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Humour -
An Anatomy & Physiology

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Mechanisms of Humour
in English and Romanian Humorous Verse

CONTENT

I. INTRODUCTION

This work is an attempt at re-discussing humour in one of its relatively poorly studied fields of manifestation, that of humourous verse.

The mobile of any attempt at offering a new point of view (on humour, in our case) should be and has been a higher validity as compared to previous ones, i.e. a higher degree of generality and a wider range of application. This should account for the choice of humourous verse as a domain of analysis, as well, because of some of its specific features, on the one hand, which permit a quick identification of the mechanisms involved in the production of humour, and, on the other hand, because it will result, after analysis, that the linguistic mechanisms of humour are identical regardless of the type of text they might appear in, i.e., that they are not specific to literary genre or species. Theoretically, then, linguistic mechanisms of humour ought to be universalia of humour, relative as to language and specific to what will be further defined as „humour as artefact", a category which includes literary humour.

The relative universality of linguistic mechanisms of humour will be postulated after demonstrating their dependence upon such linguistic universals as synonymy, homonymy, paronymy etc. It ensues that the analysis will be performed with linguistic instruments upon a corpus which will be selected from two non-cognate Indo-European languages (English and Romanian). The method adopted will be binary analysis into categories and subcategories after applying several criteria which will be defined further.

Since the response to potentially humourous statements on situations implies the cognitive process of understanding (in one of its particular acceptations, at least), the analysis will resort first and foremost to logical categories, therefore a more accurate name of the mechanisms involved in the production of humour would be „logical-linguistic mechanisms"[1]. Yet, since there is a wide category of non-language-specific mechanisms of

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[1] term used as „procedee lingvistico-logice" by Marian Popa (Popa, 1975, p.307)

humour which can be paraphrased and/or translated into any other language without the loss of humourous effect and, consequently, are predominantly logical mechanisms of humour, as against those which are predominantly linguistic and cannot be paraphrased or translated without the loss of the humourous effect, the term „*linguistic mechanisms of humour*" clearly covers the two principal areas in which humour appears:

a. predominantly logical mechanisms of humour, where language appears as the vehicle of an incongruity of the logical type - mechanisms which are universal.

b. predominantly linguistic mechanisms of humour, where the logical categories appear as disambiguators of an incongruity of the linguistic type (see infra, p. 194)- which are ultimately language-specific.

These arguments could account for the accuracy of the term *logical-linguistic mechanisms of humour*. Nevertheless, since the analysis is performed with linguistic means (and not those of literary theory and/or criticism), the term *linguistic mechanisms* has been considered more appropriate in that it alludes to the type of analysis, as well.

A linguistic analysis has been preferred to a literary one - although, ideally, the results yielded by both types of analysis should be the same - because the formalization is more obvious and handier. The content-aspect of the phenomena under analysis will be covered by logical categories, as well as categories in the theory of literature, wherever they can be resorted to.

The term „*mechanism*" has been preferred not only as an echo to Bergson's famous definition of laughter (Bergson, 1932, p.5), but also in order to stress the relative repeatability of a formalizable sequence which triggers off a certain response. In our case, the formalizable sequence will be obviated in the four steps between the perception and disambiguation of an incongruity, while the phenomenon triggered off is expected to be laughter. A possible definition of humour could be provided on this basis, if a discussion on the term *incongruity* is previously offered.

In the broadest sense, an *incongruity* is a fracture in a normal course of events (thoughts, utterances, etc.), perceived factually and/or intellectively. Since it is a disruption, an incongruity has no structure of its own, but it can have various causes and various effects, whence different types of incongruity. Normally, the system of reference in which we judge something as incongruous is our expectation, but an incongruity can appear in the adequacy of our system of reference itself to the items to be judged in it; if the system of reference of our normal expectation is inadequate, this inadequacy can be labelled as incongruity in another system of reference (generating in some cases a possible world).

According to their causes and, their effects, respectively, incongruities are of various types, engendering various effects. An incongruity of the tragical type (called by Aristotle „*hybris*") can generate tragedy; an incongruity of the absurd type (which creates a possible world whose generative system is different from our normal expectation) can engender the absurd; an incongruity of the metaphoric type can generate the partial overlapping of the content of two notions and the subsequent momentary contiguity of their spheres which we call metaphor, etc.[2]

A humourous incongruity could then be defined as being that type of disruption in the continuum of expectation which generates laughter.

Reducing the definition of humour to this much would be an obviously incomplete approach. The fact that the term „*pure humour*" will be brought into discussion should suggest that there are also hybrid forms of humour (see *infra*, II.1); therefore it ensues that humour cannot be defined outside a consistent theory of humour. The multitude of humourous acts identifiable in literature and in everyday life, as well as the numerous points of view from which they can be approached and taxonomized have generated the impressive amount of literature written on humour throughout the history of culture; the number of theories of humour is, perhaps, in a direct ratio with the development of human thought.

Qualitatively, on the other hand, contemporary theories of humour tend to integrate and order, according to one or several principles which are more or less consistently pursued, all, or as much as possible of the previous theories of humour in mankind's history.

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[2] A possible aesthetics and stylistics of incongruity could be provided by simply classifying intellective incongruities into classes and types according to classes and types of expectation they contradict. Yet, such an attempt, challenging as it might be, is beyond the scope of this work.

Several types of approach have crystallized throughout the history of criticism, which operate on the basis of one or several logical principles of analysis, and a brief sketch of several such analyses might prove useful for the study here.

Since the object of analysis has been specified, the validity of several theories of humour to this field will be analyzed, in search of a definition of humour which should account for all the mechanisms of humour encountered in the corpus selected for analysis.

Ideally, the theory of humour containing such a definition should be strong enough to account not only for the mechanisms under analysis, but for all the possible mechanisms of humour, approached diachronically. No such theory of humour exists, so far, because of at least two reasons:

a. any theory of humour is socially and historically conditioned

b. the long-term evolution of a language cannot be predicted but insofar as the accidental factor is ignored.

More specifically, b. could be rephrased and completed as:

b'. the illocutionary potential of utterances can only approximately be conjectured as to the past and predicted as to the future.

A possible and functional theory of humour would then only envisage the synchronic level, the recent past and the near future. If by „recent past" we could mean the epoch starting with the formation of the literary standard of a language, up to the contemporary stratum, our predictions as to the future would stand under the mark of probability and possibility, and would be the more likely as the future is nearer. Such an approach could, nevertheless, offer relative universalia of the phenomenon studied, and its degree of generality would allow it to be valid over a relatively long span in the history of mankind.

Another condition of validity for such an approach would be the one ensuing from point b' above; the illocutionary potential of a humorous utterance, i.e. its liability to generate laughter, is a function of expectation which, in its turn, is strongly influenced by mentality. Therefore, it could be alleged that an ideal theory of humour should be based upon data offered by the history of mentalities. This would be valid in the case of a diachronical study of humour, to conjecture more accurately upon the liability of a certain script to have stirred laughter in a past period in history. In other

words, an ideal theory of humour would include the occasional humour of past epochs with an equal weight to that of contemporary occasional humour, abolishing the actuality-factor.

Apart from the inherent difficulties of such an approach, were it carried out, it would make no differenciation between universal and „local" humour and thus the predictive aspect of the theory would be less likely to be correct than in the case in which predictions are based upon what was found out to be relatively universal (i.e. stirs up laughter in the contemporary reader as well).

Therefore, perhaps, a theory of humour should analyze humour diachronically only insofar as humourous effect still exists at the synchronic level; these mechanisms of humour are likely to preserve their illocutionary value in the future, as well.

On the other hand, admitting of the existence of non-universal instances of humour could not only account for possible humourous effects produced in the past which do not stir up laughter any more, but also admit of the probability of unpredicted developments in the future which could partially be accounted for by the history of human mentalities, as well.

What is available for analysis is, therefore, an inventory of forms (since the text stays fairly unmodified in time) which can be rather accurately analyzed as to content and checked (at the synchronic level) as to effect.

Therefore, a theory of humour should probably envisage an effect-aspect with an equal weight to that of the cause. Because of our own physical limitations, this can be performed very accurately only at the strictly synchronical level, therefore an „ideal" theory of humour seems never to become possible.

Yet, in spite of limitations (out of which the ones above could form a possible set),[3] theories of humour have been elaborated and will be elaborated as a direct result of the necessity of giving a definition of humour

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[3] Another possible set of limitations could be offered by the detailed discussion of illocution in diachrony which, being mediated by written material, is limited, in our case, to a discussion on literary humour, excluding its spontaneous, oral aspect; this problem will be discussed below (see *infra*. III.3)

that should either be valid on various corpuses or, conversely, should result from a larger integrating system[1] (a philosophical one, a general theory of genres, an aesthetics etc.) in which humour is an aspect of a larger category or a way of manifestation of a more general (human) attitude.[4]

A chronological review of the theories of humour so far elaborated is beyond the purpose of this work; almost all of the attempts at analyzing humour contain a metatheoretical aspect, although the points of view on the possibility of theorizing the phenomenon are divergent, whence the heterogeneity of the points of view. The difficulty of elaborating a consistent theory of humour might also ensue from the fact that humour is a live, productive phenomenon, and the detaching step back necassary for analysis is hard to perform. This is the point of view of some theorists who notice that an attempt at analyzing humour means lack of sense of humour (a statement which has become a butade, in time). Dismantling a humourous act down to its mechanism might deprive it, momentarily, of effect; therefore, Esar Evan's pertinent analysis of humour (Esar, 1978) is in itself humorous, turning into a secondary source of humour; other authors adopt this tone in their analyses as well (Baring-Gould, 1993). Wayne C. Booth's *Rhetoric of Irony* (Booth, 1974), an extremely accurate and, perhaps exhaustive theory of one mode of the comic, at times has ironical turns of phrase.

Such approaches only obviate a prerequisite of any analysis of humour: that the analist should have some sense of humour himself. The fact that the analysis of a live phenomenon is, technically, harder than that of an already non-productive one is also obvious in that the relatively restricted area of application is always postulated in these analyses. The relative scepticism as to the analyzability of humour is a consequence of the fact that the predictive aspect of analyses is overlooked, i.e. the liability of identified mechanisms of humour to engender new humorous acts (oral or written). Hence, perhaps, the fact that analyses of humour performed by humorists are essentially „serious".

Another aspect generating difficulty in the analyses of humour is the fact that the unpredictable (or, rather, perhaps the unpredictedness) is a fundamental element in generating humour. This unpredictability is relative, since it is a function of the elements constituting expectation. Since this is a heterogeneous variable for both groups and individuals, it results that the liability of elements incongruous to expectation to appear is also a heterogeneous variable, in that an incongruity can be generated, theoretically, both by the intrinsic combinatory valences of the elements constituting expectation and by the interplay of these elements with others, exterior to expectation considered as a system. Another difficulty coming up immediately would be the question to what extent expectation could be considered systematic. Probably, insofar as the expectation of an individual is conditioned by the social and historical experience of the group he is part of, his expectation is statistically predictable and systematic. From this point onwards, humour becomes more or less „occasional", limiting down social groups according to factors like status, profession,age, dialect, register, etc., up to the extreme situation in which the common experience which becomes system of reference (expectation) is shared by only two individuals: the creator (author) of a humorous act and its receiver. The liability of such an act of humour to survive in time is, in the best case, equal to the biological life-span of the two individuals. Most analyses of humour consider common group-experience as axiomatically given and do not even mention it as necessary condition for the production of a humorous act. The *British Encyclopaedia* article on humour mentions: „The highest reach of humour is found in such characterization as turns on the vanity of life itself."[5] probably pointing at the fact that the problem of life and death ranges among the basic common experiences of mankind. Still, humour exists when it is shared by two individuals only, as well, although it has a relatively poor chance of surviving since it cannot and will not be made public. A possible delineation

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[4] All theories of humour, without exception, implicitly or explicitly postulate that humour is a universal human trait. This could be, perhaps, partially accounted for the fact that humour is a specifically human type of communication, probably due to the existence in the human being of a more highly developed non- reflex memory which, in time, will create expectation. A more detailed discussion on humour as an act of communication will follow in Chapter II.

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[5] *The British Encyclopaedia*, ed.1967, v.5, p.887 - article signed St. Lea., probably Stephen Leacock

among theories of humour would be, then, between theories that envisage *humour in general* and those having in view *humour as artefact*.

The first type of theories is not concerned with the „survival" factor and offers a general view on humour in the cause-effect sequence. The second type of theories treats humour in its productive aspect as well, but overlooks its spontaneous facet, since its material of analysis is humour institutionalized as art. The cause-effect sequence is analyzed through an aesthetic lense. Since such a delineation is only methodological, the shortcomings of the first type of theories can be found in the vantage-points of the second, and vice-versa.

When Plato defines humour as „*a failing, one that takes its name from a state of character and is that specific sort of failing with the characteristic quite opposed to what the oracle of Delphi recommends*" (Plato, ap. V.Raskin, 1985), he pioneers in one set of theories of humour which define it as incongruity; by „*failing*" one could understand incongruity and, since „what the oracle of Delphi recommends" is „*know thyself*", it could be broadly interpreted as expectation. Plato's approach is deductive and refers (implicitly) to classical Greek, so two points could be made:

a. an incongruity can generate not only two, but, in some languages several interpretations of a script (at least in English), so Plato's deduction cannot be generalized to all modern Indo-European languages. When Plato died (347 B.C.), the English language did not exist; Proto-Germanic was crystallizing on the Continent. Plato could not have foreseen that one of the branches of Proto-Germanic will become, after more than two centuries a highly analytical, almost isolating language in which polysemy would be extremely high and what he considered to be a „failing" would become a typological characteristic, i.e. norm, of that language.

b. that the definition is too general and could be perfectly valid for tragedy, for instance, if that „*specific form of failing*" is a hybris, unless the reaction to it is mentioned, i.e. laughter.

Unlike Aristotle, Plato seems to have ignored the cathartic function of laughter (which will be the basis of a set of theories of humour called by Raskin „*theories of release*" – Raskin, pp.24-30). Perhaps this is the reson why comedy was considered a minor genre for an unfairly long time - perhaps up to Boileau.

Another aspect Plato foresaw correctly - maybe because of the etymon in „*humour*" - was the „*state of character*"; an aspect which, apart from generating the theory of humours (which originated with Hippocrates and was developed by Ben Jonson as a theoretical aspect of comedy, and whose reverberations go as far as „*flat characters*" in Dickens), was also much later developed by Freud.

The idea of „failing" can be found in Aristotle as well, but the Stagyrite goes further and defines the ludicrous as that type of „*defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive*", thus pointing at an essential factor in defining humour as against the comical. What is also very important is the fact that, in *Problemata physica*, Aristotle speaks about a kind of comic catharsis („*catasthasis*") and its value. Perhaps to modern man catharsis by laughter has a much higher existential relevance than catharsis in its Aristotelian acceptation because of the crisis of values which our epoch undergoes.

In its first meaning, that of „disposition „ (in Hippocrates' meaning) humour had nothing to do with the comic; the term became polysemantic much later on, but from its very evolution the idea that it is rooted in the human being is basic. Freud's theory develops the conditioning of humour by the human subject: „*The most favourable condition for the production of comic pleasure is a generally cheerful mood in which one is 'inclined to laugh'*„ (Freud, 1905). Freud was certainly not the first author to deduce that humour (and laughter) are exclusively human characteristics. The *inclination to laugh* is a favouring, yet, not sufficient condition for the perception of a humorous act. Freud completes his statement by a particularization: „*Unfavourable conditions for the comic arise from the kind of mental activity with which a particular person is occupied at the moment.*" This second statement is as debatable as the first, since one could easily imagine a non-humorous context in which a joke should stir up laughter and, perhaps, the incongruity in the joke is enhanced by the incongruity of the humorous act itself with its non-humorous context, so the reaction will be even stronger than in contexts where there exists an *inclination to laugh* given by the situation. The other extreme could be

imagined as well: a humorous act which fails to produce its effect, because its receiver is in a gloomy state of mind, stays a humorous act and may produce laughter with other potential receivers or with the same receiver in another state of mind.

Perhaps Freud's postulates should be reformulated as:"*the condition for the production of comic pleasure is a neutral mood in the receiver, when the balance of outer/inner stimuli is at least equal if not in favour of the outer stimuli; that is the receiver can react as expected (laugh) to the outer stimulus (incongruity).*" The postulate would be valid for the reception of any stimulus from outside (not necessarily humorous) and could be a possible definition of *normality*.[6] Since our concern here is neither psychoanalysis nor a sociology of humour and our domain of investigation is written literature (which is characterized by the lack of immediate observable feedback) all our statements as to reactions to humour should be seen in such a context, i.e. of a normal receiver, more specifically an abstract receiver representing an average of potential receivers whose indispensible characteristic should be the *normality* defined above.

The importance of the valuating subject is also stressed by Romantic theories of humour (of which the most important is Jean Paul's); yet, they do not formulate the normality-constraint mentioned above as a prerequisite for the expected reaction (laughter) to take place.

Perhaps these examples would be enough to sustain the previously implied idea that a deductive approach to the problem would yield conclusions which could be contradicted by further examples; on the other hand, the stress of the analyses so far discussed is on the causes of humour rather than on its effects (with the exception of Aristotle and Freud, perhaps).

Another possible approach is the inductive one. As in most fields of analysis in the history of human thought, induction is incomplete with humour too, because the examples one can analyze will never be all the instances existing at a certain moment in the history of mankind; except for this shortcoming, an inductive approach risks to yield a more general definition which refers to a larger sphere than the object of analysis chosen

would allow. In his brilliant analysis of irony (Booth, 1974), Wayne C. Booth defines the decoding of irony as a four-step process which, in fact, could apply to all humour, not only to irony as one mode of achieving it. The specific difference characterizing irony (i.e. 2 the apparent *bona-fide-communication*)[7] is only dealt with much later on and is not included in a possible definition of the concept. Analyzing irony as an instance of rhetoric, Booth concludes: „Everything I have said is too general to be of much use, because in the last analysis all rhetorical situations are unique" (Booth, pp.10-12).

Far from being valid only for irony, Booth's conclusion includes other types of humour as well. The distinction humour- irony would then lie in the different type of reaction to the two modes of communication: laughter versus consensus.[8]

But laughter is a type of consensus as well, perhaps one of the strongest, since it has a cathartic value. On the other hand, the consensus author-receiver can be obtained by other means as well: metaphor, plain discourse (non-ironic, non-humorous), demonstration, etc.[9]

The fact that irony is an instance of rhetoric, meanwhile having a rhetoric of its own, points at its intentionality which is, according to Booth, one of the four defining marks of the phenomenon discussed and certainly the element allowing the rhetorically-based approach. The metaphorical value of irony is also correctly pointed at. Yet, what Booth defines as *consensus* in necessarily conditioned by a previous co-perception of the incongruity in the script.

Consensus may or may not exist between author-receiver; the co-perception of irony is a prerequisite of any rhetorical value ascribed to it.

Up to a point, Booth's demonstration is valid for humour as well, therefore his statements are more general than his object of interest; this is

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[6] The author-oriented normality would include blocking any thought incongruous to expectation, before uttered.

[7] The term belongs to Victor Raskin (OP.cit. p.91) and was coined by analogy with Grice's „bona-fide mode of communication".

[8] Booth assigns to consensus the role of effect of irony.

[9] A work on the physiology of laughter could include causes of laughter other than humour, such as tickling, paroxystic delight or others; this analysis is beyond the purpose of the present work, but one cannot help noticing that Bergson's definition of laughter is valid for non-humorous laughter as well.

valid both if we consider irony and humour as two completely distinct *modes of the comic* (Popa, 1975) or irony as a manifestation of humour seen as a larger category (Robotos, 1973).

