found that

what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure, and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it — that is, everything resulting from

sociohierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). (Stam 1992: 45).

As it is well known in Latin America these hierarchical structures are present throughout the tapestry of society\*. Inequality is as vast as "a plain in flames" and as long as many "hundred years of solitude"\*\*. With all its corrupting consequences: violence, terror and torture.

What do people do when they have but little chance to change this oppressive system favouring and encouraging inequality? What they have always done with little success but with dignity: they resist. And this resistance takes on a wide variety of forms.

And it is here that carnival takes place as a truly yearly event (most visible in those regions where the Afroamerican component is actively present and influential) and as a force that sweats in multiple drops of everyday life expressions. And there is the carnivalesque, too. Present and disquieting, specially in those regions where real carnivals were suppressed or abolished (especially by the Roman Catholic Church). It finds expression in the people's musical and talkative nature, in their permanent flirting, in the use of political jokes as weapons, as well as in that pervading, truly dionysian daily drive for dancing.

But there are other expressions of this spirit of carnival within the media environment, in this highly controlled sociohierarchical system. They are possible because several creators have chosen to work inside "the system" in order to use its loopholes. That explains the appearance of films and some long running television series where individuals and groups of creators use carnivalesque elements in their productions, as a means of expression and as a joyful celebration of resistance. This phenomenon, to be found specially in the last decade, comes in part as a result of disenchantment because of the defeat in the revolutionary

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\* It is born out of a mixture. In the "mestizo" reality the product of the Indigenous, European and African traditions come together. Their past has a common bond: a hierarchical structure based on inequality. These countries were and are still being exploited and stripped of their natural resources by the US and Europe (in association with their native allies).

\*\* I refer here to the titles of the two most influential novels in Latin American literature in the last 40 years: Juan Rulfo's *El llano en llamas* and Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad*.



aesthetic battles of the seventies, when Cinema Novo, Liberation Cinemas and Third World leftist manifestos were heralded as instruments for radical change, and as the panacea against all forms of oppression.

Within the context of that period and those battles, says Stam:

instead of the pleasurable indulgences of carnival, Cinema Novo proposed an "aesthetic of hunger" and a kind of pedagogic displeasure in the service of political consciousness. In its wish to make a definitive break with Hollywood alienation, however, Cinema Novo at times threw out the baby of pleasure with the bathware of imperialism and thus lost contact with its public. (Ibid. 145).

In the quest for regaining the contact with its audience and continuing the battle against stupidity and the increasing monopoly and control of the media, it is possible to situate a number of productions in the different countries in Latin America that are outstanding in the way they approach stories and in the form of telling them.

Carnavalesque strategies come into play here, enriching storytelling and making a significant impact on the audience they are supposed to address. These productions are made not for leftist European film festivals (as it was almost the case in the 60's and 70's), and get broadcasted not on — well intentioned — "first world" public television channels, (that vigorously supported those productions) but in the large broadcasting companies of their countries of origin, making in many ways a relevant impact in Latin America's media landscape.

There are some characteristics of this narrative approach:

- a) A fluid capacity to adapt to circumstances which manifest great inventiveness in supply for limited resources and tight budgets.
- b) Intertextuality and the possibility to integrate traditional, local and Hollywood narrative formulas. This is done in multiple ways. Sometimes by using them in other contexts, abusing them, making parodies and, actually and physically, cannibalizing them.
- c) Finally there is a drive to question power and prejudices. In this sense and while appearing as part of the festive "bread and circus" of the media, they softly twist that model into Saturnalian festivity.

Summarizing, it can be stated that these productions use carnival as a means of representing "an alternative cosmovision characterized by the ludic undermining of all norms". In Latin American expressions of

everyday life, the carnivalesque is festively and almost inevitably present. In Colombia for example there is a carnivalesque practice, never regulated but always present, of turning the world upside down by means of jokes.

Critical and satirical jokes come in waves, by the hundreds, as media events, scandals connected with power figures (usually heads of state), or conflicts happen. This is most probably true in many other countries and societies as well, but in Colombia the sport of figuratively demolishing the status quo "with the tongue" is remarkable. And very symptomatic, since the actual possibilities of real political dissent are scarce, in spite of the fact that there are democratic elections every four years. The waves of mockery grow fast and they acquire names. In the eighties for example, the major one was called "Turbay jokes". This was an almost endless wave of puns on the person of Julio Cesar Turbay, a fat old politician who became president due to his political ability to manipulate the machinery of the majority's party. The jokes on him concentrated mainly on his ignorance, stupidity and lack of cultural interest and formal studies. Typical of this wave was the urgency everybody felt to come up with new jokes against him (and what he represented). This wave grew as a gigantic, endless expression of joyful discontent, apace with the creativity and challenge it posed to the tellers and listeners to add on.

