



## History of the Study of Humour and Satire in Literature



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### Abstract

The article discusses the history of humor and satire in literature. Examples and theoretical works of scientists and literary scholars on this topic are given. These studies are philosophical and in general, it noted that until the XIX century, all research in the field of comedy, satire, and humor was conducted as elements of any philosophical teachings and concepts. It also describes the transformation of humor and satire in modern literature. Manifestations of the comic in contemporary journalism differ from the comic in the satirical newspaper and magazine publications of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and earlier periods in that today, this sphere of the printed word belongs to the media with all its inherent attributes, while previously it could be characterized as fiction.

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## 1 Introduction

Understood originally as a philosophical category, the comic was considered by ancient philosophers. Aristotle's theory of the comic is based on the notion of the presence of the ugly, violating the norm, in reality, and the need to express with the help of the comic the reaction to this ugly. "The comic is some mistake and ugliness, causing no suffering to anyone and no harm to anyone; so, not to go far for an example, the comic mask is something ugly and distorted, but without [expressing] suffering" (Ross & Aristotle, 1936). According to this interpretation, even physical ugliness can be the subject of comic reflection, which is unacceptable to the modern concept of humor on ethical grounds. Aristotle also wrote about the vital role of laughter, said that one should not overdo the ridiculous by making the object of laughter suffer, one should observe decorum, not allow "slurs", and noted: "Those who amuse themselves decently are called witty" (Ross & Aristotle, 1936). We see here a psychological rather than a purely philosophical approach, which proves the syncretic character of ancient philosophy.

For Aristotle, it is important to use humor in a way that does not allow for communicative disturbances in the process. In modern foreign science, T. Hobbes sought to understand the nature of the comic from the point of view of a subject's perception of faults in the real world: "the occurrence of laughter requires three preconditions: that some defect should be felt at all, that this defect should be foreign, and that this feeling should come suddenly" (Curley, 1990). H. F. Hegel, determining the nature of the comic. W.F. Hegel, who defined the nature of the comic: "The comic in general by its very nature rests on contradictory contrasts between goals within themselves and their content, on the one hand, and the accidental character of subjectivity and external circumstances, on the other..." (Prokhorov, 1970). F. Schlegel, as early as the end of the eighteenth century, who noted in Romantic irony the union of opposing principles: "...everything must be a joke and everything must be serious, everything simple-hearted and everything deeply pretentious" (Endres, 2017). C.-W. - F. Erwin Zolger, who at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wrote about the contradictory nature of irony, its ambivalent character. Its ability to help man discover "the divine idea" (that is, to learn more about the world, to know it) and at the same time to destroy that "which it gave the appearance of life", and many other scholars, literary scholars, and writers.

## 2 Materials and Methods

In the science of the last two centuries, a significant number of literary studies have been devoted to the theory of humor and satire. In the nineteenth century, Russian writers, for whom not only practical literary activity was important, but also the desire to understand the issues of literary theory was concerned with the comic in literature (Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2002). Indeed, as the entire history of Russian literature shows, Russian writers were closer to the satirical direction than to the humorous one.

## 3 Results and Discussions

In classical Russian literature, the comic developed sometimes out of connection with laughter, not requiring laughter as a reaction to the comic. The paradox of Russian laughter is that satirists in Russia are "people by nature serious, sad, and sometimes gloomy". Russian reality itself, which lacks serenity, constant development, a stable good attitude to man, political and social stability, requires from the writer seriousness, including in the comic interpretation of what is happening.

In the first half of the XX century, one can note separate studies devoted to humor, satire, and the comic. N.N. Sretensky noted in the XX that the author's humorous perception of reality induced by "the seriousness of the human anthill, with which people subordinate themselves to the rational volitions and assessments they set up". That is, the establishment in the society of mandatory rules, the inviolability of such attitudes, uniformity in everything, from clothing to the perception of the phenomena of reality, are the factors, which, according to the researcher, encourage authors to the humorous interpretation of what is happening. Such an interpretation in a totalitarian state is perceived as an act of destruction, unacceptable from the perspective of the power structures and therefore dangerous for the satirist. In light of the above, it is not surprising either how actively humorous literature (M. M. Zoshchenko, I. Ilf and E. Petrov, M. A. Bulgakov, etc.) developed in the young Soviet state or how few attempts were made during the Stalinist dictatorship to grasp the nature of literary humor (Meza et al., 2018; Srivastava & Mishra, 2016). According to researchers of the comic, "any discourse will be transformed and, therefore, discredited in its self-value and

significance when it is included in a playful context”. That is, the comic representation of Soviet reality was bound to serve its discredit, even if the author did not set himself such a task directly, but sought only to combat certain manifestations of the negative. This explains the negative attitude during the Stalinist dictatorship toward both comic literature itself and its research.