Very close to our subject here is Victor Raskin's extremely pertinent analysis of *semantic mechanisms of humour* which, in its meta-theoretical considerations, groups theories of humour into three categories: *theories of incongruity, theories of release* and *theories of disparagement* (Raskin, 1985). Several points could be made here:

a. the author has a non-homogeneous point of view in setting up the three sub-categories, in that *incongruity* pinpoints the cause, *disparagement* the attitude of the author of the humorous act, whereas *release* refers to its effect upon the author and hearer/reader. Raskin himself indirectly reconsiders his point after an analysis performed upon a corpus of jokes, assigning three different types of *script oppositeness* to the three groups of theories (Raskin, 131 sq.)

b. these considerations could refer to the comic in general (*disparagement* as an attitude of the author towards the object of his speech act is not a feature of humour, but of irony, sarcasm, satire - modes of the comic which are aggressive to human essence and do not meet the Aristotelian condition of catasthasis).

c. Raskin defines humour as a function:
$$HU(S,H,ST,E,P,SI,SO)=X$$
where X = F (funny)
X = U (unfunny) (Raskin, pp.4-5) and
where HU is *humorous act*, S is *speaker*, H is *hearer*, ST is *stimulus*, E is *experience*, P is *psychology*, SI is *situation*, SO is *society*. Apart from the fact that this is a definition for all comic, there is an overlapping in the factors conditioning a humorous act, in that the *psychological type of an individual* (P) is conditioned by his experience (E) and by a factor Raskin has overlooked, heredity (psychologists hold that the sense of humour is at least to

a certain extent innate). On the other hand, the value of the object of humour in the humorous act is overlooked, in that it may coincide with the hearer in some cases.[10]

The fact that Raskin considers the mechanisms of humour to be semantic could lead to the classical debate of generativists upon which the generative level of language is: the semantic one or the syntactic one. Raskin clearly prefers the semantic level. Yet, apart from this aspect (which is beyond the scope of this work), a point should be made here accounting for the title of this book: „*linguistic mechanisms of humour*" would be a term referring to all levels of language (including the phono-morpho-syntactic hardware as well); on the other hand, perhaps semantics is the least „*mechanical*" level of language, since, along with pragmatics it connects the user(s) to the system of language and, meanwhile covers all the other levels.

The overwhelming merit of Raskin's theory lies in the fact that he stresses the *formalizability* of mechanisms of humour and, consequently, their relative repeatability, his theory being one of the few which have a concrete prospective aspect.

Other analyses of humour adopt points of view of literary theory. A common point of view is that humour is a sub-category of the comic, yet a clear-cut deliniation of humour as against the comic is seldom found. Some points of view stress the non-aggressive character of humour as against other modes of the comic. This is a highly significant point and should be taken into consideration for further analysis.

As a sub-category of the comic, humour reproduces its basic feature, the comical contrast, based on a duality,[11] in the shape of an incongruity generated by an ambiguous script. Yet, in many such definitions the non-aggressivity factor is not postulated, therefore they are larger in sphere than the category defined: „*in jokes...we are led along one line of thought and then booted out of it*" (Mindess, 1971, pp.21-22); or: „*laughter arises from the view of two or more* inconsistent, unsuitable or incongruous parts or

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[10] 10. A more detailed discussion on the participants involved in a humorous act will follow in Chapter II

[11] All theorists of the comic seem to agree upon this point, since Cicero (*De oratoria* II' 63, 70, 71) up to Wayne C. Booth

circumstances considered as united in a complex object or assemblage, or as *acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them*" (Beattie, 1776); or: "*The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laugh itself is just the expression of this incongruity*" (Schopenhauer, 1819, p.76).

Some theorists define humour as against *wit*. R.B.Martin considers both to be "*aspects of comedy and the ludicrous*" (Martin, 1974, p.25). Wit is considered to be "*thought, speech or writing that surprised and delighted by its neatness and surprise, usually occasioning laughter*" (Martin 1974, p.26), whereas humour (at least in its Victorian acceptation to which the author refers) is characterized by "*amiability, sympathy, naturalness and pathos*". The same point can be found with Leigh Hunt, who characterizes wit as "*an element for professors to sport with*" whereas the blending between wit and humour helps "*humanize the world*" (Leigh Hunt, 1846, p.14). This last observation is valuable since it pinpoints the cathartic value of humour as well as the social function of hybrid types of humour.

It ensues that, if wit is the intellectualized, pedantic, "*art for art's sake*" aspect, humour is a natural, more or less spontaneous and non-aggressive species of the comic. Since wit is not always laughable, its value is rhetorical rather than comical, whereas humour always stirs laughter and is not always intentional, like wit is.

The relationship humour (wit)/ rhetoric has long been dwelt upon in the history of criticism. Among the figures of classical rhetorics, *paronomasia*, i.e. the pun plays an important part. Applying classical rhetorical devices to the analysis of Shakespeare, sister Miriam Joseph and afterwards Brian Vickers identify instances of paronomasia in the text under analysis; yet, what classical rhetorics understands by paronomasia only covers several types of pun (those based on homonymy and/or polysemy); our contemporary notion of pun includes all instances of wordplay, involving other mechanisms as well.

Last but not least, a very interesting point of view on humour is the one treating it as play. Defining play (Fry, 1963), William Fry identifies three elements involved in the idea of play: the idea of a foundation behaviour, the idea of a metaphoric behaviour and the idea of metacommunication. The second element contains what Fry calls "*representation just for fun*", i.e. modelling a reality by play, for the sake of laughter. The following points could be made:

a. being repetitive, play is unlike a humorous act, since the latter, repeated with the same witnesses, ceases to produce its effect.
b. there certainly is a metaphoric value in a humorous act (as Booth observes, as well) but its result is, in most cases, the generation of a possible world, not a model of the already existing one.
c. the respective cognitive values of play and humour cannot be compared but insofar as the two human attitudes are assigned truth-values; the systems of reference of these truth-values are different by definition.
d. unlike humour, play can also have a dissociative value; a dissociative comical act is ironical, satirical, sarcastic; insofar as play is associative, it can be compared to humour in that it establishes an instance of human solidarity.

Some conclusions could be drawn from this succinct review of a few theories of humour:

1. that humour is extremely hard to define, having in view the multiple conditioning and mechanisms involved in its production.
2. that it is an extremely complex function depending on constants and variables which are not homogeneous socially and historically.
3. that, probably, a more consistent point of view would be a cause-effect analysis performed with linguistic instruments

Therefore, this analysis should:

a. give a working definition of humour
b. limit a corpus by analyzing some constraints
c. see to what extent the corpus confirms the definition
d. formalize mechanisms of humour found in the corpus and taxonomize them according to some logical-linguistic criteria
e. state (or predict) the relative liability of these mechanisms to create potential humorous effects

The purpose of this work is, consequently, to identify linguistic mechanisms of humour in the corpus under analysis, to ascertain to what

extent they are identical (universal) and/or different (language-specific), taxonomize them according to some relatively consistent criteria into groups and sub-groups, with a view to their potentiality of generating humorous acts in the future, i.e. to their productivity.

To the extent to which mechanisms of humour are a. *formalizable* and b. *universal* (for English and Romanian, here, but perhaps for other Indo-European languages as well) this work will ascertain the relative repeatability of humorous acts in different sets of contexts and, consequently, their reproductibility in and outside the boundaries of humorous verse.

Chapter II.
TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF HUMOUR

II.1. Humour as Disruption / Humour as a State of System

Most of the definitions of humour given so far label its cause as an incongruity, fracture, disruption in the continuum of expectation, a disruption whose result is relief and/or derision by laughter. Laughter is assigned (similarly to catharsis) the function of establishing an equilibrium following this disruption.

More or less implicitly, humour is also defined as function of different constants and variables, without whose interplay the effect might run the risk of not being achieved. If humour is a function whose domain of definition is at a certain point discontinuous (where incongruity appears), after this point:

a. the function continues to be defined on the same domain of definition, but there also appears a second, parallel function whose probability is judged as against the main function (which could be normal expectation). Laughter arises from the high improbability of two functions of the same form to coexist on the same domain of definition, in other words, from the improbability of the second reading of an ambiguous script (possible world) to actually happen as a situation (a fact which pertains to the non-aggressive character of humour),

or

b. the domain of definition changes after the discontinuity allowing at least two parallel functions of the same form to co-exist on it with an equal degree of probability (the extreme case would be an infinity of functions which could appear, if language were infinitely ambiguous). In this case, there is a cognitive value attached to the humorous act (in that it offers a new, unexpected, unthought-of possibility of interpreting the world which, in some cases, could also have a poetic value). In other words, the

incongruity generating humour does not re-establish the old equilibrium, but suggests a *new* one. If the second function does not annul the first (i.e. it is compatible with it), the non-aggressivity condition of humour is fulfilled.

In both cases, the disruption in the domain of definition of the original function is an incongruity. In both cases the incongruity is ambiguous, i.e. it offers a second valid/non-valid reading of the world as well, according to the truth-conditions embedded into expectation. If no truth-condition in expectation is abolished (the non-aggressivity condition is fulfilled), the result is humour and the reaction to it is laughter. This type of humour could be called *pure humour*.

Incongruities can also question one truth-value of expectation, at least. In this case the non-aggressivity condition is not fulfilled and the script becomes ironical, satirical, sarcastic.

If one truth-value of expectation is altogether abolished (whether it is replaced by another proposition or not), a possible world is created, which according to expectation, can be judged as absurd (or, perhaps, utopical)[1].

According to the importance ascribed by the social and historical experience of the group to the truth-condition abolished, as well as to the actual possibility - impossibility of its cancellation, the text may or may not be labelled or felt as aggressive by its receiver. In this case, the text may be read as either neutral or absurd. In both cases the incongruity is not ambiguous.

When the moral values of a group are assigned the importance of truth-values (i.e. they are granted an existential relevance), infringement upon a moral value will generate a tragical incongruity (non-ambiguous, aggressive) which Aristotle labelled as hybris. When the system of values regains its equilibrium by eliminating the infringing element (elimination called „tragedy" in everyday life, as well), the state of catharsis arises among the members of the group. Seen as a function, the tragical would then regain the form and the domain of definition of the original function after the moment of disruption engendered by the incongruity. On the other hand, if convention or decorum, for instance, are assigned artificially a value

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[1] Through such a lense, the difference between the utopical and the absurd is that with utopia the reader agrees to abolish one truth-condition from the outset.

higher than they actually should have (gaining the weight of moral values), the coexistence of the two functions can generate sarcasm, irony, satire and „*comedy of manners*" is obtained. The incongruity does not question here the truth-value in expectation „*in se*", but the importance the group assigns to it at a particular social-historical moment.

Like laughter (and catasthasis), catharsis is a human reaction. It ensues that the sense of humour (irony, satire, sarcasm) as well as the sense of the absurd and the tragical are exclusively human attributes.

Strangely enough, linguistic practice has not accredited the syntagm „*sense of the comic*", preferring „*sense of humour*" in the great majority of (Indo- European, at least) speech communities. Taking into account the first meaning of the term (see supra p. 11), linguistic practice seems to plead for the *subjectivity* of humour as against the „*objectivity*" (in a Platonical sense) of the comic. Since the latter is a human output and experience as well (nothing in nature is comical in the absence of a human valuating subject), it seems that historical group-experience reflected in linguistic labels ascertains not so much the „*human*" quality of humour, as against the comic, as (or also) its „*humane*" feature. If the comic is a proximal genre for several species (or „modes", as they were labelled by some theorists) (Popa, 1975, pp. 222-303), the specific difference individuating humour as against other species of the comic is non-aggressiveness.

The cathartic value of laughter is also perceived by human groups as something wholesome and benefic; in many speech communities the expression „*to lose one's sense of humour*" is more or less equated to a psycho-pathological state.

II.2. Pure Humour and Hybrid Humour

From what has been discussed so far, it results that humour could be seen as a state of system defined by a function which is characterized by a discontinuity in it called incongruity. Humour can be perceived due to the the sense of humour which is the availability of human beings to sense the types of incongruity in a situation or text liable to stir up laughter and to re-create such incongruities in different contexts. The perception of incon-

gruity is possible in a state of normality[2] of the human receiver endowed with a sense of humour. Incongruities can be ambiguous or non-ambiguous. Humorous incongruities are ambiguous. The classification of incongruities into ambiguous/non-ambiguous is made on the basis of logical-linguistic criteria. Another criterion operating in the case of incongruities is the social one, distinguishing between acceptable/non-acceptable incongruities. (Acceptability in this case could be roughly equated with „*aggressiveness*"; the word does not here imply its generative-transformational meaning.)

Corroborating the two criteria, the following situations can be identified:

1. acceptable + ambiguous - *pure humour*
2. acceptable + non-ambiguous -normal discourse (non-aggressive)
3. unacceptable + ambiguous - *hybrid humour*
4. unacceptable + non-ambiguous - serious discourse of the aggressive type (oaths, taboos, etc. on the one hand, or tragic, absurd, etc., on the other hand)

4. can become 3. if the following statement is considered as axiomatic:

The sense of humour has three aspects:

a. perceptive

b. interpretive

c. creative

In this case, the creative aspect of the sense of humour comes into play, making the non-ambiguous linguistic and/or logical meaning of the text become ambiguous. In most cases the two possible meanings are enough, out of which one is acceptable, the other remaining the oath, the taboo, the absurd, the tragic aspect. Both readings of the script should be validated by the cotext (which should be *non-restrictive*, i.e. should not contain markers which favour one decoding to the detriment of the other). The mechanisms brought into play in order to ambiguate the script are *linguistic mechanisms of humour*.

Two conclusions could be drawn from what has been so far discussed:

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[2] *normality* was defined in Chapter I., p. 16 sq.

1. that humour is a non-aggressive species of the comic, in which the two possible interpretations of the ambiguous script are both acceptable (socially or individually); in this case *pure humour* is obtained.

2. that humour can also act as a downtoner for other types of incongruities which in their *pure* variant are highly aggressive to human essence or values (the tragic, the grotesque, the absurd or the comic in such modes as: satire, irony, derision, etc.), by ambiguating the script, making it allow an acceptable reading as well. The possibility for both readings to be valid in the non-restrictive cotext tones down the aggressiveness of the unacceptable reading by stirring up laughter, as well. Such hybrid species as tragi-comedy, humorous absurd, humorous satire may thus appear. In this way one of the social functions of the creative aspect involved in the sense of humour is fulfilled. By including laughter into the range of expected reactions to the script, its illocutionary potential is increased. The effective downtoning of the initially aggressive utterance is achieved by including catasthasis among its effects.

One point this discussion will try to make is that the mechanisms of ambiguation are the same with both *pure* and *hybrid humour*.

In both cases the play element is involved into the ambiguation of the script (i.e. in fulfilling the social function of the creative sense of humour), with an associative value (perhaps what Booth calls *consensus*). The only case in which the game is dissociative is when one or more of the participants lack the sense of humour (in its perceptive and interpretative acceptation, as well).

Defining humour should also have in view the participants in a humorous act. The first problem would be that of *intentionality*. If intentionality is involved, then some rhetorical aspects should be discussed as well; since irony is the simplest way of ambiguating a script, meanwhile standing somewhat apart from humour, it will be discussed in relationship to rhetoric and humour. A discussion of humour as a communication act should help us, finally, define it as a complex function.

II. 3. Non-intentional/intentional Humour.
Humour as an Artefact

Both non-intentional (spontaneous, accidental, involuntary) and intentional humour are instances of the comic; the former, whether non-intentional humour are instances of the comic; the former, whether non-intentional humour is the result of an unrepeatable, unique situational linguistic or linguistic, is the result of an unrepeatable, unique situational context in which an accident creates an incongruity in relation to expectation (in the sense defined above, of „*horizon d'attente*"). This accident can be non-linguistic and its issue is „*situational comic*" (in some cases, what has been called „*the burlesque*"); if the accident is linquistic, it can be triggered off by a misuse of language (and is, as we shall discuss later, a miscarried analogy in attributing meaning to a morpho-syntactic structure, due to various causes: ignorance, fatigue, ambiguity, confusion of registers etc.) Roughly, the mechanism of accidental „*linguistic comic*" acts according to what Freud defined as *acte manqué*. In a person who has a normal behaviour (in the sense we have given to normality), the linguistic *acte manqué* will be blocked before it is uttered, unless the subject considers that the context permits it (in the sense given by the quotation from Freud above) (see supra I., p. 16) and/or if the cannot resist the urge of being witty. In such a case the original *acte manqué* becomes an *acte trouvé*[3] which may be ironical and/or humorous (it will stir up a kind of consensus which may manifest itself as smile, grin or laughter).

In all cases described so far, the situational context is unique; it may happen that the context in which the *acte trouvé* took place for the first time shoud be reiterated in a more or less similar way for the author of the „*witticism*" or one of the original hearers; the repetition of the „*bon mot*'[4] in broadly similar situations, by more and more people, re-enacting the *acte trouvé* will turn the witticism into a humorous cliché. Another case might be the one in which one of the witnesses or the author himself narrates the circumstances of the *acte trouvé* and its punch-line to other hearers who

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[3] the term belongs to us
[4] in Freud's terms

were not present when it originally occurred: what results is an anecdote[5]. A third case in which the author (if the „*bon mot*" was blocked before it was uttered) or one of the witnesses (if the *acte trouvé* took place) invent a different cotext for the same punch-line containing the incongruity; this will be what is called a joke.

In all three cases (humorous cliché, anecdote, joke) the comic is not accidental but intentional and meant to stir up laughter. The mere reproduction of a „*catch-line*" or, with non-verbal humour, „*catch-gesture*" without its cotext is not funny in itself, because the original system of reference, in which it was perceived as incongruous is not there. Once its original or invented cotext is reproduced in order to arouse laughter, it becomes an *artefact*. Moreover, the cotext and incongruity can both be invented and this is the case of humorous literary species of which humorous verse is only one instance.

Since it is circumstantial, accidental humour has a fleeting character, lack of elaboration, it is short-lived in time, highly tainted with occasionality; even if it has been jotted down or re-narrated it has a restricted area of circulation. This is the fate of what is called „*occasional*" literary humour, as well. Many times an epigram is accompanied by an explanatory text on how it was written, because the humorous effect could not be perceived otherwise; many of Cincinat Pavelescu's epigrams exist only as replies to Nigrim's; in order to understand a parody, one must necessarily know the text it parodiates; such is the fate of the pastiche, as well, and a very special type of intertext comes into play in order to decypher the epitaphs at the „Jolly Cemetery" in Săpînța.

If the aspects described so far could be the landmarks of a possible concept of „*naive literature*" or „*naive humour*", the great bulk of humorous literature (and poetry) resists more successfully the test of time, both because of a higher degree of general-human relevance (and elaborateness) and because it is meant as literature (*artefact*, in its etymological sense);

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[5] The difference between anecdote and joke seems to be the fact that the former is real-to-life (sometimes attributed to great personalites) whereas the latter can also be fantastic, absurd, etc (i.e. involving the imaginary). Formally there seems to be no difference between the mechanisms of humour involved in the two.

punch-lines are incorporated into carefully built cotexts which bring into discussion already established literary conventions.

Humour as artefact could then be defined as the narration of a humorous instance (either real or invented), oral or written, with the intention to stir up laughter.

Since the purpose of any act of this kind is consensus of one of the strongest types (collective laughter), it will result, after analysis on the corpus, that the mechanisms of humour are the same with all humorous texts, whether accidental or intentional. Intentionality is, then, an aspect irrelevant to a discussion on the structure of humour; but, since this work analyses literary humour in verse, it should be mentioned that intentionality is not only obvious, but manifests itself in the embedding of the basic mechanisms of humour into stylistically conditioned scripts. Therefore, a discussion on humour as artefact should pinpoint some of its rhetorical aspects, as well.

Classical rhetoric treats humour and irony as rhetorical devices with a more or less equal weight in discourse. Perhaps a discussion of the two modes of the comic with regard to their rhetorical effect would be relevant at this point.

II.4. Rhetoric - Irony - Humour

Unlike humour, irony is by definition intentional (Booth, 1974., p.5) and, on the other hand, „weaker" as to effect. The consensus implied by irony is not cathartic, it is not the release laughter brings about. The reaction to irony is usually a smile, not a guffaw. One possible explanation is that irony is more contextual than humour.The incongruity is not abrupt, it is *covert*[6] in many cases, because the object of irony is almost always present.

Like humour, irony has an effect of „*amplification*"[7], adding a new rhetorical dimension to any work it appears in. Yet, it also has an effect of dissimulation (what was called „*covertness*" above), identified by

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[6] the term is not used, here, in Booth's acceptation, but with its normal meaning
[7] as defined by Thomas Wilson's Art of Rhetoric, 1553

Aristotle,[8] then Quintilian (Quintilian,*Institutio Oratoria*, 9, I) (for whom one-word irony would be a thrope) and up to our days. This effect ensues from the fact that, structurally, irony is characterized by an appearance of *bona fide communication*, i.e. the incongruity is not present in the surface structure of the script (as with the pun, for instance) but in the clash between text (syntagm) and context (whether linguistic or, in most cases, non-linguistic).

As rhetorical devices, both humour and irony can function as *attention-strainers*, because they are not as easy to decode as plain discourse. Yet, humour also has a tension-breaking component which is not specific of irony. It could be supposed, in the light of what has been pointed out above concerning humour as a downtoner, that whenever laughter accompanies irony, there is a humorous component to it. Perhaps when irony blends with pure humour the result is what has been labelled as „*mild irony*" (which has the feature of non-aggressivity described above).

Yet, perhaps the main difference between humour and irony lies in their mechanisms of decoding which will be analysed in what follows.