On those same lines there is a genre in Latin American television where some forms of the carnivalesque in Bakhtinian terms manifest themselves: fiction comedies.

The true appearance of the comedy fiction genre in Latin America dates probably from the 60's and early 70's with series like the Argentinean *Viendo a Biondi* and the Colombian *Yo y tu*. They were truly popular long running series, of immense mass appeal. They were broadcasted simultaneously with *I Love Lucy*. But having different modes of production in relation to this early situation comedy from the United States. Some common elements can be traced though, mainly the use of the family everyday life situation as the central core of laughs and conflicts, and the living room as the locus for their gags.

We will have to wait until the middle of the 80s and 90s to see this hybrid genre grow, adopting some of the features of the situation comedy but not losing its own idiosyncrasy. These comedy series started a hard competition for the audience at a time when the programmers

flooded Colombian TV screens with US sitcoms bought at dumping prices in the international TV markets. The literal invasion of North American "sitcoms", poorly dubbed and alien in their humour and everyday day life situations, did not last long. Audiences, especially the working class and the poor, would turn the TV sets off or tune them to the newly introduced comic sketches coming from Mexico, productions that reflected the realities and conflicts which were closer to them.

In this way the *Lucy*, *Archie Bunker*, and the *Dick van Dyke Show* saw their ratings plummet to the lowest levels of the scale in what became an "expensive" experiment for programmers, not so much in terms of their profits as in their failure to attract advertisers. It was then that the producers felt the need and saw the potential for establishing native series, a kind of their own brand of popular entertainment. They were lucky in that they managed to hire and attract writers, talented actors and directors coming mostly from the relatively developed experimental and political theater of the sixties and seventies. In this way began the consolidation of what today constitutes a good chunk of Colombia's own television programming with which the audience can identify itself, giving at the same time very good profits, and competing robustly with the few remaining counterparts from the north: *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*.

One of the reasons for this success story is that fiction comedies in Colombia are not necessarily situation comedies. It is true that some of them have adapted certain features from best sitcoms, with their clear rules of placing the main characters in a particular boiling conflict, different every week. But several long running comedy series, have developed carnival like patterns, some of them borrowing elements from the "telenovela" genre or following the paths of the comic Mexican sketch show, which in its turn is directly cannibalized from vaudeville.

The process of creating and developing them for the screen differs greatly and does not follow the industrial and highly structured pattern of their North American counterparts. One example: comedy fiction in Latin America is the effort of a team but not necessarily of a team of writers. The stories and screenplays are very much the creation and responsibility of individual talented craftsmen who work effectively. They actually produce an enormous amount of material in a year lasting fifty production weeks since there are no actual summer season breaks. This leads to early burn-outs since the quality of the stories have the

tendency to decline. These writers have an unusual capacity for staging conflicts and situations of a polyphonic culture. They have managed to look at the margins within the margins and tell stories that are usually forgotten in the rest of the programmes.

Among some of the best examples of the running series of the eighties special mention is to be made of *Don Chinche*. The title of this series immerses us in its carnivalesque mood and it is difficult to translate. Being a play of words, it refers to its central character, a sympathetic low class mechanic trying to make a decent living. Don Chinche is a respected man, a "don" or a "señor" and a nobody; — a "chinche" — which also means a fellow who loves teasing. In fact he gets around conflicts by using humor and carnival-like attitudes. He is the central person in his neighborhood while being regarded as a fool by a society that mistrusts those who do not have the power or the will to make money. The series was unique and interesting in its location. It did not happen, like most sitcoms, in the living room of one individual family, a bar or a newsroom. It happened in a community, a poor neighborhood of the capital city. Shot on location, without an audience, it portrayed a small society with all the characters that inhabit it. It also had a point of view where social overturning, the rejection of social decorum, and "a perspective on language, the nonsensical, and marketplace speech as expressive of the linguistic creativity of common people" (ibid. 96) were used very effectively.