In Russian literary criticism, attention to the comic, humorous, and satirical in literature intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, with the end of the Stalinist period. Various types of comics in the works of Russian writers are beginning to consider. A.S. Bushmin analyzes hyperbole and the grotesque in the satire of M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin and notes the writer’s ability to anticipate and predict events, “exaggeration as an anticipation of the dangers threatening society shortly”. N. E. Rotman in her PhD thesis turns to the analysis of journal satire on the example of the work of N. I. Novikov. E. Polotskaya examines the stories and novels of A.P. Chekhov and notes in them the “inner” irony, bitter and subtle, which destroys the hopes of the characters. Y.B. Borev, in his doctoral dissertation, identified the tragic and the comic in the context of literary problems, emphasizing their inseparable connection. A.Z. Vulis considers the nature of the satirical image and the ways of its creation in literature, as well as the specificity of conventionality, the role of the grotesque, and the features of representation of creative fantasy in a satirical text. Y.V. Mann in his book “On the Grotesque in Literature” theoretically substantiates the concept of the “grotesque”.

M.M. Bakhtin, who became the starting point for all further studies of humor in the framework not only of literary studies but also of sociology and cultural studies, made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of humor. M.M. Bakhtin’s approach to the comic is called concrete-historical, since the scholar, in constructing his concepts, proceeded from concrete examples of the realization of the comic in different historical circumstances. In particular, the carnival culture that existed for a long time in the middle Ages and the carnival perception of reality arising from it was indicative for him. M.M. Bakhtin has a negative characteristic of Menippist satire, or satire as a genre, for example, in the novel of F. Rabelais, and at the same time a high estimate of satire as a technique (Weisfeld, 1993; Gonot-Schoupinsky & Garip, 2018). He characterizes the latter as “a certain (mostly negative) attitude of the creator to the object of his depiction (to the reality depicted), which determines the choice of means of artistic representation and the general character of images”. M.M. Bakhtin extols the artistic properties of satire and notes its “special inter-genre position”. A significant work of M.M. Bakhtin is his book “The Work of François Rabelais and the Popular Culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance”. The researcher notes the combination in the novel “Gargantua and Pantagruel” of images of official culture and commonplace humorous elements, which are often simply obscene expressions; he develops in this connection the concept of laughter culture, discussed by us above. Rabelais, who creates such a paradoxical combination in his work, influenced, according to M. M. Bakhtin, by the culture of the medieval carnival. The language of the carnival, according to M.M. Bakhtin, became the basis of all humorous works of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it was “used in different ways and to different degrees by Erasmus, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Guevara, and Quevedo”. Significant in M.M. Bakhtin’s doctrine of the comic is also his concept of the laughing word, described in detail by O.E. Osovsky, a researcher of M.M. Bakhtin’s scientific heritage. The laughing word is defined today as “the most important tool (means, device) for creating a comic effect”.

M.M. Bakhtin’s research has caused some criticism on the part of Russian philologists-medievalists, specialists in the culture of the Middle Ages. Y.M. Lotman and B.A. Uspensky criticized M.M. Bakhtin's idea of mockery of the sacred, of religion as a property of popular laughter culture. In the opinion of these researchers, such mockery was unthinkable for Russian culture; on the contrary, laughter “affirmed” religion “using negation”. According to S.S. Averintsev, Bakhtin's reasoning, based on an analysis of Western laughter culture, does not correspond to the nature of the comic in Russian culture; moreover, there is much “utopianism” in Bakhtin's book about Rabelais, and his theory itself, “canonized” by modern science, has many weak points. In our opinion, one cannot also agree with M.M. Bakhtin’s postulate that the completely modern culture of the comic not only derives from the medieval carnival but also continues to exist in its space. G.V. Silchenko notes: “Bakhtin viewed modern laughter as a reduced echo of carnival laughter”, but this view can lead to an incomplete perception of the comic, which, in light of M. M. Bakhtin’s concrete-historical approach, is constantly developing depending on social and historical processes. Indeed, the satirical direction of Russian comic literature, as mentioned above, is not oriented toward laughter. Satirical works are sometimes sad and unrelated to the carnival tradition postulated by M. M. Bakhtin as virtually the only one. Nevertheless, the contribution made by M.M. Bakhtin to the development of the theory of the comic is indisputable, and his concepts have been in demand for several decades now (Kuiper, 1984; Ravi, & Ravi, 2017; Brock, 2016).