According to Booth (Booth, 1974., pp.10-13), the decoding mechanism of irony consists of four steps:

1. „the reader is requested to reject the literal meaning"
2. „alternative interpretations or explanations are tried out or, rather, in the unusual case of quick recognition, come flooding in"
3. „a decision must/.../ be made that the statement is ironic"
4. „we can finally choose a new meaning or a cluster of meanings with which we can rest secure".

A quick analysis of this mechanism could reveal the following conclusions:

a. step 1. is necessary because irony (unlike some types of humour) has an appearance of „*bona fide communication*". Yet, if the literal meaning were altogether rejected, there would be no irony any more; apparently the effect appears only in the presence of the literal meaning as one

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[8] in *Ethica Nicomacheia* he even defined „good jokes" as against „buffoonery" (entrapelia/ homolochia)

possible decoding (so the literal meaning becomes part of the system of reference in which the statement is judged as ironic)

b. step 2. coincides with a perusal of memory-systems (i.e. expectation) to find „alternative interpretations".

c. step 3. is impossible if step 1. is achieved (see point a. above)

d. corroborating step 3. with what Booth calls „consensus" („Both parties to the exchange have confidence that they move together in identical patterns"), the conclusion is that the doublet author-receiver is rather driven towards a co-perception of irony and not towards a consensus.

e. On the other hand, it is not very clear what „to rest secure" could mean, if the analysis above is taken into account, and irony is ascribed an aggressive feature. Perhaps „resting secure" refers to having found the alternative meaning(s), but their interpretation keeps the author/receiver in the zone of „security" only if neither of them coincides with the object of irony.

A possible mechanism of deciphering humour could be the following:

1. perception of the text containing incongruity (which, unlike irony, is at times in the surface structure)

2. perusal of memory systems - establishing the area in which the incongruity could be solved

3. solution of the incongruity (disambiguation by shifting back its elements into their expected places) - an act of analysis ultimately yielding two or several possible ways of decoding the script

4. return to the original script and superposition of the incongruity with its solution(s) - synthesis

5. reaction (laughter) (Tataru,1985)

Some differences appear between the two mechanisms of decoding:

a. with humour, the incongruity can appear in the surface structure, compelling the receiver(s) to shift immediately to the non bona fide mode of communication

b. if in the case of irony it is obvious that the second („covert") reading is the intended one, with humour the effect arises, perhaps, from the indecision among two or several interpretations, from their co-existence with an equal justification (and justifiability) in a non-restrictive cotext; if with irony the literal meaning is to be dismissed as a pre-requisite to

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perceiving it, with humour it can and must be a possible reading of the script.

c. with humour laughter is always present as a checkpoint for its existence; laughter with irony presupposes, as demonstrated above, some humorous overtone, as well.

One of the reasons why irony was chosen for a parallel discussion with humour was the fact that the two modes of comic can often coexist in one and the same text; consequently, a dissociation between them would be purely methodological in these cases. Yet, irony is incomparably more proteic; as Booth argues, there is a possible ironical reading for any literary text ever written.[9] With humour, there exists the checkpoint of laughter as an effect; on the other hand, (co)textual markers can also be present to orient the decoding.

A discussion of the rhetorical values attributable to the two would be a discussion of their respective illocutionary potentials. Therefore, a discussion of irony and humour as communicational acts would, perhaps, be necessary. Since irony has been discussed in details by Booth, some conclusions could round up this parallel between irony/humour, before a detailed analysis of humour as an act of communication.

Irony has a smaller sphere than humour; it may be a mechanism of humour (like what classical rhetoric calls zeugma, paronomasia etc. - which will be discussed later). It can also play a part in other contexts (the absurd, the tragical, etc.) as a means to achieve a certain stylistic effect. In all cases it is a means of reinforcing illocution (consequently a rhetorical device) and, therefore, it is structurally intentional, even when used outside literature, in everyday life. A rhetoric of irony is therefore sufficient to account for all its aspects. Irony functions on the basis of the co-perception by at least two humans of a second possibly valid reading underlying a script, which is always in some relation of contradiction with the first. Irony is always intentional and more covert than humour. In the great majority of cases it is aggressive in some way to its subject/hearer.

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[9] Booth, 1974, p. 7, where the author quotes I.A.Richards and Cleanth Brooks as well, to argue this point.

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Humour, on the other hand, çan be non-intentional as well, not only in point of mechanisms (which are not our main concern, at this point) but also as to effect (laughter is not always a matter of consensus between two humans) (see infra, p. 39). It can be achieved by several mechanisms, out of which one can be irony, therefore it is a larger category than the former. It can acquire the aggressive character of irony (absurd humour, tragical humour, etc.), insofar as it is intentional, stylistically-conditioned and, consequently, used rhetorically. Yet, it can also have functions other than stylistic (inasmuch as laughter, its effect, is a relapse-valve for tension), which are not our main concern here. It leads not only to co-perception, but also to a *consensus* between two humans; it can re-establish equilibrium inside one and the same human being at the perception of an incongruity in the non-human environment. Therefore, humour has a strong cathartic value and its manifestation is a strong form of consensus - laughter - which also releases inner tensions or smooths up tensions between individuals - environment (whether natural or social).

Insofar as humour is used rhetorically, it has the effect of „*amplification*" irony has; but a rhetoric of humour could not cover the whole range of manifestations of the phenomenon; it would exclude non-intentional aspects altogether, as well as humorous perceptions of non-human realities.

Yet, our concern here is literary humour, consequently intentional humour should be given a more thorough analysis as an act of communication with a certain illocutionary value, so that a workshop definition of humour should take shape before dealing with humorous verse.

II. 5. Humour as a Communicational Act. Humour as Process and Product

As shown above, the communicational approach to humour is justified by its underlying illocutionary potential.

The communicational value of humour can be ascribed on the one hand to the *process of humour* (i.e. to the humorous act itself) and to the manner in which the reaction to humour is triggered off („*product*").

It is obvious that the two aspects act synergically and therefore cannot be separated, especially if the effect, laughter, is considered. Yet, for methodological reasons, humour can be seen as a process engendering a humorous act which can fall into different types (pure humour or humour blended with other species), whose product is a reaction to this act, by which, normally, laughter is triggered off.

II.5.1. Humour as a Process

Seen procesually, humour is a function involving some constants and some variables.

Two relevant constants could be quoted, out of whose interplay the humorous act takes shape. These are:

a. the three persons involved in the humorous act.

b. the incongruity (situational or textual)

Out of the variables involved in the humorous act some could be ascribed to *a.* above, some others to *b.*

Variables ascribed to *a.*

A. the physical presence/non-presence of the persons involved in the act of humour

B. the coincidence/non-coincidence of the three

C. the self-perception and the reciprocal perception of the three

D. the /± Human/ feature of the three

These variables will emerge more clearly from the discussion of the constants below; their function will result in the types of interplay they are involved in, with the constants above.

The variables that could be ascribed to *b.* form the object of analysis of this work (linguistic mechanisms of humour), insofar as they are involved in the (more specific) production of humorous verse.

The three persons in any communicational act are traditionally equated with the grammatical persons (Ist person-emitter, IInd person-receiver, IIIrd person-object of communication). With humour, they could be ascribed the following functions:

*I*st person - author of the humorous act

//nd person - receiver(s)

///rd person - object(s) or „victim(s)" of humour

This set of constants interacts with the set of variables listed above, yielding the following possible classification of humorous acts:

1. author = object = receiver

This is a possible but improbable (in the etymological sense) case. Quite a number of butades point at the fact that mockery of others should start with self-mockery. Yet, it is, probably, as commonplace to assume (for any possible theory of humour) that the author's opinion about himself in the act of humour is always positive. If self-mockery is non-humorous, it certainly will have no witnesses and will probably assume the outlines of self-satire One could tell very little about such cases, but, presumably, people who do not have a good opinion about themselves will not venture into the authorship of an act of „pure humour" (see definition above). It is generally admitted in psychiatry that a certain degree of development of inferiority complexes in a human psyche could generate a sarcastic, ironical, derisive, satirical attitude (i.e. an aggressive one); serious psychic ailment (if associated with laughter reactions in the patient) can be accompanied by the gross, the grotesque, the utterly vulgar and not by what is normally labelled as humour.

Normally, on the other hand, all instances of self-mockery meant for witnesses are artefacts, i.e. they are intentional and fall into another category of acts of humour.

2. author = object; author ≠ receiver

This type of humorous acts is somewhat cognate to the first, but it is characterized by the presence of illocutionary potential (since there are witnesses to it). What the author aims at, here, is a consensus with his reader/hearer about the contrary of the things stated[10]. As pointed out before,

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[10] By *contrary* we mean here a sentence of the type p=-p, i.e. „/Subject/ is anything but/quality/" this would be a possible definition of the ironic statement (which Booth has overlooked). The ironic statement „You're an angel!" does not imply „You're a devil", but only „You're anything but an angel". A sentence like „You're a table" (= you're not a human being), of a type p=p̄, is absurd. Different possible worlds could range between these two poles, according to the degree of improbability of the implied comparison; here Booth correctly stated the metaphorical value of irony. But when this possible world is very close to

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the author's opinion about himself (in humorous acts) is always positive, so there is always an underlying expectation in him that the third party should contradict him and confirm this good opinion by consensus in laughter. Even when Charles Lamb states his own alleged lack of responsiveness to the music of great composers, he actually mocks at the snobbery of his contemporaries:

> Some cry up Haydn, some Mozart,
> Just as the whim bites; for my part,
> I do not care a farthing candle
> For either of them or for Haendel -
> ....
> The devil with his foot so cloven,
> For aught I care, may take Beethoven;
> And, if the bargain does not suit,
> I'll throw him Weber in to boot.

In the light of what has been pointed out above, regarding this type of attitude, Lamb's statement is not „I'm uncultured and insensitive", but „These are not values fundamental to existence" and, further, perhaps: „I will not abide by these values, alleging they are existential, like my contemporaries do."

If the author does not expect his hearer/reader to laugh, the mockery is aggressive (self-satire, self-derision, etc.) Statistically, the production of such texts seldom takes place. Lemuel Gulliver's considerations on himself (in part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*) involve the entire human race; but this is a unique example and the bitterest satire ever written in English literature; on the other hand, the fact that Lemuel Gulliver stands, here, for all his fellow humans could confirm the point previously made about the author's fundamentally positive opinion about himself, in that the character does not

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the absurd, verging on it, cases of „*absurd humour*" can be encoutered, which are more than irony. The relationship humour-absurd will be discussed further below. Suffice it to say that laughter in the case of absurd humour is generated by a consensus that the possible world is so highly improbable that it could not possibly exist (so our normal values and human condition could not be at stake)

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remain an individual with his own typical flaws to be mocked at, but grows into a blueprint of the flaws of ˌmankind. „Judge me, and you'll judge yourselves" is not an invitation to laughter any longer.

Finally, if the author expects his hearer to laugh and the latter does not react as expected, there will always be, with the author, a self-reassuring reaction („He's stupid" or „He hates me"), restoring his good opinion about himself. Although an anthology of bad verse has been already compiled, there does not (yet) exist an anthology of bad jokes, perhaps because such productions can and will not survive. A possible anthology of bad jokes produced by famous writers, for instance, would turn into a source of humour, because of the incongruity between the fame of the author and his failure to produce a humorous act (which is the mechanism underlying the anthology of bad verse).

The fact that the author of a humorous act coincides with his object only in order to convince (a) receiver(s) of the contrary of the things stated can be formally demonstrated by mathematical logics.

Since $x = -x \notin Q$ (natural numbers), it ensues that the author is insane (which is a possible world) or that he does not mean it (non-intentionality could further imply that the author does not elicit consensus, which reduces the statement to the absurd).

An absurd equation would not be $x=-x \notin R$ (i.e. such a thing could happen), but $x=\overline{x}$. Only $\overline{x}=\overline{x}$ is a valid equation (proposition) in our normal system of reference, governed by the rules of logic.

It results that the author wants to state *the contrary* of what he says, not its *opposite*. Should one admit that $x=\overline{x}$ is a valid statement, he creates a possible world (which is absurd, according to the normal system of reference of expectation) where the system of reference becomes $x=\overline{x}$; i.e. *pure absurd* (of the type cultivated by Kafka, Ionesco, Orwell) is based not upon an incongruity in our normal system of refernce, but on inconsistency of the normal system of reference itself. This inconsistency will lead to the acceptance of the absurd convention $x=\overline{x}$ as a system of reference (*pure absurd*).[11]

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[11] Pure absurd would then, perhaps, be based on the hearer/reader's conscious abolishing of the normal expectation in favour of $x=\overline{x}$. Whenever this does not happen, the possible world

3. author ≠ object ≠ receiver

This is, statistically, the largest category of humorous acts. After the co-perception of the incongruity in the script, the consensus reached can be of several types:

a. consensus object-author-receiver

It is the ideal case when the three persons involved in the act of humour consent about the humorous essence of the communicational act (i.e. shift to the non-bona-fide mode of communication) and the result will be pure humour and laughter. The possible readings of the incongruity in the humorous text do not affect the human essence of either the object or the receiver. Occasional oral humour could be quoted here, since this type of consensus implies the physical presence of receiver and object, as well as a human object. Since with written literature the receiver and object are not physically present in the production of the humorous act (no immediate feedback by laughter can take place), this type of consensus is only indirectly specific to written literature. One could easily imagine the atmosphere in which Cincinat Pavelescu and Nigrim wrote their epigrammatic duels; yet, this case cannot be included into the category under discussion now, because the object coincides with the receiver (and afterwards turns into author himself). On the other hand, this example is in fact a series of distinct humorous acts, ultimately forming a unit (they cannot be understood fully if taken separately). Moreover, it could be argued that the author's reaction to his own epigram does not take place simultaneously with that of the object/receiver, but perhaps at a moment during the elaboration of the text, consequently, although this case could appear as a counter-example to the previous statements, it falls, in fact, into another category.

b. consensus author-receiver

If the humorous act takes place factually, two variables stated above come into dicussion:

- *the physical presence/absence of the object*

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is at each point confronted with normal expectation and the result is humorous, because of the manifold incongruities obtaining. Lewis Carroll's two *Alices* are the game of a logician playing with the two propositions $x=\overline{x}$ and $x=-x$.

If the object of humour is present and laughs, the situation amounts to what has been discussed before under *a*.

If the object of humour is present and does not laugh, the humorous act will be either a case of blunder (the author, out of various reasons, did not correctly predict the response of the present object) or of variously motivated malice on the part of the author. What takes place between author and receiver may become an act of humour, provided that the latter side(s) in attitude with the former. The relevance of attitude in the object and receiver clearly points at the fact that the species of humour implied are not „*pure*", but mixed species, such as: irony, satire,derision, mockery - blended with humour. The presence of laughter is a momentary downtoner of such strong means of disproval of the object as satire, derision, etc., which, in their pure form are aggressive to human essence and, therefore, not laughable. Such humorous acts are not likely to take place in the presence of the object, unless a blunder or malice are implied. The receiver, on the other hand, may not laugh either, or only grin, which could mean that he either assumes the role of object or he sides with the latter to the detriment of the author. No act of humour takes place in such cases except, perhaps, a „consensus" in the author's mind (with a self-reassuring function which confirms his basically positive opinion about himself) that he wasted his capacity of creating a humorous act upon people who lack sense of humour, and/or the frustrating feeling that he has made a blunder. His laughter (if present) will immediately stop in either case.

- the human/non-human quality of the object

This variable acts throughout our classification. In this case (consensus author-receiver), if the object is human, the situation amounts to what has been described above; if the object is non-human, the author and receiver can laugh at a situation in the (non-human) world around. Pure humour is thus achieved in most cases, because the receiver does not feel affected in his human essence, neither does he have a human object to side with. Yet, essentially non-human objects or situations can be indirectly human (institutions, conventions, art, crafts, politics, etc.). In this case the description of a consensus or of a blunder may function.

In all cases (those sketched above and the ones which will follow) the human object and receiver of a humorous act can shift roles, becoming, in turns, respectively, the object-receiver, the receiver-object, both of them objects or both of them receivers, according to the degree of self-involvement in the humorous act, i.e. to the extent to which they feel affected in their essence by one or several possible readings of the incongruous text, which amounts, ultimately, to their opinions about themselves. A humorous act can question (more or less severely) the self-perception of an individual and self-perception is a fundamental component of equilibrium. Humour becomes a downtoner if this questioning is seriously meant by the author and it acts as such by ambiguating the original non-ambiguous, aggressive script. At least one non-aggressive reading co-exists with the aggressive one and reduces its impact. On the other hand, the very ambiguity of the script suggests that there is something unacceptable about it, and the invitation of decoding the meaning also highlights it, as against the neutral, non-aggressive, acceptable one(s). To a certain extent laughter is also conditioned by the satisfaction of having re-composed this puzzle. Only after this first step can there exist a judgement of value; if the receiver sides with the author, he will go on laughing; solidarity with the object will stop laughter or block it altogether. In actual communication, i.e. in live situations, it may happen that the object of irony, mockery, etc. burst into laughter and then stop short realizing he or something fundamental to himself is the object of mockery.

Yet, the questioning of the object/receiver's fundamental values can also not be seriously meant by the author; in this case an act of pure humour takes place and the consensus (I/you do not (cannot) actually mean it) stirs up laughter with all its cathartic force. This latter situation is

c. consensus author-object,

which has as a necessary prerequisite a thorough reciprocal knowledge of the two, trust, perhaps even love. It is the case of „*amiable attacks*" (in Romanian „*şarje amicale*"). The case when there exists

d. consensus object-receiver

has been to a certain extent tackled above, from the author's point of view. Assuming that the object and receiver have, basically, a good opinion about themselves, a consensus object-receiver (excluding the present author) may imply a possible world in which the author is insane, stupid, has strong inferiority complexes etc. If all these labels are established by a consensus

object-receiver, no act of humour takes place. If the two laugh, the situation is the one described under point *b.'* above, or, if they laugh at the act of humour although they disagree with its content, either their opinion about the author changes (usually for the better, because of the function of laughter) or their opinion about themselves is questioned, i.e. their respective self-perception. If the latter stays unaltered, the act of humour becomes a blunder. If it changes, it means they were not confronted with an act of pure humour, but with humorous satire, irony, derision, mockery, humorous absurd[12] etc. The case in which object and receiver laugh at the author, consenting that he is insane, stupid, etc., whereas he may laugh at his own joke, will revert the roles in the act of humour in that the object and receiver will each become author and receiver at the same time of a new humorous act, while the original author becomes the object of humour. It is the situation decribed above under *b*.

All cases described under *3*. (author ≠ object ≠ receiver) imply, in oral communication (in the „live" variant) so far insisted upon, a very intricate and rather risky probabilistic game whose purpose with the author is to foresee the success of the act of humour. Normally, this calculus is made instinctively, in a matter of seconds, and, at times, it risks not to have been correct, as, pointed out above. The only common point of these situations is intentionality on the part of the author, whether positive or negative. Negative intention, i.e. a certain amount of aggressivity, perhaps requires a more careful calculus from the part of the author and his taking into account the poorly predicted ot unpredictable elements in his receiver's momentary state. The object-receiver can be avoided if the author resorts to writing. Creating an artefact is a matter of intentionality by definition; on the other hand, a written text can be and is perfectible, to enhance its effect. In other words, to a certain extent both author and object/receiver are spared, since

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[12] Humorous absurd is different from absurd humour in this very respect: whereas in the case of humorous absurd humour is a downtoner for the possibility of an absurd world (absurd in as many ways as the number of absurd statements) and of the way in which an absurd world would affect human essence, absurd humour stays primarily humour, does not affect human essence (see the enormous success of absurd jokes - bancuri seci) and laughter is full-hearted because the self-perception of the individual is not questioned. Absurd humour also has a nursery variant: this fact could reinforce what was stated above.

the former avoids his direct participation in the reaction (which, as pointed out above, may be aggressive to himself) and the latter is allowed to react away from the presence of witnesses (since the act of reading is fundamentally individual). On the other hand, the lack of immediate feedback by laughter (which is the signal of success in the act of humour) compels the author to elaborate on his text (which has, during elaboration, the advantage of reversibility and perfectibility) and reduce the risk of failure in creating a humorous act to the relatively least possible, by resorting to style.

It is obvious that this is the sphere in which the great bulk of humorous literature can be found. Some examples may be illustrative for the subcategories in class *3* described above which can be found in literature.

Subclass *3 a*. is rather typical for oral humour, because it requires the physical presence of the author, object and receiver.