The third important feature was its capacity to involve "the other", the marginals, the ones who were never shown on television. I am referring to working class people inside or outside Bogotá, the capital city, the center of power and hierarchy. In a country of 18 different cultural regions, a kind of a Balkan republic where accents, ways of life, customs and rivalries are older than the nation state, television broadcasting has played a key role in bringing the nation together, at the price of ignoring the province. A clever way of maintaining the status quo in this centralized power structured Latin American country.

By portraying a community of new immigrants to the capital, *Don Chinche* showed for the first time Colombian diversity in a remarkable critical and colorful way. By admitting peoples' idiosyncracies represented in a lively free form, by showing the poor dwellings in Bogota as a melting pot, and a carnivalesque mixture of cultures and backgrounds it managed to celebrate their endurance and joyful struggle for survival.

Their partying while defying conventions and lack of solidarity, is the most interesting feature in this comedy. Don Chinche and his friends were laughing not only at themselves but at the society they belonged to.

The originality of *Don Chinche* was the incorporation of the marginal and the peripheral by means of a diversity of characters and outsiders. The impact on the ratings, the quality of the acting and style had made a healthy and profound influence on Colombian television programming ever since. Some of the best drama series that came later, copied and learned from this experience. The "telenovelas" took over and developed some of its melodramatic features in order to incorporate the point of view of marginality, some kind of irony and in the best cases a significant amount of humor. This comedy series, and some later ones, have shown that the carnival is alive not just as a festival but as a

countermodel for cultural production and desire" and on the positive side "it is ecstatic collectivity, the joyful affirmation of change, a dress rehearsal for utopia". (Ibid. 95).

To conclude, it is interesting to state that there is a lesson to be learned from this new Latin American way of "cultural cannibalism". And it goes along the lines of people resisting and making of that resistance a festival. A carnival where death is also dreadfully present. In a time when the US media dominance is omnipresent and when even the Europeans feel the pressure of exploring "language of Hollywood" in order to capture the attention of their own audience, it is still possible to be competitive without being boring. The carnival and resistance flourish in countries without one identity but many and carnivalesque strategies are used in their main stream media as a narrative structure which is both entertaining and critically engaging. So it is high time to look more into it. If it is already not too late.

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## About Authors

SUSANA G. ARTAL works as an Associate Professor of Dr. A. Alonso Institute of Hispanic Philology and Letters at the National University of Buenos Aires. She has published a book on traditional epic poetry *De guerras, héroes y cantos* (Buenos Aires, 1992) and numerous articles in specialized magazines like *Hispanic Review*, *Bulletin Hispanique*, *Filología* (Buenos Aires), *Signos* (Valparaíso), etc. As a poet, she has been awarded several national literary prizes and has published a book titled *De piedra al canto* (Buenos Aires, 1995).

TIINA AUNIN is the Chair of Comparative Literature at Tallinn Pedagogical University. Her main subject has been American literature in which she took her Ph.D. at Leningrad University in 1981. She has published articles on the discourse between history and the novel. As a visiting scholar she has done research and given lectures at the universities of Surrey, Essex, Lund, Cornell and British Columbia.

JOSÉ MARÍA BALCELLS DOMÉNECH (1943) took his Ph.D. on the ascetic and moral work of Quevedo at the University of Barcelona. Among his books there are: *Márgenes de la curiosidad* (Málaga, 1974), *Quevedo en "La cuna y la sepultura"* (Madrid, 1981), *Miguel Hernández* (Barcelona, 1990), *Poesía y poética de Angel Crespo* (Palma de Mallorca, 1990) and *Proyección y contraproyecto en la poesía española contemporánea* (Palma de Mallorca, 1991). He has also edited the work of Luis de Granada, José de Villaviciosa, Rafael Alberti, Angel Crespo and Rafael Ballesteros. At present he is the Chair of Spanish literature at the University of León, Spain.

ALESSANDRO BALDI (1959) is an Associate Professor of Italian language and literature at the University of Zaragoza. He has participated in several international conferences of literary studies and has published articles mainly on Italian literature.

VICENTE J. BENET (1962) holds his Ph.D. from the University of Valencia and is the Professor of literary theory and audiovisual media at Jaime I University in Castellón de la Plana, Spain. He has centered his research on

cinema history and comparative literature, especially on the narrative typologies between the two world wars. His books include *El tiempo de la narración clásica* (Valencia, 1992). He is also the co-editor of the collection *Ficcionalidad y escritura* (Castellón, 1994) and has published articles on cinema and literature in several international reviews.