Active research of the comic and the ways of its representation in literature continued in Russian literary studies in the 80s of the twentieth century. I. Pasi and V.M. Pivoev considered irony as an aesthetic category. Various forms

of comics in fiction continue to become the subject of analysis. L.F. Alekseeva in her PhD thesis (1981) considers irony in the works of A.A. Blok and notes that the poet's style is characterized by "ironic mutual reflection of the world of dreams and the world of reality". V. Tyupa also focuses on the category of irony in A.A. Blok's poetry and examines from this point of view his poem Nightingale Garden. A.V. Skobelev's PhD research (1984) is devoted to the consideration of the peculiarities of satire and the problem of the comic in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann. The author notes the diversity and versatility of the comic in the writer's work the combination of "pure humor" with satirical elements (Pfaff & Gibbs Jr, 1997; Green et al., 2006).

Satirical journals of the turn of the XI-XX centuries and the beginning of the XX century were studied in Russian literary studies. The publication of T.M. Zhaplova and E.A. Khmur is devoted to the journal satire of the turn of the XIX-XX centuries. On the example of the Orenburg magazine "Kobyłka" the authors consider the main satirical genres (songs, fables, ballads, odes, riddles), characterize the objects of satire of the provincial poets. The researchers' reference to the provincial magazine shows how widespread newspaper-journal satire spread in the "post-Iskra" period and proves the significant influence of Iskra on the development of satirical journalism in the future.

The genre peculiarity of Russian satirical poetry of the early XX century on the material of parody, epigrams, and fables considered in the PhD thesis of O.B. Kushlina. She notes that the explosion of satirical poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century has a bearing on the poetry of Iskra, the authors "creatively developed the traditions and achievements" of the poetry of the 1960s. Journal satire of the early XX century was also the subject of attention of T.A. Filippova. Who examines the representation in satirical magazines of the images of "the German" and "the Turk", the Caucasian front during World War I, and in her monograph the formation of the image of Turkey and "the Turk" in Russian journal satire in 1908-1918.

These studies are valuable for their attention to the media mechanisms of shaping this or that image in the public consciousness. Such mechanisms, widely used by modern media, in the era, which magazine satire became the subject of the literary scholar's study, were established. As noted by researchers, the main satirical genres common on the pages of magazines in the early XX century are caricature, humorous poems, feuilleton, and anecdote. The work of satirical poets described in a monographic work by L.A. Evstigneeva, as well as the combination of the comic and non-comic in the poetry of satirical, the connection with symbolism, Acmeism, futurism, modernism, and other literary movements of the silver century poetry (Snyder, 2019; Ruch & Carrell, 1998).

## 4 Conclusion

Manifestations of the comic in contemporary journalism differ from the comic in the satirical newspaper and magazine publications of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and earlier periods in that today, this sphere of the printed word belongs to the media with all its inherent attributes, while previously it could be characterized as fiction. In the conditions of transition to the market system, the existence of mass media became dependent on the success of selling the publication, which changed the content, ideological, and genre paradigms of the journalistic text. Satire in its classic form is no longer in demand; today, its purpose is to simplify the presentation of material for the audience. Journalists prefer entertaining texts to critical publications, and images of a physiological nature brought up to date. There is no doubt that satirical journalism today is gradually ceasing to exist or is passing into other forms other than satirical journalism. Researchers are trying to comprehend the reasons for the observed changes. It has even been suggested, "this may be an alarming symptom, warning of the unsatisfactory performance of the modern media as an effective communicator between the authorities and society". However, it seems to us that the main reason lies in the lack of demand for magazine satire, explained both by the change in the communicative paradigm and by the social situation. The censorship factor cannot be considered as a determining one in the process of the disappearance of satirical magazines, as the experience of publishing magazines in the XVIII-XX centuries showed its impotence to counteract the active social position of writers and journalists.

### *Conflict of interest statement*

The author declared that he have no competing interest.

### *Statement of authorship*

The author has a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author have approved the final article.

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