Subclass *3 b*., on the other hand, can find its manifestation in humorous literature, as well as in straightforward oral humour. Some examples of aggressive (mixed) humour in verse:

> I knew that nought was lasting, but now even
> Change grows too changeable, without being new;
> Nought's permanent among the human race,
> Except the Whigs *not* getting into place
>
> (Byron, *Don Juan*, III)

The derisive statement on the Whigs is relevant nowadays as well, so it is clear that a contemporary reader will react to it (with the exception of the Whigs, perhaps). The incongruity in the text is very carefully built into its cotext; there is a background of contrast between the permanent and the fleeting, on the one hand, and between general statements and „local" ones on the other hand. „*Nought is lasting*" is balanced by „*now even/ Change grows too changeable*"; „Nought's permanent" is contrasted, afterwards, with the catch-line (line 4 in the quotation) which brings about a humorous reverse of the situation, placing the Whigs' fretting among the immovable realities of the Universe; meanwhile the derisive character of such predictability in political action is mocked at.

In a hardly different register, Eminescu mocks at atheists, imagining a world inhabited by cats:

Ah! Sunt printre voi de-aceia care nu cred tabla legii,
Firea mai presus de fire, mintea mai presus de minte,
Ce destinul motănimei îl desfășură-nainte ?
Ah! Atei, nu tcm ei iadul s-a lui Duhuri - liliecii?
Anathema sit! - Să-l scuipe oricare motan de treabă,
Nu vedeți ce-nțelepciune e-n făptura voastră chiară?
O, motani fără de suflet! De zgîriet el v-a dat ghiara
Și la tors v-a dat mustețe – vreți să-l pipăiți cu laba?
                         (*Cugetările sărmanului Dionis*)

The satirical considerations are here embedded into a mock-diatribe; the world of cats is a negative utopia in a nutshell standing for the author's epoch. The pretext cloaks the aggressivity of a straightforward attack in the unlikeliness of a world introduced by if-conditional sentences: „*De-ar fi-n lume numai mîțe*", „*Filosof de-aș fi*", „*Sau ca popa/.../ Aș striga*". This (im)possible world is a humorous double of the real one and, since humorous, it obliterates the sharpness of satire. The rhetorical pretext (offering from the outset an incongruity between diatribe and its non-human alleged objects) is itself built up with ostentatious care, which is a textual marker of the non-bona fide mode of communication, to which the reader is entreated to shift as a coperceptive stage in the achievement of a humorous act. Consensus is aimed at by the rhetorics of the text.

Some instances of pure humour could range under *3.b.*, as well. In such cases, there is no aggression towards the object of humour and the incongruity in the text only stays an invitation to laughter. In the description of Hampton castle (*The Rape of the Lock*, Canto III), two humorous lines about the queen appear:

Here thou, great ANNA! whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take - and sometimes tea.

The incongruity is a sheerly linguistic one: a syntactically parallel structure exhibits two phrasal verbs formed on the basis of the same notion (*to take*), once used figuratively, then properly (*to take cousel - to take tea*). Classical rhetoric calls this figure *zeugma*; In our classification it will be labelled as a pun based on set phrases (with a lexical - phonetical basis) - see infra, Chapt. VI. p. 203 sq.

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The aspect relevant for this stage of analysis is the non-aggressivity towards the institution of royalty or the person of the queen. Moreover, the humorous touch denotes an endearing attitude on the part of the author, whose subsequent comment is: „although three realms obey her, the queen is a human being who takes tea like all of us". Perhaps a further step in the analysis of the subtext would point at the indirect exaltation of Britishness present in Pope's line: not only is she a human being (she needs to take counsel), but she is one of us, British, by a typical habit of Britons (taking tea).

The same endearing attitude towards the object of humour is present in Topîrceanu's *Balada popii din Rudeni*

Pe cînd el cu grijă scoate
Pîntecoasă ploscă veche
Din dăsaga de la spate.

Și cu plosca ridicată
Zugrăvit pe cerul gol
Popa capătă deodată
Măreție de simbol.

The consensus in this endearing attitude is arrived at by a very subtle interplay congruous - incongruous, almost a semantical ballet in which the reader is entreated to partake. An apparent incongruity appears between the status of a priest and the character's indulging in drinking. Yet, many stanzas before this moment plastically describe the bitter cold in which the priest's journey takes place. Like the queen in the quotation from Pope, the priest is glimpsed at in one of his very human attitudes, one which should be incongruous with his calling, but which prevails over it. The humorous apotheosis which follows should again be incongruous with the normally expected chastisement or expiation following the sin of a priest's not behaving in accordance with what he stands for. Yet, the author and reader agree, at a more thorough analysis that this incongruity is apparent, as well. Not only the cold entitles the priest to drop for an instant his status, but also our Romanian tolerance; and the apotheosis suggested by Topîrceanu reinforces this reading. Extremisms of any kind (religious fundamentalism

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included) have never been typical to Romanians, therefore the priest in Topîrceanu's poem stands for a symbol of tolerance. Taking into account the loneliness in which the gesture takes place, the symbol could assume universality, but in a slightly different reading. Point *3.c.* above could be illustrated by many instances in both English and Romanian literature. When the author of a humorous act stirs sincere laughter in his „victim", the act of humour is non-aggressive, therefore pure humour appears.

The epigrammatic dialogues between Nigrim and Cincinat Pavelescu could be an example in this respect. When Topîrceanu ironised her for her debut, Otilia Cazimir replied:

> Am stat la foc şi-am chibzuit;
> Ce pot să fac dacă mă las
> De poezii şi de Parnas...
> Să mă mărit ?
>
> M-aş mărita, deoarece
> Mă cer demult un avocat
> Un popă şi un impiegat
> La C.F.R.
> ....
>
> Cu toate că-i prea pesimistă
> Povaţa dumitale
> Cu versul pot să fac parale
> S-ajung director de revistă!
>
> Şi-n urmă - cîte ipoteze, -
> Când mi-oi sfîrşi ucenicia
> Se poate să mă premieze
> Academia.
> ....
>
> Degeaba dar îmi stai în cale
> Şi mă primeşti cu-n bobîrnac,

> Jonglînd cu versul dumitale
> Ca Cyrano de Bergerac.
> > (*Răspuns lui G.T.*)

Or, when in 1912 Osvald Teodoreanu ran for the Senate on the lists of the conservatory-democratic party, his son, Pastorel, dedicated to him the following quatrain:

> Osvald a obosit
> In sălile Palatului,
> Şi-şi caută odihna
> In „dormitorul" statului...

In the same vein, Mircea Micu parodiates Mircea Dinescu in *Privatizare şi amor*:

> Nici dracu nu-nţelege ce se-ntîmplă
> Şi tot românul e contestatar
> Incît îmi vine să mă-mpuşc în tîmplă
> Cu dopul unei sticle de Cotnar.
> Doar tu, iubito, mîţă siameză,
> Mă faci să scriu de-a dreptul în engleză.

It is hard to assume, in these cases, that the object of humour felt in some way attacked in his essence or self-perception. What characterizes such samples is friendliness and, indirectly, a certain amount of flattery. Even when the text is a parody (as in the last case), the very fact that the author chose a certain object (writer) for his parody denotes his regard for him. There are, also, sarcastic parodies, but these range into categories which include mixed humour.[13]

Finally, the case *3.d.*, when there is a consensus object-receiver, to the detriment of the author, could exist in literature, but it is improbable by written text. It is a situation rather typical for oral humour (see supra, I for a more detailed discussion). A sociological study on humorous literature could, perhaps, account for the way in which it is received and interpreted, but such an approach would be beyond our scope here.

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[13] parody will be more extensively discussed (see infra, IV, 4.2.4.)

4. author = receiver; author ≠ object

This case, too, is improbable, yet possible. The situation in which a person mocks at something or somebody in the surrounding world and keeps it to himself forever (or, rather, more humanly, forgets it before he has had the chance to impart it to somebody else) can easily be imagined since it can happen to anyone. The word „improbable" was used in its etymological sense, i.e., the act of humour itself was forgotten (there exist accounts of the type „I had tremendous fun" with no specification „at what"). If the act of humour is remembered and re-told or re-written, it becomes an artefact and falls into what was described above under *II.3.*

5. author ≠ object; object = receiver

This is a particular case of what has been described before under *3 b..* It is the case when a person is mocked at with no witnesses. Since literature (and any artefact; even an oral rendering of the humorous act) is meant for readers/hearers, this case is not typical of literature, either.

If the object of humour is inanimate, the case is similar to *4.* above.

Consequently, humour as a process can be defined as a function depending on some constants:

a. the author-object-receiver of the humorous act, which can be assimilated to the three persons of the discourse (with their respective „*horizons d'attente*" and sense of humour)
b. the incongruity creating humour, which can be *situational* or *textual*. Textual incongruities can take shape orally or in writing. Our concern here, are textual incongruities in writing, i.e. humorous literature, more specifically, poetry.

The variables involved in the process of humour could be ascribed to constants *a.* and *b.* above. Some of the variables bound to the author-object-receiver of the humorous act have been discussed above. To sum up, variable *1* (physical presence/non-presence of the three parties involved in the act of humour) influences the type of the latter in that if the author is physically present, oral species of humour are implied; if this condition is not fulfilled, - literary humour is obtained. Both with oral and written humour, the author is, nevertheless, present, even if in the latter case the presence is only implicit. On the other hand, if in the case of oral humour the accidental, spontaneous variant can appear (with the underlying

mechanism of „*acte trouvé*,. which was explained before - see p. 28 supra), with written species intentionality is always present with the author.

The receiver and the object can be both physically present to the oral humorous act; the receiver must be obligatorily present. If both are absent, no humorous act takes place. In the case of written humour, the receiver is the only obligatory physical presence to the act of humour.

Variable *2.* (coincidence/non-coincidence of the three parties involved in the act of humour) has been discussed above.

Variable *3.* (the self-perception and reciprocal perception of the three parties involved) has also been dealt with above. The solidarity or consensus of two or all three participants as to the act of humour, as well as the very perception of the latter depend on this variable. As shown above, the author's opinion about himself is always basically positive, if humour is involved. If the object-receiver think(s) also positively about themselves (himself), different types of attitude towards the humorous act can emerge according to the author's opinion about them, which manifests itself in the quality of the humorous act (aggressive/non-aggressive). If their opinion about themselves or about the other two participants is negative, shifts of roles in the act of communication can take place or, in the extreme cases, changes in their self-perception can appear.

As to variable *4.* (± Human quality of the three parties involved) it should be pointed out that both author and receiver must be human for a humorous act to take place. The object of humour can be /-Human/, which implies /+Animate/ objects. In the category of /-Animate/ objects of humour, some indirectly human items can appear, such as human institutions, habits, prejudice, values, arts, crafts, etc. - the attitudes bound to these form the object of the history of mentalities.

The variables bound to constant *b.* - the incongruity, have been, to a certain extent, touched in the previous discussion. Their specific manifestations in humorous poetry will form the core of this work.

II. 5. 2. Humour as Product

Communicationally, the product implied in a humorous process is a *co-perception* of the humorous act by at least two of the participants

involved in it, when in the presence of the incongruous situation/text, a co-perception followed or not by *consensus* of at least two of the participants on the non-aggressive character of the humorous act.

Both co-perception and consensus can be discussed from the participant's point of view, as to their cognitive value, or from the point of view of the text, as a problem of illocutionary potential. Since our approach started on the assumption that the receiver is an average, characterized by normality (consequently an abstract receiver), our approach will be rather textually-based, although it can be argued that the text does not exist apart from its receiver.

If the text can be characterized as the bearer of a certain illocutionary potential, the latter should be seen at least from two points of view:

A. from the point of view of the type of the language (in our case, to what extent and how English - analytic - and Romanian - more synthetic - can be and are the vehicles of humorous illocution);

B. from the synchronical - diachronical point of view (for our discussion here, what are the chances of survival of humorous texts exhibiting certain linguistic mechanisms as against others, and the chances of some mechanisms to engender new humorous texts).

These two points will form the object of the following chapter.

Staying, for the time being, with the participants in the humorous act, the interplay between co-perception and consensus can generate the following situations:

a. co-perception with no consensus - the case when one of the three parties is subject to aggression. The result is humour as a down-toner (blended with other aggressive species).

b. co-perception and consensus - ,,pure humour"

c. consensus with no co-perception of the humour (pure aggressive species) - in this case all parties are involved, including the author.

Looking at humour communicationally (as interplay process – product) is a rewarding approach, in that it clears up many of its fundamentals. Yet, the approach is incomplete, in that it overlooks one of the major differences between humour and plain communication: the fact that the former has a manifest, implicit effect: laughter. Therefore, any analysis of humour should include this aspect obligatorily.

II.5.3. The Effect of Humour

To insist on the physiology of laughter is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to mention that it has been described and many authors have tried to probe into its motivation; generally it is known *how* we laugh; what stays obscure is *why* (Popa, 1975, p.85).

In the light of what has been pointed out so far, laughter could be, in the case of humorous acts, of two types:

a. *non-cathartic* (case *a.* above - co-perception with no consensus)

b. *cathartic* (case *b.* above - co-perception with consensus).

Since physiological factors (conditioned reflexes) are more visibly and to a greater extent involved in the production of laughter, as compared to other possible reactions to a (literary) text, laughter could be labelled as a *strong* type of rection to a script. Meanwhile it could be used a checkpoint for the illocutionary power of utterances, and will be used as such in this demonstration.

II. 6. A Possible Definition of Humour

From what has been discussed so far, it results that probably the best way to look at humour is in the cause-effect sequence, where points *II. 5. 1.* - *II. 5. 2.* above would cover causes and point *II. 5. 3.* the effect.

All the elements discussed above could be labelled as *universalia of humour*, except for the variables bound to constant *b.* in the function humour can be defined as (see infra, II.5.1) (constant *b.* refers to the incongruous script; variables bound to it are language-specific mechanisms of humour), which will form the object of our discussion.

A possible definition of humour in general would be: *an intentional/ non-intentional human act which could be defined as a function depending on two constants: a human author, human/non-human object and a human receiver, on one hand, and an incongruity on the other hand, in which the co-perception of the incongruity charged with a given illocutionary force (co-perception made possible by the state of normality and presence of sense of humour in at least one of the*

participants) generates consensus by laughter in one or more of the participants.

Literary humour ranges among the more numerous manifestations of intentional humour (or humour as an artefact) and could be characterized by the presence of literary conventions to which the text submits. Hence, one of the constraints on the definition above:

A. the discussion of the type of fictionality involved in humorous literature

The illocutionary force of the humorous script (its liability to stir up laughter) should not only be discussed with a focus on the text and its receivers, at a certain moment, but also in the context of

a. the history of mentalities
b. the evolution of the language,

two factors ultimately linked, which would form another set of constraints (B, C) upon the definition above, in other words:

B. the social-historical determination of the humorous act.

The evolution of the language should be seen as a process generating the linguistic types of the two languages under discussion. Hence

C. mechanisms of humour in an analytical vs. a synthetical language.

These aspects form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter III.
Constraints on the Definition of Humour

In order to apply the above definition of humour to the corpus in view, several constraints should be discussed, so as to make possible the shift from a definition of humour in general to the peculiarities implied by literary humour and, more specifically, to humorous verse.

It is obvious that the type of humour involved in any literary production is *humour as artefact* (see supra, II. 3). Since this paper attempts to cover linguistic mechanisms involved in humorous verse, it will concentrate upon written humorous verse, leaving aside its oral manifestation, not without mentioning, though, that there must be a high probability for the linguistic mechanisms of humour to be the same, structurally, both in the oral and the written forms. Yet, the constraints by which the two manifestations abide are different, ensuing from their pragmatic peculiarities. Some of these have been analysed above in the discussion on humour as a communicational act. Several characteristics of literary humour should be pinpointed in what follows:

a) Since literature is nowadays mostly addressed to readers (with the exception of drama meant for staging), it is not a direct act of communication, but a mediated one. The immediate consequence of this is the need for a greater effectiveness; in our case, written humour should be more obvious and effective than oral humour because the extralinguistic factors involved in the production of an oral humorous act (whether spontaneous or artefact) are not physically there; they should be *described*, insofar as it is possible.

b) The mechanisms involved in the production of incongruity are, in their great majority, the same; yet a written text is normally *linear* and its reading is *repeatable*. On the other hand, it lies under the graphetical conventions of *orthography* (spelling).

These two major aspects generate at least the following consequences:

a') any description in literature involves fictionality and thus, can create possible worlds;

b') written humour can also develop on the basis of mechanisms specific to writing only, which create incongruities to such aspects of expectation as are implied in spelling and the visual conventions of linearity, verse arrangement and/or more specifically, visual versifying conventions. This aspect will be a first criterion in taxonomizing linguistic mechanisms of humour; *according to the existence/non-existence of humorous effect in written respectively, oral form, mechanisms of humour will be classified into /± written/*.(see infra, chapter IV)

The consequence under a') is worth considering under at least two angles: on the one hand, if humorous literature involves fictionality, in what manner does it do so and what type of fictionality does it involve; on the other hand, if humorous literature can describe possible worlds, which are these cases and what types of possible worlds are described? The latter aspect pertains to the discussion on predominantly logical mechanisms of humour and will be detailed in Chapter IV.

The problem of fictionality with humour will be discussed in what follows.

III. 1. Some observations on genre

The necessary prerequisite of this discussion would be a delineation regarding literary genre. It seems that fictionality is likely to appear preferentially in non-lyrical genres, since it involves the description (albeit incomplete – Eco, 1996, p. 234) of a world. The case of the parody of a lyrical poem is only apparently a counter-example; lyrical stretches in a drama cannot, on the other hand, be labelled as humorous verse. No lyrical passage, in any work of fiction, could be said, perhaps, to directly define one of its basic rules, as a possible world. On the other hand, figures of speech (both in the metaphorical and metonymical group) could be, in at least one of their aspects, seen as "meinongian objects"[1] which not only have a

[1] Thomas Pavel's term. (Pavel, 1986, p. 27)

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function in the poetisation of the existing world, but also create, at times, salient worlds, in themselves.

Humorous verse tends, by definition, to be epical, perhaps because even a mock-ode implies a situational or literary intertext standing for a "fabula" which makes it cease being an ode and become a satire or some other aggressive species. Even the (physically) shortest types of humorous verse (the limerick, the epigram or the humorous epitaph) textually delineate or contextually imply some fable.[2]

An example of humorous epitaph (quoted by Evan Esar, who argues that it could be unintentional) might prove this point:

"My wife NAOMI STANWOOD lies here,
All my tears cannot bring her back.
Therefore I weep." (Esar, 1978, p. 242)

The "epicalness" of humorous verse may be a result of the fact that it either formulates an alternative world in some way incongruous to the existing one, or activates some area of normal expectation, to which something should become incongruous. It has been shown before that incongruities do not exist outside a context; the formulation of, or reference to some context (which normally appears as a more or less complete set of rules which define a possible or existing world) is normally liable to imply some kind of "epicalness".[3]

The problem of humour in drama (more specifically in comedy – which is theoretically a non-lyrical species) raises the question whether verse comedy could be considered humorous verse. Since structurally there appears to be no difference between linguistic mechanisms of humorous in verse comedy and humorous poetry (i. e. there are no mechanisms appearing in comedy which could not be present in humorous verse) it might seem that the two species could be assimilated in this respect. This can and will be

[2] W. S. Baring. Gould suggests that a limerick contains all the moments of a narrative (introduction, crisis suspense, climax, Baring-Gould, 1993 pp. 12–13
[3] However enticing a discussion on the "seriousness" of the lyrical, it is beyond our purpose here. Two observations could, nevertheless, be made: first, that traditional genre deliniations are fluidified by the proteic character of humour; second, that, as Wayne C. Booth mentioned, there is, at least theoretically, a potential ironical reading for any text; yet, the present discussion is not one focussing on authorial intentionality alone.

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done in this paper (some linguistic mechanisms will be illustrated with examples from Shakespeare, for instance); yet, the following observations must be taken into account:

A. Verse comedy uses humorous verse in order to delineate character, situation etc. in other words, humorous verse is *a means* to create a possible world and not *a purpose* in itself, as it is with humorous verse proper. This *collaterality* characteristic of humorous verse in comedy is, perhaps, what makes possible its free alternation with prose stretches (or, rather, non-versified stretches) which is present both in Shakespeare and in Alecsandri, for instance.

Humorous verse proper, on the other hand, does not only respect verse patterns throughout, but also turns them, at times, into a source of humour, which proves that it is humorous *per se* as compared to comedy which uses humorous verse *in se*, collaterally to its main purpose, which is different. (Maybe the reason why verse drama exists is that rhythmicity is not only mnemonic but also dramatic to a certain extent, which could confirm our hypothesis that verse in drama serves a purpose different from that of verse in itself).

B. If all linguistic mechanisms of humour present in verse comedy can appear in drama as well, the reverse of this situation is not valid. Since verse can alternate with non-versified stretches, licenses from versificational patterns are not likely to turn into primary source of humour in comedy.