KRZYSZTOF BILIŃSKI (1962) is a graduate in Polish philology of the University of Wrocław, where he now teaches Polish literature. A Ph.D. since 1990, he has mainly researched Polish romanticism and modernism and their links with religious ideas. He is also interested in local Silesian literature and the semiotic literary theory.

YURI BOREV (1925) is a prominent Russian scholar in the field of aesthetics. He has dealt especially with the categories of the comic and the tragic, which were also the subject of his doctoral dissertation (1963). He has published monographical studies on the comic (1957, 1970) and the tragic (1960), while his book *Aesthetics* has been translated into several languages. He has also researched the "folklore of intelligentsia". He works at the Institute of World Literature in Moscow and is a member of the Independent Academy of Aesthetics and Liberal Arts.

M<sup>a</sup> CARMEN DÍAZ DE ALDA HEIKKILÄ holds her Ph.D. from the Madrid Complutense University, where she also has been a professor. At present she works as the Lecturer of Spanish at the University of Tampere, Finland. She has written extensively on the Spanish writers Luis Rosales, José Luis Sampedro and León Felipe. For Spanish readers, she has introduced the Finnish epic *Kalevala* and the work of outstanding Nordic writers, like the Finn Mika Waltari and the Finnish-Swedish poet Edith Södergran (*Edith Södergran, el corazón desmedido*, Madrid 1992, 2nd ed. 1996).

ÁNGEL GARCÍA GALIANO (1961) is since 1988 Doctor in Spanish philology. His thesis *La imitación poética en el Renacimiento* was published in 1992 in Kassel, Germany. He works at present as a Professor of literary theory at Madrid Complutense University. He has published literary criticism on works of the Spanish "golden age", Francisco Ayala, Benito Pérez Galdós, Julio Cortázar and also the Estonian Jaan Kross.

MARINA GRISHAKOVA is a Lecturer at the Chair of Comparative Literature of Tartu University. Between 1985 and 1990 she worked at the Laboratory of History and Semiotics, directed by Yuri Lotman. She has published articles in the series of *Semiotics*, of Tartu University, and has presented



reports at the Summer School of Semiotics in Kääriku (1986) and at the session of British nonformalist circle in Oxford (1991). She holds her M.A. in Russian philology.

INGEMAR HAAG (1959) is at present working on a thesis about the grotesque in Swedish modernism. He has published several articles in various magazines and is one of the three editors of the review *Aiolos*.

JULIETA HAIDAR is a Brazilian anthropologist, working at the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. She has specialized in the analysis of discourse and semiotics of culture and is the author of *Discurso sindical y procesos de fetichización* (México, 1990) and *El estructuralismo. Lévy-Strauss y la fascinación de la razón* (México, 1990), besides many articles on linguistics, discourse and semiotics.

FELIX KARLINGER (1920) is a prominent German scholar in the field of Romance literatures, and especially of folklore. He graduated in 1948 from Munich University in musical sciences, folklore and Romance studies, and took the same year his Ph.D. in Pyrenean folklore. From 1966 till retiring in 1980 he was the Chair of Iberoromanic and Rumanian Studies at the University of Salzburg, Austria. He has published about twenty books and 400 articles in the above-mentioned field and has edited and commented folkloric and fairy tales of nearly all Romance and Latin American peoples.

MADELEINE LAZARD has worked for many years as a Professor at the University of Sorbonne. Specializing in the 16th-century French literature, she has published besides numerous articles the following books: *Pantagruel, Gargantua* (Paris, 1977; new edition 1994), *La Comédie humaniste et ses personnages* (Paris, 1978), *Rabelais et la Renaissance* (Paris, 1979), *Le Théâtre en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1980), *Images littéraires de la femme à Renaissance* (Paris, 1985), *Michel de Montaigne* (Paris, 1992), *Rabelais humaniste* (Paris, 1993). In 1989-1993 she presided *La Société d'étude du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* and is since 1993 the President of *La Société internationale des amis de Montaigne*.

ANNE LILL is the Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Tartu. Her research subjects include Greek tragedy, studies of style and literary theory. She has translated into Estonian and commented works by Greek and Roman authors (e.g. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses or the Golden Ass*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*).

ÜLAR PLOOM (1955) is a graduate from Tallinn Pedagogical University. He holds his M.A. from the University of Tartu, with a thesis on Petrarch's *Secretum* (which he has also translated into Estonian). He is an Associate Professor of Romance studies at the Estonian Institute of Humanities in Tallinn. His translations include works by Italian writers Bassani, Moravia, Calvino and others.