But the main difference lies in the fact that, since verse comedy is meant for hearing and not necessarily for reading as well, an entire class of graphetic, orthographical, more generally, most graphically–based mechanisms (which will be later grouped under /+ written/) cannot and do not appear in drama.

A short illustration of this point might be offered by the following examples:

> I often sit and medit8
> Upon the scurvy trick of f8
> That keeps me still a celib8
> Oh, what a f8!

or

> A little buoy said „Mother, deer,
> May eye go out two play?
> The son is bright, the heir is clear,
> Owe, mother, don't say neigh [4]

Such mechanisms of humour are not likely to appear in verse comedy, since the primary purpose of any drama is staging and the quatrains do not combine the graphetical mechanisms of humour with any other /- written/ ones; in other words, the humorous effect is lost in the oral form.

In this respect humorous verse proper (*per se*) could be said to be a larger category than its manifestation in drama. An immediate consequence of this, which is important for this discussion, is that *no study of humour in drama can cover all the linguistic mechanisms of humour in verse.*[5] Since the reverse is not valid, this may also account for the choice of our field of analysis.[6]

If the mechanism of „alphanumerics" can be, theoretically a source of humour in Romanian (its basic mechanism is homophony and the latter is a linguistic universal, at least in Indo-European languages), no humorous verse has so far developed on its basis, although there is a fair chance for such developments in the near future. Perhaps under the pressure of Anglo-Saxon media, alphanumerics have started appearing in advertisements, after 1989 („O 9 idee" or „Xtraordinar"; the latter example proves the Anglo-Saxon influence in the alphabetical reading of „X" as „eks" and not „iks").

On the other hand, „homonymic verse" cannot appear in Romanian for the time being, because of the phonetical spelling of our language.

The field of mechanisms of humour stays larger, in Romanian too, with humorous verse, as compared to other literary species, because versification licenses can turn into a source of humour in our language as well. A

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[4] The examples are quoted in Esar's Comic Encyclopaedia under the heading of *alphanumerics*, respectively *homonymic verse* (Esar, 1978, p. 47 and, respectively, 354)

[5] At least, therefore, studies like Sister Miriam Joseph's or Brian Vickers' which try to cover Shakespeare's wordplay could not offer a model of analysis for humorous verse in general.

[6] Humorous verse contains, in our opinion, the maximum of possible linguistic mechanisms of humour since prose (meant for reading, even) is also a narrower field of analysis, having no mechanisms that cannot be found in verse as well.

popular distich which started circulating before 1989 „Foaie verde de dudău/ O să fie și mai bine" uses the oxympronic character of the inferrable rhyme, as a grudge against communist propaganda. Graphetical mechanisms can also appear in Romanian: „De ce, din soiul alb și galben,/ îmi iese tot un pește galben?/ îmi iese tot un pește gALBen? și, de ce, ah, din alb și albastru,/ m-aleg cu, numai, pește ALBastru? ..." (Șerban Foarță, *Istoriile unui matroz întors de pe planeta roz* în *Simpleroze*, Ed. Facla, 1978).

If, as it was previously assumed, there is a strong likelihood for epicalness to be involved in humorous poetry, and epicalness is bound to imply some fictional construct, the problem of fictionality in humorous verse should be examined.

III.2. Ficțional, fictitious, fake – fictional, mock-fictional

If we assume that any artefact involves fictionality to some extent, *humour as artefact* should be no exception to the rule.

Two basic concepts seem to underlie the different types of possible worlds: *credibility* and *conceivability*. The former establishes conventions regarding ontological status, placing fiction into the existing world; the latter (manifestly or not) defines possible worlds other than the existing world, taking the existing world (implicitly or explicitly) as a constant point of reference. Our purpose here is not to give a summary of the theory of possible worlds; we shall adopt for this discussion, the classification Eco provides (Eco, 1996, pp. 236–240). According to him, possible worlds fall into the following categories:

(i) worlds that seem true-to-fact and credible and which we can conceive of (Eco's examples on a future world in which his study would be translated into Finnish; but also a past world in which the characters in Treasure Island could have been persons navigating in search for it);

(ii) worlds that do not seem true-to-fact and little credible from the point of view of our experience (as for instance, Eco examplifies, worlds in which animals can talk);

(iii) incredible (unconceivable worlds) – possible or impossible – beyond our capacity of understanding, because their supposed individuals and

laws violate our logical and epistemological habits. (Eco's example: worlds furnished with square circles which can be bought for a sum in dollars corresponding to the greatest even number);

(iv) impossible possible worlds (whose extreme case are the incredible worlds, mentioned above), which Eco defines as „worlds which the Model Reader should conceive of only as much as is necessary for him to understand that it is in fact impossible for him to do so". Here Eco quotes Dolezel's concepts of „self-voiding texts" (which apply conventional validation procedures to bring narrative entities to life, but then the status of their narrative existence is uncertain because the very founding of the validation mechanism is undetermined) and „self-disclosing meta-fiction" (which offers simultaneously both the illusion of a coherent world and the sensation of an unexplainable impossibility). „Impossible possible worlds", Eco argues, „do not simply mention something that is unconceivable. They build up the very conditions of their own incredibility". Finally, he mentions that „in verbal texts the representation of impossible possible worlds can be superficially considered as imaginable for pages on end, until the contradiction they contain is noticed." (Eco, 1996, p. 239)

It ensues that *a possible world is always a construct implying (if it is described by a verbal text), at least up to a certain point, the conventions of coherence and cohesion.* Except for self-voiding texts and self-disclosing meta-fiction, coherence and cohesion work throughout the text in a bona-fide manner. In the case of the two categories, it might seem, at first sight that no coherence and cohesion appear in the text (Says Eco: „These impossible narrative worlds include internal contradictions" (p. 237), and, further, „In order to make the sensation of lack of equilibrium more embarrassing, these texts can resort to various syntactic strategies" (p. 239).

Any „syntactic strategy" can be assumed to establish a kind of coherence and cohesion in a text, even if it is different from the syntactic strategies used in plainly communicative contexts. Moreover, a marked syntactic strategy is liable to be the vehicle of style; should we consider any syntactic strategy as the output of the generative system the human mind is, a *marked syntactic strategy* could be considered the output of a *strong generative system*. The latter, definable as lacking at least one element of the

censorship-system dictated by (in our case) the linguistic norm, can be attributed, among others, to the artistic mind.[7] Possible fictional worlds could, then, be depicted by possible syntaxes, which can be deviant in the system of reference of *normal norm* (that of a „real" language which becomes the language of reference, W_0) but are not so in the system of reference represented by the *possible norm* (the norm defined for W_1, W_2 ...). *Style could be defined, in this light as the linguistic norm of a possible world.* The condition for this to be valid derives from another feature of style: *consistence* (systematic character) which allows defining it as a set of style markers, in their turn characterized by *recurrence*. In other words, coherence and cohesion should be universals of any text, be its syntax „normal" or „possible".

If coherence and cohesion are implied, incongruity seems to be excluded, regardless of the type of norm (N_0 – of an existing language or N_1, N_2 ... – of a style). No humorous effect is, then, likely to appear.

On the other hand, judged in the system of reference of an existing language (which is always there at the backdrop of our expectation) a deviant syntax is not a source of humour but one of the absurd („pure" absurd, according to our previous observation); our sense of the absurd depends on a „meta"-judgement always implying the extrapolation into another system of reference than normal expectation (see *infra*, Chapter V).

If salient worlds are not incongruous in themselves, they can become humorous when constantly judged as against the existing world, on condition that the incongruity(ies) they present as against „real reality" should be humorous (see *supra*, Chapter II, pp. 26 sq). And, since constant reference to the existing world is and should be made in the case of fiction, it ensues *that all fictional worlds are allegories of the existing one*.

Yet, some of them are *manifestly mimetical* (historical novels, autobiographies...); others contain elements of self-constitutive description (postulating the rules which are different from those of the real world) – such are the utopia, the fable, the allegory, science-fiction, etc. The fact that

they contain one or more self-descriptive (meta-) elements points at their being *manifestly fictitious*; among the latter, some are *impossible* (because unconceivable, self-voiding or self-disclosing, among other types of impossibility). Self-voiding texts and self-disclosing meta-fiction could also be regarded, as against the general laws of fiction, to be *fake-fictional*. Fake-fictionality differs from fictitiousness in that while the former destroys the pretence of ontological status (indirectly postulated by the consistent submittance to a set of rules, be they those of the existing world, with „plain" fiction, or those of a possible world, in the other cases), the latter – fictitiousness – abides by a set of rules which allegedly describe some ontological state of being and, therefore, are consistently pursued. Considering the fact that all fiction can be read as an allegory of the real world (W_0), fake-fictionality appears, by reference to W_0, as absurd, whereas fictitious worlds may appear as fairy-tales, utopias, etc.[8]

Such a grouping of fictional worlds into:

    a) manifestly mimetical
    b) manifestly non-mimetical,

considering:

    b') fictitious worlds
    b'') fake-fictional worlds (absurd worlds)
        to be subcategories of b), would more or less cover Eco's
        classification quoted above.

The place of humour in this discussion should be established, both for the purpose of this paper, and because it has been left aside by most theories of possible worlds.

In its hybrid form (see *supra*, II. 1), humour can appear in all the categories above; a realistic novel (like Dickens' or Thackeray's), an epic

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[7] Other strong generative systems could be: children's, those of the mentally disturbed etc. The difference between an artistic and/or a rhetorical generative system and the former, lies in that the latter intentionally abolishes rules.

[8] The term utopia, is used here in the broadest sense: that of possible world engendered by a consensus author-reader that at least one truth-condition of the world of reference (normally, the real world) is replaced by another sentence.

(like *Ţiganiada*), falling under type a) above, or, on the other hand, stretches of fairy-tales (like *Pied Piper, Ivan Turbincă*) or of Lewis Carroll's *Alices*, falling under b) above, clearly combine humour with other elements in order to achieve their effect. As demonstrated above, at least theoretically, any piece of writing can have humorous overtones, on condition that humorous incongruities should appear in it.

What is important for our discussion here is the fact that, *since the credibility and/or conceivability of fictional worlds is a function of their coherence and cohesion (in other words, of their consistency), an incongruity (of any type, humorous included) will become a marker of fictionality, since any incongruity in a text of fiction points at authorial intention.*[9] (All figures of speech, „syntactic strategies" and inconsistencies in register, sociolect, idiolect, etc., could thus be seen as markers of fictionality).

As markers of fictionality, humorous incongruities are *collateral* to the constitutive rules of the fictional world, yet, on the one hand they combine with the former yielding hybrid species; on the other hand, humorous incongruities put the constitutive rules of the fictional world into question, so much the more that they have laughter as an effect, as well as the catasthatic function of all humour, be it pure or hybrid.

A humorous incongruity can, nevertheless, be one of the rules describing a fictional world; in such cases it is no longer collateral, but *constitutive, creative* of a world. Whenever this occurs, the world created is *mock-fictional.* A mock-fictional world cannot be consistent, because its basic rule is an incongruity; it will function only if the incongruous element is replaced by some other rule in the real world, after a process of inference (Eco prefers the term *abduction*) oriented either logically or linguistically.

A mock-fictional world is neither fictitious (because it postulates no ontological status pretending to be real) nor only fake-fictional (because it destroys a would-be ontological status *in order to drive the reader back into*

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[9] The detectable authorial intention in these contexts is towards the effectiveness mentioned above, in other words, such textual markers question the would-be ontological status of the world described, marking off fictional worlds from the more general category of possible worlds.

the real world, a step which is not there either with self-voiding or self-disclosing texts).

The fact that something mock-fictional is, ultimately, non-fictional, could be demonstrated as follows:

a) theoretically, some rules of incongruity should function in any possible world (fictional or non-fictional) on condition that the world in question should have been described to such an extent as to imply some kind of expectation in its entities. In this case humour should have a description different from that in our world.

b) possible worlds with a description (and expectation) radically different from ours are inaccessible to us (perhaps, since inconceivable);

c) an incongruity in any conceivable world is liable to be solved in the system of expectation pertaining to the world of reference (W_0): in our case, an incongruity in a fictional world will be judged in the system of reference of normal expectation pertaining to the real world because no other world has been as completely described as to create a radically different system of expectation in human beings. A humorous incongruity in a fictional world intentionally aims at provoking laughter (just like humorous incongruities in the real world can unintentionally provoke laughter);

e) if laughter (and catasthasis of the human receiver) are aimed at, these can only take place in the context of and by reference to real-world expectation; moreover, they actually are phenomena that take place in the real world;

f) it results that mock-fictionality reverses the parts played by the fictional and humour in the case of hybrid humour; *if with hybrid humour, humour is collateral to the fictional and functions as a marker of fictionality, with pure humour the fictional becomes collateral to humour; it comes to life (as mock-fictionality) in order to form the cotext of a humorous incongruity which, in its turn, by feed-back into the normal system of expectation, creates laughter.*

g) obviously, mock-fictionality can only be the output of an intentional act and is an artefact.

Consequently, the movement of fiction is from the real world towards a possible world, whereas humour pretends to create a fictional world in order to shift back into the real world and induce a response which has an *ontological status* (laughter).

From the point of view of the receiver, if any fiction is a potential behavioural model staying in the realm of the possible, humour gives rise to immediate behaviour in the real world.

From the point of the authorial intention, on the other hand, the fictional outlines (pure) humour may be apparelled in are only a pretext, their function being to form the cotext of a humorous incongruity, therefore a pretext for inducing laughter.

This hypothesis may be checked if we compare from this point of view any other work of fiction with an anecdote or a joke (or, in our field of analysis with an epigram or a limerick).

III. 3. On the Illocutionary Potential of Humour

If humour is liable to stir a real-world response, then it should be the bearer of some illocutionary potential. Laughter has been characterised as a *strong* type of reaction to a script and as a checkpoint for the illocutionary potential of utterances. (see *supra*, II.5.3)

Dealing with the problem of illocution in fiction, Searle advances the extreme hypothesis that, since „There is no syntactical or semantical textual characteristic by which a text should be identified as a fictional work", „what makes it be a fictional work is, so to say, the illocutionary position of the author towards it, which is a matter of complex illocutionary intentions the author has while writing or conceiving that work." (Searle, 1978, pp.18–19; 33)

To adopt this point of view would mean to dismiss the notion of style altogether. Searle argues that qualifying something as literature is the decision of the receiver, whereas fictionality pertains to authorial intention. To demonstrate this point, he states that the literary and the non-literary are a continuum, that „literature" is the name of our attitude towards a stretch of discourse and that there is no feature or set of features common to literary works that should be necessary and sufficient for these to be literary works.

If his arguments were true, there would be no distinction between literature and non-literary fiction (lies, false testimonies, or... electoral programmes, for instance). The distinction lies in the fact that, with literature, the fictitious character is accepted by consensus author-reader; with other fiction the consensus is not there; at times the author can even allege the true-to-fact character of his fiction. Searle himself demonstrates the existence of *pretence* in fictional speech acts, but is not clear enough about the receiver's attitude regarding it. Yet, a possible argument against Searle's theory pertains to authorial intention itself: style. Non-literary fiction can present identifiable stylistic aspects (inasmuch as idiolect is liable to generate them); but as soon as they are consistent and become style markers, literature is liable to appear; consequently, the necessary and sufficient condition for a fictional text to be literary is a set of specific (literary) style markers which should meet the conditions of recurrence and collocation.[10] Style markers are part of the author's „illocutionary intentions".

At this point we will not discuss in details to what extent humour is literature; humour as artefact is a category likely to contain all literary manifestations of humour; of these, we are here interested in the written, versified ones. Since, at least versification can be considered to be a style marker, humorous verse could be considered literature.[11]

Our concern here is, rather, the extent to which style markers can convey illocutionary potential in humorous verse, whence a set of restrictions upon our definition of humour could arise.

The basic assumption of such a discussion would be that the illocutionary force of humorous acts lies in their capacity of eliciting laughter as a response. Two points have been previously made in this discussion:
  a) that mechanisms of humour are basically the same in any text.
  b) that a prospective opening should be grounded on such mechanisms that have preserved their illocutionary force till to-date.

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[10] For a discussion on style markers see Enkvist, 1965.
[11] Adrian Marino argues that the foundation of the idea of literature is „the existence, quality and level of its cultural grounding" (Marino, 1987, p. 466)

The two points are connected; while the first will be demonstrated upon corpus in Chapters IV-V-VI, we shall try to discuss the second point in what follows.

A perspective on illocutionary force in diachrony is liable to be to a great extent conjectural. Any statistically-based method of investigation is out of the question, both at the synchronical and at the diachronical level. The reason for this rejection is, first, the empirical character of any statistics; moreover, in a non-English speaking country, the only group submittable to investigation can be one of philological scholars or students, doubly biassed by their non-native way of feeling the English language, and their scholarly background. Diachronically, on the other hand, a statistics upon a corpus of critical opinions on certain texts is not only at times impossible (because of the scarcity of such texts), but also irrelevant since the impressive amount of critical texts dealing with Chaucer's or Shakespeare's humour, for instance, comes from epochs posterior to them; therefore the opinions postulated by post-Chaucerian and post-Shakespearean criticism are conjectural, at least in what concerns the illocutionary value of their humour.

With Romanian literature, it is hard to say at which epoch of its development written humorous literature appeared; if the application of statistical methods could be less empirical, because of the presence of native non-scholarly speakers, the problem would be that of diagnostical text. If the first piece of writing in Romanian dates back to 1521, the first attempt at versifying in Romanian was in 1643 (the opening of Varlam's *Cazania*, „Stihuri la stema domniei Moldovei"), and the first Romanian non-popular poet, Dosoftei, wrote thirty years later; it is clear that no comparative study could cover (even conjecturally) the synchronic slice of the 16-th century, in the two literatures, not to mention Chaucer's time, regarding humorous verse. Another difficulty lies in the fact that popular verse started being written down in Romanian literature much later than in English and when it did so, the focus was on non-humorous species.

Conjectural hypotheses should take into account the basic fact that English poetry comes from a tradition in which alliteration and wordplay held a basic part; Romanian verse developed from a predominantly rhythmical tradition, going back not as much to Latin poetry, than to a necessity to

be used as song-text (popular, then liturgical – perhaps it is not accidental that the first piece of consistent authorial verse in Romanian literature is a „Psalter unto verse forged"). The mnemonic value of rhythm is not to be neglected in English literature either (quite a lot has been written on the role of the caesura in Old English poetry); yet, what is important for our purpose here is the fact that wordplay existed in English literature (as kenning) long before it appeared in Romanian. Even if in English literature wordplay had initially a „serious" character and a metaphoric value, it may ensue that:

a) humorous wordplay could, perhaps, appear more easily in English literature;
b) wordplay had for a long time a non-humorous character as well (even in Shakespeare's age, perhaps under the influence of ancient rhetorics resuscitated in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance); it results that in an analysis of the Shakespearean text, for example, a contemporary critic could hardly tell which instances of wordplay were humorous and which were only plainly rhetorical;
c) perhaps the previous observation could account for the typically English distinction between wit/humour; wit is a category both pre-existent to and surviving after the mannerism of the metaphysical poets, which echoed European mannerism. On the other hand, Restoration comedy is a development specific to English literature which brings together and meanwhile delineates the two categories.

Outside the history of literature, main-stream history and the history of mentalities could offer data regarding the liability of certain texts to have been perceived as humorous, in their epoch.

A limerick like:

The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher
Called a hen a most elegant creature.
The hen, pleased with that,
Laid an egg in his hat
And thus did the hen reward Beecher.

can be analysed in the light of extra-textual reference on its history. The limerick was written by Oliver Wendell Holmes, probably as a retort to some public conference of Beecher's where he spoke about or alluded to hens. No further biographical data on Henry Ward Beecher, on the tradition of public conferences in 19th century America, on the necessity of a convincing talk on breeding poultry and its probable audience could add anything to the limerick that should be essential to its decoding. The basic mechanism underlying the humorous effect is a pun based on juncture in the oral form and/or spelling (if the written form is considered); for the mechanism to work, a fictional world is generated in which

    a) hens could understand speech

    b) a hen was present in the conference room

    c) it experienced a human emotion (pleasure) at being vested with a human quality (elegance) and reacted in its own (poultry) manner, which (in our human terms) presumably generated a most inelegant sequel.

All this obviously has nothing to do with historical or mentality aspects in 19th century America. The humorous effect is there because the limerick stands as a story on its own. Warnings against the risk of pompousness in discourse have existed, perhaps, since rhetoric appeared. Because humour is non-aggressive, on the other hand, a certain friendliness and mild affectiveness can be detected in the limerick. Maybe it is not risky to venture the hypothesis that one of the reasons why this limerick exists is also the fact that Henry Ward Beecher had the sense of humour. He might, even, have been its first reader.

The reason why we indulged in conjecturing was to prove that historical data may be illuminating as to the cause or genesis of a humorous act, but if the latter survives (we still laugh at this limerick even if it is 100 years old and even without knowing anything about Henry Ward Beecher or Oliver Wendell Holmes), it must be because of its intrinsic mechanism (juncture is a linguistic universal – at least for Indo-European languages).

The same point could be illustrated by the following quatrain:

    Cu vioiciune de maur,
    Cu aerul unui Columb,
    El scoate creionul de aur
    Şi scrie-o prostie de plumb.

The first element a receiver will notice is the cotextual antinomy between aur/plumb, generating an oxymoronic effect. Because it is, in itself, laughable, the quatrain may refer to any poetaster of some wealth. The fact that the epigram was written by D. Teleor as a retort to another epigram dedicated by Macedonski to Eminescu and that it refers, in fact, to one of the greatest poets of Romanian literature may, in the best case, turn into a secondary source of humour, having in view that Teleor was a minor poet; the data such information conveys has nothing to do with antonymy or the oxymoron (linguistic/stylistic universals). It is known that Macedonski disconsidered Eminescu, a fact which pertains to the history of literature and is, at least from one point of view, utterly unfunny.

There are, nevertheless, cases in which the history of literature artificially preserves instances of humorous verse which, although backed by mechanisms which are universal, cannot be understood without extratextual information:

    Că n-am destulă sare-a mea,
    Te rog amice-a măs'Cuza;
    Dar c-aş fura-o altuia,
    Nu cred că poţi a m'A'Cuza.

It results from the text that:

a) the author was a humorist (because of the expression „n-am destulă sare");

b) that he was accused of plagiarism, which he denies, so the quatrain is a retort;

c) a reader knowing some Romanian history would also understand the allusion to „măsura lui Cuza" (non-"doctored" weight or capacity unit, as against „ocaua mică" (falsified capacity); the latter gave the expression „a prinde cu ocaua mică" (to catch somebody red-handed) which any speaker of Romanian knows;

d) perhaps, if the reader is acquainted with Romanian literature, he will (fortunately) remember the name of A. C. Cuza (minor writer); but more likely, he will realize that A'Cuza does not refer to the first leader of the Romanian United Principates mentioned in verse 2, but to some other Cuza (the voivode's name is abbreviated in Romanian to Al. I. Cuza) and that he has to do with a pun he cannot understand.

The pun is an extremely complex one: it combines onomastic homonymy with abbreviation and juncture; the text belongs to Caragiale, a master of Romanian humour; this may account for its preservation in the history of literature, alongside with its story. Caragiale himself, in *Cazu-Cuza* gives an anecdotic account of D. Teleor's being accused of plagia-rising the writer A. C. Cuza. Caragiale „quotes" some humorous stanzas:

> Precum scînteia licăreşte
> De zgîndăreşti oleacă spuza,
> Oricine-ar zgîndări, găseşte
> Sub Teleor pe A. C. Cuza.
>
> ....
> Teleor, dragă ţăţică,
> Te prinsei, mînca-şi-ai muza,
> Şi nu cu ocaua mică.
> Ci cu ocaua lui Cuza.

We know from Caragiale's anecdote that Teleor was called „• a• a" (female gossiper, in Romanian) by his acquaintances; what he does not mention is that he himself was the author of the attacks.

Teleor replied, alluding to Caragiale's employment at the State Monopoly Office (in Romania, holding the monopoly over salt, tobacco and matches, in those times):

> Ai fost funcţionar cinstit,
> Tu, la Regie, cît îmi pare,
> Căci văd că nu ai profitat
> Nici de tutun şi nici de sare.

The wordplay is based on the literal meaning of a set-phrase, „a avea sare" (= to have the sense of humour), favoured by the accident of Caragiale's job. The first quatrain quoted („Că n-am destulă sare-a mea"...) is Caragiale's retort to this quatrain of Teleor's; obviously, without all the information of the historical type, a reader could not fully understand it.

The statement that the history of literature preserved the quatrain because of the high intrinsic value of its wordplay would be venturesome; it might have been preserved because it was authored by Caragiale, perhaps both reasons stand.

What should be mentioned here is the fact that Caragiale's quatrain differs fundamentally from Oliver Wendell Holmes' in that its occasionality is fundamental, constitutive.

It has been demonstrated before that the mechanisms underlying occasional humour are similar to those in non-occasional humour; the latter is, nevertheless, a category more often found in literature, because it has a better chance of surviving. Occasional humour would appear, in such a light:

a) to be dependent on extratextual factors in order to be fully understood, whence

b) to present, if considered as fictional world, such an incomplete description that the intention of fictionality is being questioned, whence

c) it is not an artefact *in se*, but an artefact *per se*; primarily meant to be a real-world fact (a retort, in our case) and not fiction. Laughter is secondary and subordinated to the primary illocutionary intention of (sharply) reacting to a provocation.

If humour is collateral to something else, there is a strong suspicion that it is of the hybrid type and not pure humour, like with Oliver Wendell Holmes' text. Devoid of its humorous outfit, Caragiale's text is aggressive to a real-world situation. The reason why it cannot be understood and enjoyed by everybody is that its real-world context has lost its actuality. With Holmes' text, the real-world situation that generated it was only a *pretext* for creating a fictional world in a nutshell, which is sufficiently described to be relatively autonomous. Even if Henry Ward Beecher had been an invented character, the limerick preserves its humorous effect.

If by occasionality we mean a set of real-world propositions which substitute themselves to propositions descriptive of a fictional world (one such substitution is sufficient), *actuality* could be defined as the operationality of the above-mentioned propositions at the epoch when the

text is received. *Effectiveness* would mean, in this light, a statistically-proved level of acceptance of these propositions sufficient to include them into the systems of expectation of the group in question (i. e. into the systems of expectation of the statistical majority of the members in the group the text is meant for). Propositions included into the system of expectation of a group at an epoch are part of its mentality.

The dependence of occasional humour on mentality has thus been demonstrated. Non-occasional humour depends on such elements of human mentality which are relatively independent of epoch and, in this respect, relatively universal (let us say, in passing, that one such universal is awareness of the fictionality of fiction, which makes literature possible; this is a relative universal because it is incompatible with mythical thought and is a development subsequent to this).

Since all mentalities are socially and historically determined, humour could, at times be diagnostic of their history. For instance, the chivalrous model (mentality and behaviour) must have always coexisted with its mock-undercurrent; but the sign that it ceased to be a strong model is perhaps the fact that it ended its career in the history of literature by giving rise to two mock-models: the fabliau and the picaresque novel. This could only happen when the heroic-chivalrous tradition grew devoid of content by the disappearance of its vector, the medieval knight, from history, and by the blurring of the behavioural model and values conveyed by him, in mentality. What remained is an attitude in behaviour remote from its original code. The sign that a mentality has ended its career in history may be its becoming the object of humour in literature.

What is capital for our discussion here is that occasional humour cannot be felt as humour unless there are enough data to re-constitute the context of the incongruity it is based upon. Knowledge of mentality may be a necessary condition, but at times it is not sufficient to identify all instances that could have been felt as humorous at a certain moment in history. It results that, in point of content, non-occasional humour is rather likely to survive, because of its relative autonomy from extra-textual decoding conditions.

A particular instance of mentality is the national specific. In what follows we shall try to demonstrate that national specific, seen as mentality and/or behavioural pattern, should not be absolutized, at least in what concerns humour, because it is collateral to basic situational patterns of incongruity.

National specific could be said to function in at least two fields:
a) as a „national behavioural pattern", yielding a specific outlook on the world.
b) as language-specific mechanisms of humour.

Point b) will be discussed in the next subchapter. Yet, one observation should be made here. Language specific mechanisms of humour are a direct consequence of the linguistic type a language falls into. These cannot be confined to arbitrary national frontiers. A pun will have a similar linguistic mechanism, whether made in America, Australia, Canada or Britain, respectively Moldavia or Romania.

In what concerns point a) above, even if we should admit that a notion such as „national behavioural pattern" could be defined and described (which is not our concern here), this might manifest itself as predominant preference of a national (or ethnical) group for certain behavioural patterns as against other possible ones existing in the stock of general-human behavioural patterns. Such chlichés as „the avarice of Scots", „the traditionalist conservatism of the English", „the malice of the French", have had a career in the history of mentalities. The concept of „English humour" is also one taken for granted by many theorists, even as a term of comparison against which other „national humorous" are defined.

Harold Nicolson, one of the theoreticians of this concept, defines English humour as having the following features:

(1) amiability
(2) sentimentalism and pathos
(3) a healthy way of understanding man and tradition
(4) the abundance of fantasy
(5) a fine grasp on twists in human qualities
(6) readiness for compromise and conciliation
(7) inclination to childishness
(8) self-defense (against the unusual, the dangerous, the tragic, other people's mockery, intellectual or social superiority)

(9) the economy of the spiritual effort (the predilection for tradition, validation, repetition; laughter at education and scholarship; a bias for nonsense)

(10) the aspiration towards spiritual commodity and serenity (Nicolson, ap. Popa, 1975, p. 297)

Such a description of national specific in humour must have had a statistical grounding and must have been formulated as a chart of recurrent predilections. Except for the first item listed (amiability) which is a universal of all humour marked by non-aggressiveness, all the other features listed by Nicolson can be demonstrated to exist in other humorous literatures as well. Most of the „typically British features" listed above can be identified in Topîrceanu's humorous verse, for instance. On the other hand, some of these features cannot be found in consecrated British humorists such as Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll.

Perhaps national specific in humour is not ineffable; it cannot be exhaustively described by a list of features, nevertheless. What is important for our discussion here is that national specific, like all other components of mentality, should not be absolutized.[12] The basic mechanism of humour – incongruity – *can* function against the background of national specific, as well, but its functioning is the same in all languages and cultures. If humour were basically different for every group (national or ethnical) it could not cross borders into the world's culture and literature.

<center>*</center>

The excursus into history, the history of literature and mentalities and into the problem of national specific was necessary to prove that although these may be conditional to the humorous act, they cannot be causally connected to it. Our initial intention was to demonstrate that the illocutio-

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[12] Some pros and cons on this problem, in criticism: Jean Paul (*Vorschule der Ästhetik*) Goethe (*Maxims and Reflections*) or ETA Hoffmann (*Prinzessin Brambilla*), Louis Cazamian (*L'humour anglais*) even Robert Escarpit (*L'humour*) argue that national specific can define humour; Sully (*An Essay on Laughter*) or Pirandello (*L'umorismo*) argue for the individual character of humour. A more moderate opinion is Topîrceanu's (*Problema rîsului şi humorul românesc*) who defines national humour as the interplay of two factors: a) means used in literature to provoke laughter; b) things preferentially laughed at.

nary potential of some humorous acts is preserved in time. The two conditions for this would be:

a) non-occasionality (in the sense discussed above)

b) intelligibility

Thematically, intelligibility is a matter of non-occasionality. Yet, the notion should be discussed linguistically, as well.

With humorous acts the problem of intelligibility implies qualifying and incongruity as humorous and processing it through the decoding-mechanism specific to humour (see *supra* II 4). The element which triggers off this process is the shift to the non-bona-fide mode of communication. *Intelligibility would then amount, in the case of humour, to the receiver's perceiving the author's illocutionary intention materialised in a breech in congruity signalling non-bona fide communication of the humorous type.*

This condition is not always met. The problem of „bad humour" has been dealt with in Chapter II. An unsuccessful speech act can, nevertheless, take place, as well, when the author and the receiver are not contemporary.

A punning passage of Pandarus' speech to Troilus (*Troilus and Criseyde*, Book IV, 148):

> I seye, that if the opinioun of thee
> Be sooth, for that he sit, then seye I this,
> And thus necessitee in either is.
> For in him nede of sitting is, y-wis,
> And in thee nede of sooth; and thus, forsothe,
> Ther moot necessitee ben in yow bothe,

might fail to trigger off a reaction in a contemporary non-scholarly reader, although he may perceive the existence of a pun; yet, the meanings of sooth/forsothe/mot sitten (= truth/(iron.) no doubt/might sit) might be obscure to him.

On the other hand, a passage like:

> Sin I fro Love escaped am so fat,
> I never thenk to ben in his prison lene;
> Sin I am free, I counte hem not a bene.
>
> (*Merciles Beaute: A Triple Roundel*),

could, perhaps, be understood more easily because it is both closer to Modern English and sounds surprisingly fresh to the contemporary reader. It may be suspected that this happens because of verse 1 in the quotation: indeed, all possible „complaints" for the loss of a love have been listed in world poetry, since Chaucer, except getting fat.

A contemporary of Chaucer's might, nevertheless, have felt some humorous effect in the antonymic doublet fat/lene as well, or in the phrase „I counte him not a bene" used in the traditionally serious context of a love lament. Yet, both would-be readers are likely to perceive the shift to the non-bona-fide mode of communication and react accordingly.

On the other hand, some Chaucerian passages may be perceived as humorous, although they were not intended as such. One of Chaucer's serious ballads, *Womanly Noblesse* may strike a contemporary reader by at least odd word-choices if not humorous incongruities, in:

> Al my lyf withouten displesaunce,
> You for to serve with al my *besinesse*,
> And have me somwhat in your souvenance
> My woful herte suffreth greet duresse;

. or:

> Considring eek how *I hange in balaunce*
> *In your servyce*; swich, lo! is my chaunce /.../

Perhaps this could be explained by the subsequent evolution of the word *business* which underwent a specialization of meaning Chaucer cannot be called to account for; the outlandish resonance of „I hange in balaunce / In your servyce", on the other hand, may result from the preferential use of *hang* and *balance* in the proper sense nowadays while Chaucer used them figuratively.

The motif of the poet's complaint to his empty purse may have been a literary cliché (it can be related to Villon, as well) and is not felt as such nowadays; although it has been variously exploited in world literature (see, for instance, Eminescu's *Cugetările sărmanului Dionis*): „Beth hevy ageyn or elles mot I dye!"

If the obsoleteness of the Chaucerian text is in itself a fair warning to the contemporary reader that an amount of construing should be involved in

its understanding, closer to our times, the Shakespearian text fails to accomplish its illocutionary intention, at times, too.

Certainly Shakespeare did not intend his audience to laugh when, in a moment of utter dramatic poise, Hamlet's meeting with his father's ghost, the unhappy prince says:

> If thou art *privy* to thy country's fate,
> Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
> O! speak;

Shakespeare was obviously unaware that the noun *privy* would undergo a specialization of meaning in American English and used the word with its adjectival value (privy to = in the secret of – COD, p. 882).

The Shakespearian text abounds in euphuistic passages which a contemporary reader might fail to perceive as humorous, yet, not only Shakespeare's audience, but also one in Congreve's time may have enjoyed them. For instance:

Hamlet: My excellent good friends! How dost thou Guildenstern? Ah,
    Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?
Rosencrantz: As the indifferent children of the earth.
Guildenstern: Happy in that we are not over happy;
    On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.
Hamlet: Nor the soles of her shoe?
Rosencrantz: Neither, my lord.
Hamlet: Then you live above her waist, or in the middle of her favours?
Guildenstern: Faith, her privates we.
Hamlet: In the secret parts of Fortune? O! Most true; she is a strumpet!

(*Hamlet*, I, scene II, 232-244)

The COD lists the meaning of *privates* as pluralia tantum only as meaning 10 of the word; possibly this meaning might elude the contemporary reader; but most likely it does so because the incongruity in the text is overexplained by the previous passage. Our sense of humour includes a component of abruptness; the more unexpected the incongruity is, the greater its effect; it may be that in Shakespeare's time humour could also be conceived of as a matter of gradual construction. Such a hypothesis could be sustained by arguments in the history of literature. Euphuism was not only the dawn of mannerism in English literature, but also marked one major

root of Restoration comedy, on the hand, and the ulterior split between wit and humour, on the other hand, which might not have been there, yet, in Shakespeare's time. The fact is, nevertheless, that nobody can tell, not even backing his statement with conjecture, whether this passage was perceived as humorous or not in Shakespeare's time.

When in 1553 Thomas Wilson stated, in his *Arte of Rhetoric*, that puns are one of the effects of *amplification*, he implicitly included all effects of the accumulative or the symmetrical type into the list of mechanisms of humour. Certainly not all of them induce laughter nowadays; it is problematic whether they did so in Shakespeare's time, although punning was a more widely-spread phenomenon than nowadays ("the large amount of time which is given to word-games is not merely a learned habit or a stage-trick, but a way of dealing with a real social issue").[13] Some examples:
Pyramus: Now die, die, die, die, die

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1)

This is a figure called in rhetorics epizeuxis.[14] Had it been pronounced by Richard the III-rd and not by Quince-Pyramus, it would have stirred no laughter at all, in the contemporary reader. What we might laugh at is the immediately following *asteismus* (a pun based on homonymy):
Demetrius: No die, but an ace for him, for he is but one.
A figure similar to asteismus, but based on polysemy, is *polyptoton*:
Anne: Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood!

(*Richard III*, I, 2)

Which, if pursued over several lines, becomes *antanaclasis*:
    O, cursed be the hand that made these holes,
    Cursed the heart that had the heart to do it!
    Cursed the blood that let blood run from hence!

(*idem*)

These may be classified as non-humorous rhetorical devices; yet, in:
    "Whereat with blade, with bloody, blameful blade,
     He bravely broached the boiling bloody breast",

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[13] M. C. Bradbrook, *The Growth & Structure of Elizabethan Comedy*, Penguin, London, 1963, p. 62
[14] Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare's Use of Rhetoric*, in *Shakespeare Studies*, Oxford, OUP, s. a.

both a contemporary and 16th century receiver automatically shifts to non-bona-fide communication, not because the lines are pronounced by Quince-Pyramus (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1).nor because antanaclasis combines with *paronomasia* (roughly defining what we nowadays call (humorous) pun), but because of the use of *bloody* with its pejorative adjectival value which seems to have existed in Shakespeare's time already.

Not all polysemies are identical nowadays; an instance of *syllepsis* (polysemy without repetition; in modern terms, ambiguity) would give rise to different interpretations; when Richard III promises Clarence "Your imprisonment shall not be long; / I will deliver or else lie for you", the XVIth century receiver reacts according to Shakespeare's illocutionary intention, actualizing the two meanings of *lie* as 1) go to prison and 2) tell lies. The contemporary reader does not perceive the ambiguity: if, perchance, he does so, he will immediately dismiss the second (indecent) meaning of *to lie for somebody* as inappropriate in the context.

An effect of accumulation, *quantitative hendiadys* could also be said to function as a mechanism of humour nowadays: "in his rages and his furies and his wraths and his cholers and his moods and his displeasures and his indignations", says Fluellen in *Henry V* (act IV, 7). Topîrceanu's *Cioara* could be a modern example in this respect.

Let us note, before we return to the purpose of this demonstration, that "classical" rhetorical devices do not cover the entire area of:
    a) wordplay
    b) mechanisms of humour

A breech in cohesion for instance, cannot be accounted for by classical rhetorical devices, because their principle is isolating to some extent tropes and figures from cotext. An example which cannot be accounted for by classical rhetoric:
Lear: What dost thou profess? What wouldst thou with us?
Kent: I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust; to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise and says little; to fear judgement; to fight when I cannot choose; *and to eat no fish*.

(*King Lear*, I, IV)

Such sources of humour as graphetic ones, on the one hand, and shifts in register, dialect, idiolect, functiqnal style (as, for instance, Fluellen's dialect as a source of humour), on the other hand, are not accounted for by rhetorics either (rhetoric is, by definition, oral and stylistically homogeneous, in its classical meaning).

The conclusions of this demonstration would be the following:
1. The author's illocutionary intentions are not always diagnostical of the manner in which the text will be qualified (as literary/non-literary etc.), construed, or reacted to;
2. There is no way in which the evolution of a text could be part of the authorial intention (materialized in its illocutionary potential), since effectiveness evolves and is determined socially and historically;
3. Therefore, the receiver(s) cannot be ignored (at least in the case of humour, our object of analysis).

The statements above also function synchronically.

If the survival of a text in time cannot be attributed to authorial intention, it cannot be exclusively a matter of receiver(s) either, but rather depends on the interplay between authorial intention and receiver's expectation whose sign is the expected reaction of laughter. This could be qualified as successfulness of the speech act.

Coming back to humour, we could then state that *those humorous acts which are successful (have perserved their illocutionary potential) in our epoch, although the product of past ages, are likely to preserve their successfulness in the future, as well.*

This does not exclude new developments in the field of humorous acts; anticipating a bit, though, they will appear as new combinations of the same basic mechanisms of humour which will be identified further on.

The axiomatic condition for this prediction to stand, is that no radical change should take place in the structures of human thought (and/or their output, language).