JUAN CARLOS PUEO DOMÍNGUEZ (1968) is a professor of literature and literary theory at the University of Zaragoza. He took his Ph.D. on the theory of laughter and Renaissance thought, and has published articles on contemporary literature and cinema.

ÁLVARO RAMÍREZ-OSPINA (1947) is a graduate in literature from Bolívar University of Medellín (Colombia) and holds a M.F.A. from Tish School of the Arts of New York University. He has published a book on Julio Cortázar's short stories and numerous articles mainly in Spanish. He is also a script writer, with a special interest in narratology. At present he works as an Associate Professor of the Department of Media Studies at the University of Bergen, Norway.

GIUSEPPINA RESTIVO is the Professor of English literature at the University of Trieste. Specialized in English theatre, she has produced books on Beckett (*Le soglie del posmoderno: Finale di partita*, Bologna: Mulino, 1991) and Bond (*La nuova scena inglese: Edward Bond*, Torino: Einaudi, 1977) as well as many essays on Shakespeare's theatre. She has also worked on American fiction, aspects of comparative literature and literary theory.

DOROTHEA SCHOLL teaches literature at the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Kiel, Germany. She has published her doctoral thesis on the Baroque poet Saint-Amant: *Moyse sauvé. Poétique et originalité de l'idylle héroïque de Saint-Amant* (1995) and has written on the representation of women in fin-de-siècle art and literature, on Boileau and the sublime in postmodern theory. At present her research is centered on the paradigm of the grotesque in its relation to modernity.

MARÍA DE LA LUZ SEVILLA GONZÁLEZ is a Mexican anthropologist, graduate of the National School of Anthropology and History. She has published articles on the social anthropology of illnesses and is completing at present her doctoral studies at Madrid Complutense University.

JÜRI TALVET (1945) is since 1992 the Chair of Comparative Literature at the University of Tartu. He took his Ph.D. on the Spanish picaresque novel at

Leningrad University in 1981. He has published a collection of articles and essays on Spanish and Catalan literature *Hispaania vaim* ('The Spanish Spirit', Tartu, 1995), books of travel essays *Teekond Hispaaniasse* (Tallinn 1985, Estonia's annual literary prize in essay genre) and *Hispaaniast Ameerikasse* (Tallinn 1992), and also four books of poetry (*Äratused* 1981, *Ambur ja karje* 1886, *Hinge kulg ja kliima üllatused* 1990, *Eesti eleegia ja teisi luuletusi*, 1997). He has translated into Estonian both classical and modern works (*Lazarillo de Tormes*, poetry by Quevedo, Espriu and Aleixandre, *Oráculo manual* of Gracián, short stories of García Márquez, etc.) In 1994 he became the founding Chairman of the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature.

KERSTI TARIEN, a graduate of Tallinn Pedagogical University, is since 1994 a postgraduate student at the Chair of Comparative Literature of the University of Tartu. She is completing her M.A. thesis on black humour in literature and is at present studying on a scholarship at Oxford University.

REIN TOOTMAA (1957), a graduate of the University of Tartu in Estonian philology, has since 1982 lived on Estonia's largest island Saaremaa, being active as schoolteacher, journalist and cinema administrator. He has published articles of literary criticism mainly on Estonian literature. As a creative writer, he is the author of two collections of short prose fiction: *Klaverimängupüha* (1987) and *Seal, selle laia välja taga* (1991).

REIJO VIRTANEN (1959) works as a teacher of creative and cultural writing at Oriveden Opisto of KVS-Institute in Finland. In his postgraduate studies he is specializing in humour and satire. For several years he has been working as a journalist and critic, and as a Lecturer of literature at the University of Oulu. He is also the author of some satirical stories and dramatic texts.

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# Literary Magazine

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The ESTONIAN LITERARY MAGAZINE, a collaboration of the Estonian Institute and the Estonian Writers' Union, is a twice-yearly publication in the English language, founded in 1995. Its aim is to introduce the past and present of Estonian literature. It publishes regular overviews of new literary works in Estonia.

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The ESTONIAN LITERARY MAGAZINE's editorial staff can be reached at the following address:

Estonian Institute  
14, Suur-Karja  
EE0001 TALLINN  
ph.: 372 6314 355  
fax: 372 6314 356  
e-mail: [einst@einst.ee](mailto:einst@einst.ee)

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