An immediate consequence of the demonstration above is *that the corpus will be restricted down to such instances of wordplay which are perceived as humorous nowadays, regardless of their age.*

If the chronology of humorous acts is irrelevant, in this light, to our study, another factor is fundamental, especially to a comparative approach:

the dependence of linguistic mechanisms of humour on linguistic type. This is another constraint on the definition of humour.

III. 4. Linguistic Sources of Humour in an Analytical Language Versus a Synthetic One

In what follows we shall try to demonstrate that many of the linguistic mechanisms of humour can be modelled as a consequence of the linguistic type, more specifically, that the higher or the smaller degree of ambiguity of any utterance could be influenced by the linguistic type.

The statement that all languages tend towards analytism in their evolution is already commonplace in linguistics; yet, there are degrees of analytism observable at the synchronical level which are different for the two languages discussed. Should we adopt Sapir's typological classification of languages according to degree of synthesis and technique of synthesis (Sapir, 1970, pp. 120–144), we could argue that whereas English is the most analytical Indo-European language, almost an isolating one, Romanian presents a combination of analytical and synthetical elements in which, although the tendency is towards analytism, synthetically realised grammatical categories still prevail.

In discussing the specificity of humour – generating mechanisms to English and Romanian, we should not think, nevertheless, of completely different ones. In fact, many of them are identical, because of the following reasons:

– at a certain point in its evolution, English went through the stage of development towards analytism at which Romanian is now. Consequently all the typologically-based mechanisms of humour that we can find in Romanian are available to the English humourist as well; obsolescence itself can become a source of humour, on condition that it appear in the proper context;

– due to its high analytism, English has some sources of humour which Romanian has not developed yet;

– on the other hand, due to its history, on the one hand, but also to the lower degree of ambiguity given by its synthetical elements, on the other

hand, Romanian is more redundant. Redundancy could theoretically, become a source of humour which English does not have in some compartments at all, in others, to a much smaller extent. This statement should be considered with caution, nevertheless. If the major field in which a typological diagnosis on a language should be performed is that of grammatical structure, the redundancy due to the predominantly synthetical character of Romanian is not a mechanism of humour in itself. Nobody will feel the repetition of grammatical information in the Romanian past tense as funny (*Eu am* scris) even if it appears in a humorous context.

On the other hand, redundancy could be even more striking as a mechanism of humour in a language which, being analytical, does not favour it normally.

„And my soul is in the shadow, which lies *floating* on the floor,
Fleeting, floating, yachting, boating on the fluting of the matting,
Matting on my chamber floor".

(L. Edson, *Ravin's of Piute Poet Poe*)

If the example above combines a mechanism of hendiadys with alliteration to mock at Poe's musicality which could, at times, seem far-fetched, forced, fake or fickle, an example in prose (Carolyn Wells' mockery at Henry James' style) might illustrate better the idea above; not only redundancy, but its extreme manifestations, pleonasm and double negation become sources of humour:

„She luminously wavered, and I *tentatively inferred* that she would soon perfectly reconsider her *not altogether unobvious* course. Furiously, though with a tender, ebbing similitude, across her *mental consciousness* stole a re-culmination of all the truth she had ever known *concerning, or even remotely relating to*, the not-easily fathomed qualities of paste and ink."

Mockery by pleonasm is present, nevertheless, in Romanian, which is a less analytical language than English:

Pe canapeaua elegantă
Se-ntinde doamna nonşalantă

Şi cu-un papyrus se evantă
De *atmosfera ambiantă*.

(I. L. Caragiale)

or:

Celebrule între esteţi,
Declari că eu, subscrisul Mirea,
Sunt pur şi simplu *contopirea*
Hibridă între doi poeţi.

(A. Mirea – *Racheta*)

Consequently, it is not the type of the language which favours redundancies to become mechanisms of humour, but rather the logical structures of thinking, which are universalia independent of the linguistic type. Another reason why redundancy should be considered with caution is the unexpected character defining humour; outlandish, atypical aspects are rather exploited by humorous acts with a view to higher effectiveness.[15]

Mockery at the irregularities in language is, apparently, a source of humour in both languages; English:

A dentist who lived in Duluth
Has wedded a widow named Ruth
Who's so sentimental
Concerning things dental,
He calls her dear second her twoth.

and Romanian:

Căci nu se pasc, pe-acolo, copii, nici se-nfiază
Ci se fotografiază. /.../
El să fotografie tu să fotografii.

(Şerban Foarţă, *Simpleroze*, Facla, 1978)

Nevertheless, in the most conservative compartment of vocabulary, the basic word-stock, the interdependence between linguistic type and

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[15] A study on the frequency of redundancy in normal usage, in the two languages, would, perhaps, incline the balance towards Romanian; but, except for the fact that it is irrelevant to our discussion here, it would only re-demonstrate the genetical interdependence between the structures of thinking and the language of a community.

humorous potentiality could be demonstrated. Due to its history, mainly, but also to its lower degree of ambiguity given by synthetic elements, Romanian still keeps relatively perfect synonymic series which differ only in connotation (*zăpadă-nea-omăt*), as compared to the only English equivalent *snow*. Such synonymic series could become sources of humour which English does not have any longer.

For instance, in:

The marriage/wedding took place at Westminster, the substitution of synonyms does not create any incongruity; when the word *marriage* was borrowed from Norman French, it meant the „official", „church" aspect of the act, so that the speakers might have felt that the replacement with *wedding* was improper, since the Anglo-Saxon word meant the feast one had at home (among one's own people) afterwards. Two other synonyms *spousaille* and *wedlock* (*The Clerkes Tale*, 115) are, the former, no longer in the language, the latter, archaic.

On the other hand, a Romanian watching a weather-report on TV and hearing:

Stratul de omăt/nea a atins doi metri, might laugh or, at least, sense some oddity in the sentence.[16]

It could be argued that this is a mechanism of humour based on mixing dialectal registers and that such incongruities could appear in English as well. Yet, even used in an absolutely neuter context, *E multă zăpadă* will not be marked connotationally like *E mult(ă) omăt/nea*. In English, *I was at the marriage and I was at the wedding* are equal connotationally nowadays.[17]

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[16] Such sentences could be, nevertheless, heard on broadcasts of the Moldavian television; supposedly they do not sense any incongruity at all. This may be explained by both the obsolescence and the regional character of their variant of Romanian: it may be that all three variants are non-marked (neuter), which would mean that such an evolution is still ahead, since language allows no perfect synonyms to co-exist in it for a very long time. They might have chosen on the other hand, another synonym in the series as neuter (non-marked) term; *zăpadă* may be, in the Moldavian regional variant, the marked term of the series, and, therefore, avoided.

[17] From the evolution of the corresponding pair of words, to *marry/to wed*, of which the second is marked for obsolescence (see the opposition *Marry me!/Wed me!*), it may be anticipated that *wedding* could become obsolete in the future.

An analytical language expresses grammatical ties by means of word-order and prepositions. Any shift in word-order will create a new statement or a non-statement.

Considering: *Mother loves Peter*,

Peter loves mother is another statement, while

*Peter mother loves and

*Mother Peter loves are non-statements, both being ungrammatical.

In Romanian, the corresponding sentence:

Mama îl iubeşte pe Petru

is less ambiguous, because of the pronoun and the preposition, therefore any word-order will generate synonymous and acceptable sentences. (Let us notice, at this point, that, although the pronoun in the Romanian sentence is informationally redundant, the degree of grammatical redundancy of a language – which is a function of its synthetism – reduces its ambiguity, and the fact that English is very little redundant in its grammatical system – which is one of the traits of analytism – makes it so much the more ambiguous).

Nevertheless, word-order can become a source of humour both in English and Romanian. The famous „Crazy Ads" (anthologised in English, circulating orally in Romanian) could prove this:

To Let: Furnished accommodation for two girls sharing with gas cooker.
Wanted: Grand piano for old lady with carved legs.
Situation Vacant: Nanny required for small babies with good references.
(*The 2nd Armada Book of Fun*, chosen by Mary Danby, Armada, UK, 1977)

or, in Romanian:

Vînd pat pentru copil cu picioare de lemn.

The source of incongruity is in these cases, the misplacing of the prepositional attributive phrase; when the attributive phrase is adjectival. While the English sentence with the same distribution stays ambiguous (though it may be felt as slightly deviant), the Romanian sentence can be disambiguated by the obligatory agreement:

For sale: Ink for Ph D-candidate blue.

Vînd cerneală pentru doctorand albastră.

(If the humorous effect is to be preserved in Romanian, both would-be referents of the adjectival phrase should have the same gender: Vînd cerneală pentru doctorandă albastră.)

The immediate consequence of strict word-order, conversion, historically engendered by the loss of endings in Modern English can generate incongruities of a type which does not exist in any other language:

> our can'ts were born to happen
> our mosts have died in more
> our twentieth will open
> wide a wide open door
>
> we are so both and oneful
> night cannot be so sky
> sky cannot be so sunful
> i am through you so i
>
> (e. e. cummings, *New*, *Poems*, 49)

or: what freedom's not some under's mere above

but breathing yes which fear will never no?

The cases above present examples of relatively non-ambiguous incongruities; they do not generate a humorous effect because a second humorous reading is excluded; nonce-words could rather be said to have a metonymical functioning. Nevertheless, when in an appropriate[18] context, nonce-words create a humorous effect:

> a salesman is an it that stinks to please
> (cummings, *1 x 1*, IX)

The fact that in an analytical language conversion is the most productive means of enriching the vocabulary has two major consequences upon the mechanisms of humour:

a) the constant possibility to forge nonce-words
b) a very high polysemy of formally identical items.

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[18] By appropriate we mean, anticipating the analysis of the contextual conditioning of humour, a non-restrictive context, i. e. a context permitting at least two interpretations of an item, out of which one is humorous (see infra, Chapter VI)

The polysemy of formally identical items at the synchronical level is, nevertheless, due to another (historical) factor, as well: the levelling and then loss of endings, which is, also, a function of the analytism of English. Genetically, then, what is labelled today as polysemy of formally identical items in English is due to two concurrent factors: loss of endings and conversion; affixation, since it is less ambiguous, will form our object of interest only insofar as it yields effects of partial homophony, due to the common etymon of the word-family.

In Romanian, loss of endings does not exist, while conversion is present only in the derivation of adverbs from adjectives. The most productive means of enriching the vocabulary is affixation (more precisely, suffixation, if shifts in morphological class are considered), consequently, even if a part of speech is derived from another, it is only the root that is taken over and will receive the formal markers of the new morphological class:

e. g. *Don't madam me.* – the noun *madam* becomes a nonce-verb without any formal modification.

But in: *Nu mă domni* – the noun *domn/doamnă* has received the verbal ending and underwent agreement with its subject.

Both languages, on the other hand, present homonymy as a source of ambiguity. Homonymy is not etymologically based, but rather a linguistic accident, as is paronymy (a case of partial homophony), also existing in both languages.

The consequence of this situation is that, in Romanian, puns will in most cases play upon two alternative meanings only, while the English pun can involve more than two meanings. Moreover, the two subcategories of English homonymy (homphony and homography), which can create effects involving the opposition oral/written, are quasi-inexistent in Romanian which has a predominantly phonetical spelling. Some instances of wordplay English permits, consequently, are not possible in Romanian (nor translatable into Romanian):

> A right-handed fellow named Wright,
> In writing „Write" always wrote „rite",
> When he meant to write right;
> If he'd written „write" right,
> Wright could not have wrought rot writing „rite".

The humorous effect is based upon the succession *right/Wright/wright – wrought – wrought* (archaic form of to work), *rite*, *rot*. Of the series, perhaps only the first two elements have a common etymology; the rest are homophones, respectively paronyms. The difference oral/written plays a great part in disambiguation.

A more typical example of pun based on polysemy is that of:
„Johnie Walker: born 1849 and still going strong."
where *strong* could mean:

        a physical strength
        b. high alcoholic concentration
        c. selling well (in collocation with *to go*)

Such a pun could be translated into Romanian because, accidentally, the three meanings of *strong* exist in the Romanian *tare*, as well, and they have not yet gained such a high degree of independence from the original meaning as to form separate dictionary entries (i. e. to be identified as different by the speech communities). The fourth, taboo meaning of *to go strong*, which makes the advertisement humorous, is also to be found in the Romanian adjective.

Yet, in most cases, Romanian puns play upon homonymy:
        Spunea, cînd baş-buzucii făcuse harcea-parcea
        şi răvăşise viţa pe solul craiovean,
        Un podgorean de frunte cu via la Segarcea
        Că *banul* din Craiova nu face nici un *ban*.
or: Nu contrazice voia sorţii
        şi nu sfida stihiile
        Aşa fu scris: cei morţi cu morţii,
        Iară cei *vii* cu ... *viile*.
or: Cînd te-acuză de beţie,
        Tu poţi crîşmarului să-i spui
        Că, de-a făcut şi vreo prostie,
        Nu-i *vina* ta, e *vinul* lui.
            (Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Inter pocula*)

The examples above may be illustrative of the fact that only two meanings are involved in the Romanian pun, in the great majority of cases.

Even if it is polysemy that generates the pun, a more synthetical language does not have such a highly developed polysemantic (and/or homonymic) system as an analytical one. In the second and third epigram above, the words involved in the pun have even acquired enclitic markers of gender, number and case embedded into the obligatory article, which show that the second word (*viile*, *vinul*) is not identical with the first, but a homonym (*viile*, instead of *viii*, although the nominative form is identical when it has an indefinite article *vii – vii*).

Polysemy can underlie the mechanism of puns in Romanian, as well, but, again, involving only two meanings:
        El doarme ţeapăn, doarme drept, –
        Dar ştiţi voi: *cînd* a fost deştept?
            (Topîrceanu, *Epitaf unui prost*)

or: Şi doamna preuteasă ne-a mărturisit
        (Stînd gata să recadă în sincopă),
        Că nicăieri pe lume n-a-ntîlnit
        Atîta necredinţă ca la popă.
            (Topîrceanu, *Strofe*)

It could be said, consequently, *that polysemy is favoured by the fact that English is more analytical than Romanian, consequently English has a higher potential of generating puns. The ambiguity of the language (lack of endings), also favours this possibility, whereas Romanian, which has a greater degree of redundancy (both grammatical and lexical) is less ambiguous, consequently it has a lower potentiality of creating puns.*

The dependence of mechanisms of humour upon the linguistic type is manifest only as a potentiality; it should be considered with caution, nevertheless, because, as mentioned before, humour is extremely proteic; not only does it present instances of non-bona-fide communication, but plays, at times, as it will be shown in what follows, on the fringes of acceptability.

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This chapter has approached several constraints on the definition of humour given in Chapter II. The next chapters will discuss mechanisms of humour upon corpus, in order to finally list a possible taxonomy, according to some criteria which will be discussed in what follows.

We shall adopt, hence, a synchronical view, considering:

a) only texts which are liable to induce laughter nowadays, regardless of the epoch when they were written;

b) considering the frequency of a certain mechanism of humour as irrelevant for this study; one occurrence in the corpus will be diagnostical of the existence of that mechanism of humour in the language;

c) the possibility of translation of humorous instances into the other language without the loss of humorous effect will be considered to prove the functioning of the respective mechanism of humour in the target-language, as well, even if it does not appear in the corpus.

Such a view may help us differentiate more easily universals of humour, as against mechanisms specific to one language or the other, which is one of the aims of this study.

CHAPTER IV
Levels of Analysis. Mechanisms of Humour at the Level of Form and Text Type

IV. 1. A Possible Approach to the Corpus

At the end of Chapter II, humour was defined as a function depending on a set of variables and a set of constants. If the form of the function is the type of humorous incongruity and its domain of definition is a natural language, it will assume values in the field of expectation; in other words, a humorous speech act can only be validated as such when projected against the background of expectation. Whether expectation is systematic or not, it is not for us to decide here; it can be assumed, nevertheless, that it is in some compartments, and to some extent, continuous. The author's illocutionary intention draws upon an ideal continuity of expectation in the receiver(s). Two major distinctions regarding expectation have been eliminated, for our purpose here:

a) the distinction between the expectation of all mankind in all epochs, and the expectation of a certain epoch, by taking into account only humorous acts which are perceived as such nowadays, and

b) the distinction between the general expectation of a group and that of an individual, by considering an average receiver, endowed with the sense of humour.

Expectation could be viewed as consisting of several more or less continuous (certainly continuous and at least contiguous, in different areas) layers of text (of various origins, types and degrees of completeness, depending on social and historical conditions) out of which a humorous incongruity can activate one or several to become its system of reference. The decoding mechanism of humour was discussed above (see Chapter II, supra). The layers of text can contain virtually anything that can enter human consciousness, from mentality down to syntactic competence.

Expectation can be said to act as an omnipresent intertext to any new text a receiver is confronted with.

Like language, expectation may function in a straightforward or in a self-reflexive manner. Whenever real life is involved, expectation acts straightforwardly; when fictionality is involved, it acts in a self-reflexive, meta-manner, in that the receiver accepts the fictionality of fiction and by this becomes ready to assent to the abolishment or change of some rules in the real world, proposed by the author, if it is the case. The receiver's unawareness of the self-reflexive functioning of expectation with fiction could result in Bovaristic or Donquixotistic attitudes and/or behaviours.

The consequence of such a view upon expectation is important for our subject here, because the shift to non-bona-fide communication, characteristic of humour, also triggers off a self-reflexive functioning of expectation,[1] in other words, a process of selection of system of reference in which the incongruity should be decoded. (We are discussing here, specifically, the understanding of a joke; yet, perhaps any understanding functions on the basis of self-reflecting expectation; another, lengthy discussion, out of our scope here, would be to what extent this is a reflex in the human being. With humour it must be a reflex, to a certain extent, at least, because by the time we are aware of it, we are already laughing).

This process of selection among the different areas of expectation may yield immediate results, or not. In the first case, the result is humour.

When the system of reference cannot offer sufficient decoding data for a humorous incongruity, two situations are possible:

1. extremely occasional humour (alluding to extratextual elements unknown to the receiver)
2. absurd humour.

We have discussed the problem of occasionality in Chapter III; let us re-state, here, that whenever extratextual factors unknown to the receiver are involved in decoding the humorous incongruity (the extra data needed are

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[1] 1. The discussion of fictionality in general as instance of non-bona-fide communication goes a long way back into the history of mentalities, to the point, perhaps, where fiction emerged from myth; let us remind here that we are using Raskin's term and not the literal meaning of *non-bona-fide.*

not present in his expectation) no humorous act takes place. Since the receiver is a theoretical average, it could be stated that the more particular (specific) these extra data are, the less likely the receiver is to be able to bridge the gap created by incongruity. (see supra III. 3).

The other case in which expectation does not function, immediately offering the adequate system of reference, is when the absurd is involved in the humorous act. For absurd humour to be perceived as humour, the extrapolation into an impossible possible world is necessary with the receiver, as a first step in decoding.

e. g.   There was a young lady of Lynn
Who was so abnormally lean,
That when she essayed
To drink lemonade
She slipped through the straw and fell in.

The first attempt at understanding this limerick would be, in the system of reference of general expectation, its transposition into a syllogism using the *if... then* sequence:

P_1: A straw is thin,
P_2: but if somebody is uncommonly thin,
Concl: then he can be thinner than a straw.

No truth-value can be assigned to this syllogism. If we assume that P_1 and P_2 are true, then the conclusion must be true as well. P_2 cannot be considered false, because of the incommensurate quantifier expressed by a superlative: *uncommonly*. We cannot tell, out of normal life experience *how* thin somebody who is *ab-normally* so, could be; what we know is, nevertheless, that there is no such person who should be thinner than a straw. Consequently, the entailment is false. The system of reference of normal expectation is *inadequate*. Perhaps the source of this situation can be identified, too. If the entailment is false, only P_2 can be false, because the major premiss of any syllogism is a general truth which cannot be suspected of falsehood.

If we admit that P_2 is true, we have accepted the shift into another system of reference (W_1 – impossible possible world, accessible by admitting the truth-value of P_2 in W_1). If, then, we admit that ab-normal thinness in people can go below the diameter of a straw, no truth-value

different from the one in W_0 (real world) is assigued to length/height; possible worlds *are* incomplete; but incompleteness as to this item will force us to resort to propositions in the real world. More explicitly: nothing is stated in the limerick as to height of persons or size of straws and glasses in the world W_1, where a person is thinner than a straw. Were it so, the impossible possible world would be absurd and fiercely so (as in the opening and concluding passages of *Pincher Martin* by Golding). Yet, the lack of this item of information forces us to fill it in with real-world data as to height of persons, size of straws and glasses and a humorous incongruity appears: *She slipped through the straw and fell in/to the glass/*. The reaction will be laughter.

Consequently, the reception of absurd humour is a two-step process:
1. shifting to an impossible possible world
2. perceiving the humorous clash in this realm

The second step is made possible by the fact that the fictional world is incomplete (were it sufficiently defined to be an impossible possible world, pure absurd would be involved with no humorous overtone),[2] and the real-world elements we tend to complete it with are contradictory, which creates a mock-fictional situation and, consequently, a humorous incongruity.

Consequently, the two cases in which expectation does not function immediately:
a) the extreme case of occasionality,
b) absurd humour
could be summed up as follows:
1) the self-reflexive function of expectation cannot be activated because the humorous incongruity can only be perceived after unknown information is acquired (with a)) or when the shift into an impossible possible world is performed (with b)).
2) if the conditions above are not met, no humorous act takes place, because of incomplete information (with a)) or inconsistency of

[2] All possible worlds are incompletely defined ("small worlds" – cf. Eco); yet, they are sufficiently defined to be autonomous and their irrelevant aspects, if completed with real-world data, are not contradictory to the basic definition; with absurd humour the impossible possible world is insufficiently defined to be autonomous; when completed with real world aspects they contradict its basic definition, engendering mock-fictionality.

system of reference (with b)), which lead to a failure in identifying the humorous incongruity, shifting to non-bona-fide communication and activating the self-reflexive function of expectation in order to perceive humour.

Expectation can, nevertheless, function immediately and does so, in the rest of cases. If in a) and b) above textual data are insufficient for immediate decoding, this happens because the insufficiency of data will strand the decoding process (at least in its first step) into general expectation. With cases in which expectation functions immediately and the shift to non-bona-fide communication is performed, general expectation becomes a special (text-oriented) one, and functions in the directions:
1. identification of incongruity – shift to non-bona-fide communication
2. activation at the self-reflexive function (a "perusal" of the text layers of expectation in order to identify the proper area in which the incongruity can be solved)
3. disambiguation.

Not only a rudimentary verbal strategy such as "Let me tell you a joke /limerick/ epigram" can become the incentive which triggers off the process, but also the perception of incongruity (with oral irony, for instance) or the visual perception of the page arrangement (with limericks or epigrams).

As soon as this happens, expectation shifts from general to text-oriented ("special") expectation. According to where the incongruity appears, expectation can act in three directions:
a) intertext
b) general context
c) cotext and text.

Obviously, these levels can be separated only out of methodological reasons; it has been pointed out before that all expectation can be seen as intertext; on the other hand, the borderline between context and cotext is problematic, if not impossible to establish; finally, since mechanisms of humour never (or almost never) act in isolation, an intertextual mechanism (as, for instance, parody) can act synergically with a contextual mechanism (humour of situation) and/or a textual mechanism (a pun).

On the other hand, *all mechanisms of humour, at all levels, act on the basis of analogies*:

a') – intertextual mechanisms by analogy to other texts

b') – contextual mechanisms by analogy to the rules of the syllogism

c') – cotextual and textual mechanisms by analogy in attributing meaning to signifier.

This three-level analysis has the following advantages:

a) it does not take into account the extremely loose and debatable denominations of traditional rhetorics (*zeugma, paronomasia*, etc.);

b) it can cross the border of literary species, since one and the same mechanism can appear in several species;

c) by listing the ultimate, elementary mechanisms of humour, obtained on the basis of binary analysis into groups and subgroups their potentiality of infinite combination is left open, offering a perspective of analysis for mechanisms which have not been found in the corpus or are still to be made up in the future;

d) it can ultimately cross the border of genre, as well, offering a model of analysis which might be valid for prose or drama, as well.

The first condition for such an analysis to take shape would be establishing criteria which should operate differentiations in the corpus.

IV. 2. Criteria

In establishing the criteria operating in this analysis, some assumptions should be made:

a) elementary mechanisms of humour almost never act in isolation;

b) yet, it is these mechanisms that are recurrent; the combinations among them are virtually infinite;

By *recurrence* we mean, in this case, licenses at the same level, violations of the same type of rules embedded in expectation. Therefore a grill of valid criteria for such a grouping should be established to allow a binary analysis into groups and subgroups. The categories thus obtained will

be further analysed into features and sub-features. Since no pure categories are to be found, in most cases, the association of features is obtained through combinations in one and the same item of one or several categories obtained after the application of criteria.

Restrictions as to number of combinations and types of possible combinations can be dictated by factors depending on linguistic type. Such limitations have been analysed in III. 4.; they will be re-mentioned whenever it is the case.

Binary analysis can be applied as far as the preservation/non-preservation of effect is concerned, after which our interest should shift to the type of effect obtained. After the completion of binary analysis, the ultimate (elementary) mechanisms of humour will be obtained.

The following criteria will be adopted:

a) *the criterion of form*. The criterion differentiates between mechanisms of humour based on graphical (graphetic) devices which will be conventionally marked with /+written/ and other mechanisms of humour which do not involve the difference oral/written (conventionally marked /-written/)

b) *the criterion of text-type analogy* – differentiates mechanisms based upon intertext from those which do not have such a cause; whenever text type is identifiable as a system of reference because of which (against which) incongruities appear, it can be considered a source of humour. /+text type/ mechanisms will have this feature and several subclasses can be differentiated; /-text type/ mechanisms do not exhibit text-type analogy.

c) *the criterion of immediate inference* – differentiates between mechanisms of humour, /+inferable/, and mechanisms of humour involving the absurd, as well, /-inferable/.

d) *the criterion of paraphrasability* – differentiates between mechanisms of humour of language, /-paraphrase/, which cannot be paraphrased without loss of effect, and /+paraphrase/mechanisms (others than /-paraphrase/) exhibiting types of humour other than humour of language.

The first level of analysis stops here. Further sub-categories are obtained by grouping the levels at which incongruities appear according to the way in which they appear. The analysis is expected to ultimately yield the mechanisms of humour.

The four criteria act synergically, i. e., any of them can be applied to either subgroup differentiated by another criterion. The order in which they were enumerated is arbitrary; a graphical representation of the first level of analysis could be:

FIRST LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

A. FORM	B. TEXT TYPE ANALOGY	C. IMMEDIATE INFERENCE	D. PARAPHRASABILITY
/+written/	/+inferrable/	/+text type/	/+paraphrase/
/-written/	/-inferrable/	/-text type/	/-paraphrase/

As it results from the scheme, no criterion should be applied prior to another; the classes of mechanisms can act in combination. An example:

> When lads have done with labor
> in Shropshire, one will cry,
> „Let's go and kill a neighbor,"
> and th'other answers „Aye!"
>
> So this one kills his cousins,
> and that one kills his dad;
> And, as they hang by dozens
> at Ludlow, lad by lad,
> each of them one-and-twenty,
> all of them murderers,
> the hangman mutters: „Plenty
> even for Housman's verse."
>
> (Humbert Wolfe)

The item is neuter to the oral/written criterion, so it is /-written/ because the effect is preserved both when read or said; inference does not function until the last verses; the poem is absurd, at first; the last two verses make it become absurd humour, when the reader finds out the poem is a parody after A. E. Housman. Consequently, the text is /-inference/, /+text-type/. Since the humorous effect is preserved when the poem is paraphrased, no humour of language is involved, consequently it is a /+paraphrase/ case.

This analysis is possible because the poem was taken as a whole; ultimate mechanisms can be identified at the second level of analysis, where the subclasses of each class will be discussed.

In what follows these subclasses will be identified.

IV. 3. The criterion of form

As pointed out above, this criterion differentiates /+written/ mechanisms, which present graphical (graphetical) sources of incongruity from /-written/ ones, in which incongruity appears at other levels.

The distinction graphical/graphetic will be defined, for our purposes here as follows:

a) *graphical mechanisms* will be defined as those which imply page-arrangement, text linearity etc., as elements of expectation contradicted by some humorous incongruity.

b) *graphetical mechanisms* will be defined as mechanisms pertaining to the spelling/pronouncing difference.

IV. 3. 1. Graphical mechanisms of humour

Page arrangement, verse linearity or direction of writing can engender, when they become unfulfilled expectations, incongruities, but not necessarily of the humorous type. Surrealistic writing has exploited such mechanisms of incongruity to purposes different from humorous ones. Something like:

> IKEY (GOLDBERG)' S WORTH I'M
> TOLD $ SEVERAL MILLION
> FINKLESTEIN (FRITZ) LIVES
> AT THE RITZ WEAR
> earl & wilson COLLARS
> (e. e. cummings, *IS5*, One, XV)

when preceded and followed by normal print could be considered as a highlighting, perhaps a style-marker for e. e. cummings, in whose poetry capitals are used with a stylistic value. Page arrangement can suggest musicality and rhythm, for instance:

```
Jimmie's got a goil
                goil
                        goil,
                                Jimmie
's got a goil and
she cointly can shimmie
when you see her shake
                        shake
                                shake,
                                        when
you see her shake a
shimmie how you wish that you was Jimmie.
```

<div align="right">(e. e. cummings, op. cit., 6)</div>

Item XXXIV from the same cycle of poems is written in an unexpected direction: from the bottom of the page upwards, not only compelling the reader to make the effort of turning the book, but also that of decyphering the text. The suggestion in the writing direction clearly points at a Joycean movement of bringing the subconscious to light:

Is flittercrumbs, fluttercrimbs are floatfallin, g; allwhere:
a: crimbflitteringish is arefloatsis ingfallal! mil,shy milbrightlions
my (hurl flicker handful
in) dodging are shybrigHteyes is crum bs(alll)if, ey Es

If such mechanisms create incongruities which are not necessarily humorous, in combination with a mechanism of humour, the effect of the latter can be enhanced. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, for instance, a mechanism of homophony generates first, a pun:

«"Mine is a long and sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.

„It *is* a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; but why do you call it sad?"

<div align="center">100</div>

At this point it may be assumed that Alice did not make the difference tale/tail in oral communication; yet, the cotext („You promised to tell me your history, you know" – says Alice before the replies above) does not permit confusion between the two possible meanings of the sound-complex ['teil]; since Alice does not take this element of censorship into account, we are led to believe that her imagination acts as a strong generative system; indeed, not only does she make the pun and is unaware of it, but she also takes it literally:

„And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:

```
    "Fury said to
   a mouse, That
      he met in the
        house, 'Let
          us both go
           to law: I
             will prose-
               cute you.
               Come, I'll
              take no de-
             nial;We
            must have
           a trial:
         For really
        this morn-
      ing I've
     nothing
     to do.
      Said the
        mouse to
          the cur,
           Such a
            trial, dear
             Sir, With
             no jury
            or judge
             would
            be wast-
           ing our
          breath.'
         I'll be
        judge,
       I'll be
      jury,
      Said
       cun-
        ning
         old
          Fu-
           ry;
            'I'll
             try the
              whole
               cause,
                and
                 con-
                  demn
                   you to
                    death.'"
```

<div align="right">(Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland pp. 41–42)</div>

<div align="center">101</div>

Although in most cases graphical mechanisms appear in combination with other mechanisms of humour (and/or of the absurd, as was the case above), there is one example in the entire corpus which (undebatably and beyond any further comments) proves that graphical mechanisms can function to create humour) on their own:

> There was a young fellow named Bliss,
> Whose sex-life was sadly amiss.
>   For even with Venus,
>   His recalcitrant penis
> Would never do better than t
>   h
>   i
>   s...

(The Penguin Book of Limericks, p. 290)

Romanian humorous verse does not exploit very much the graphical possibilities illustrated above; it is questionable whether Romanian Dadaists (Victor Brauner and Ilarie Voronca, the inventors of „pictopoems" in Romanian literature, intended their works which present such mechanisms of incongruity to be read as primarily humorous; since such instances could be translated into Romanian without loss of their humorous effect, the availability could be said to exist; consequently these are, potentially, mechanisms of humour in Romanian as well. An apparent exception, the example from Lewis Carroll, is untranslatable because homophony (its basis) is a /-paraphrase/ mechanism of humour, i. e., it is language-specific. There is no homophony in Romanian between poveste/coadă, although *Alice in Wonderland* has been translated. The tale in the „tail", on the other hand, can be transposed into Romanian; outside its context and form, it is absurd, not humorous:

> Furia se răsti
> Cînd un șoarec zări
> 'Vino la tribunal
> Să te judec îndat. –
> Haide, să nu mai stăm;
> Vin' să ne judecăm.

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> Fiindcă azi nu mai am
> Chiar nimic de lucrat.
> Zise-acelui mojic
> Șoarecul: „Stai un pic,
> Fără juriu ori jude
> Asta chiar n-are rost.
> 'Jude, juriu-s, pe dată,
> Zise Furia șireată;
> O să judec eu și
> Morții te-oi hărăzi'

              ·(my translation – C. T.)

Since these mechanisms can combine complex graphical elements with text, their number is virtually infinite; some of them can be, as proved above, humorous; yet, the mechanisms in question are not only logical-linguistic; they can verge upon the visual (the limerick above has no effect if read or if the last line is re-arranged according to normal expectation). They could be said to be marginal to the categories discussed in this study; statistically, their occurrence is rare in the corpus. Nevertheless, their chance to become exploited in the future is fairly high if one thinks that we might be heading towards a video culture, rather than towards one of the letters.

IV. 3. 2. Graphetical mechanisms of humour

The mechanisms under discussion rely on differences between spelling and pronunciation, therefore they are rather characteristic of English which presents this discrepancy. Should abbreviation be considered a graphetical mechanism of humour, cases of humorous abbreviation exist in Romanian as well; but abbreviation (although it will be discussed in this section) is a mechanism which combines with homophony in Romanian and, in some cases, in English, too.

Most graphetical mechanisms in English appear in limericks; two major subspecies can be identified: one in which the oral form disambiguates the written form and, conversely, cases when the written form

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disambiguates the oral form. In other words, humorous incongruities can appear:

a) in the seen form (while the oral form is unambiguous)

b) in the oral form (while the seen form is unambiguous).

Mechanisms under a) exploit an anomalous spelling (usually of a toponym, a loan-word, a name) to forge, by analogy, mock-spellings of rhyming words; if these words are pronounced similarly to the first rhyme, there is no incongruity in the oral form:

Said a man to his spouse in East Sydenham,

„My best trousers! Now where have you hydenham? (hidden'em)

It is perfectly true

They were not very new

But I foolishly left half a quidenham." (quid in'em)

or: A charming young lady named Geoghegan

Whose Christian names are less peophegan (pagan)

Will be Mrs. Knollys

Very soon at All Ksollys; (All Solace)

But the date is at present a veogheg'un. (vague one)

The limericks above combine analogical spelling with a mechanism of situational humour (in the first case – the half quid is more valuable than a pair of trousers) and with ironical contrast (between Christian – pagan in collocation with All Solace – in the second example).

Two linguistic mechanisms proper combine in the following example, abbreviation and analogical spelling:

A man hired by John Smith and Co.

Loudly declared he would tho. (thump any)

Man that he saw

Dumping dirt near his store.

The drivers therefore didn't do. (dump any)

Nevertheless, the situational humour is there, as well: the drivers (who could anyway not be caught to be thumped) did not go on dumping dirt, but, we infer, passers-by did.

Although rare, cases where analogical spelling is the only mechanism of humour can also be identified:

An impertinent fellow of Leicester

Met a lady and thus he addreicester:

„Let my arms be a neicest

Where your head, love, may reicest"

So she ran to his breicest where he preicester.

Since such limericks are few, there are solid grounds to believe that they are fairly recent productions of known authors; such limericks cannot circulate in oral form and the limerick is a popular species par excellence. There is not only an amount of spelling skills present in such limericks, but also rare rhyme alluding to realities unfamiliar to average people, such as, for instance, the pelican.

A wonderful bird is the pelican

His bill can hold more than his bellican.

He can stuff in his beak

Food enough for a week

I'm damned if I know the hellican.,

the goddess Psyche:

A beautiful lady named Psyche

Is loved by a fellow named Yche.

One thing about Ych

The lady can't lych

Is his beard which is dreadfully spyche.,

or W. S. Maugham:

A jocular fellow named Maugham

Created a general staugham

By attending a shoot

In a red bathing soot

Which certainly wasn't good faugham.

Alphanumerics[4] (h8 or 2U and so 4th) could be ranged into the same category, with the mention that they can appear in Romanian as well (C8 or 4ped). An example, in English:

---

[4] The term belongs to Evan Esar

I often sit and medit8
Upon the scurvy tricks of f8
That keeps me still a celib8
Oh, what a f8!

or: There was a young lady of Crewe
Who wanted to catch the 2.2;
    Said the porter: „Don't worry.
    Or flurry or scurry,
It's a minute or 222.2.

The extreme case presents no humour in the oral form and incongruous spelling:

    A little buoy said „Mother, deer,
        May eye go out two play?
    The son is bright, the heir is clear,
        Owe, mother, don't say neigh.

The mother who neighs is as humorous as riding a cough:

    There was a young lady of Slough
    Who went for a ride on a cough
        The brute pitched her off
        When she started to coff;
    She ne'er rides on such animals nough.

Such mockery at anomalous spelling is quasi-impossible in Romanian; perhaps an unexploited potentiality would be loan-words.

In English, „pure" examples are very rare; this mechanism combines usually with a homonymic one[5]:

    There was an old broom of St. Stephen's,
    That set all at sixes and sevens;

And to sweep from the room
    The convictions of Brougham,[6]
Was the work of this Broom of St. Stephen's.

The mechanism can also combine with juncture:

    The Reverend *Henry Ward Beecher*
    Called a hen a most elegant creature,
    The hen, pleased with that
    Laid an egg in his hat –
    And thus did the *hen reward Beecher*.

In the oral form the pause between hen/reward is obliterated which may lead the reader towards decoding the last line by analogy with the first one. The result may be the absurd supposition that Beecher laid an egg in his own hat, as well, or complete lack of understanding because of the article in front of the proper name.

Even more misleading is paronymy in combination with this mechanism in the limerick:

    The bottle of perfume that Willie sent
    Was highly displeasing to Millicent.
        Her thanks were so cold
        They quarrelled, I'm told,
    Though that silly scent Willie sent Millicent.

The components substituted for each-other rhyme: silly/Willy/Milly, so that *Millicent* could be interpreted as *Milly sent* or *Milly scent*, which makes the limerick unintelligible. The homophony *sent/scent* as well as rhythm which obliterates the open juncture between *silly/scent, Willie/sent*, also reinforce the analogical interpretation.

The written form disambiguates the limerick.

The fact that some examples are illustrative for several mechanisms of humour proves that the latter seldom act in isolation.

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[5] Esar even calls it „homonymic verse"; „homophonic" is however, excluded in the oral form while „homographic" is excluded in the written. so, perhaps it could be called „mock-homonymic". Homonymy as a mechanism of pun acts in a different manner.

[6] The allusion is to Henry Lord Brougham and Vaux, Lord Chancellor of England, who played a leading part in carrying through the Reform Bill of 1832

To a certain extent *abbreviation* could be part of the class /+written/, because it also exhibits differences between spelling and pronunciation; yet, these are due to causes other than etymological spelling. Therefore, abbreviation functions in Romanian as well:

         – Mi-a spus medicul să vin la O.R.L. 9.

or: – Cea mai caldă noutate la ordinea zilei: S.R.L.

or: „Cine se scuză, se A.C. Cuza!" Teleor is said to have replied at being accused to be a partisan of the politician Cuza.

In English humorous verse, abbreviation functions as *alphabetical pun* (based on the alphabetical reading of abbreviation) by analogy to *abbrevese*[7] (plain, non-humorous use of abbreviation).

The incongruity appears in the written form; the heard form disambiguates the items.

Alphabetical puns rely, as mentioned before, on the alphabetical reading of abbreviations, dictated by analogy to abbrevese:

    A punctilions young Ph. D.
    Was invited one day to a t.
        At the Y.M.C.A.
        And he felt lie a j.
    For forgetting to R.S.V.P.

Ph.D, Y.M.C.A. and R.S.V.P. are instances of abbrevese permitted by usage since known by the majority of the receivers (a Romanian may, nevertheless, have problems identifying what YMCA means, or RSVP – an abbreviation from French). By analogy to abbrevese, the letters t. and j. (verses 2 and 4) if read alphabetically are homophonous with the nouns *tea* and *jay*, whence the humorous effect.

Not only Latin letters can be read alphabetically to yield a humorous effect:

    There was a kind curate of Kew
    · Who kept a large cat in a pew,
        Where he taught it each week

---

[7] The terms belong to Esar, but we have re-defined them, since, with the author, the difference between them is not clear.

        Alphabetical Greek,
    But it never got further than μ.
A rather rare example (abbreviation + homography) appears in:
    There was a young Girton M.A.
    Who said: „This degree's by the way.
        To something much higher
        One day I aspire".
    Well, now she's an M.A.M.A.

Not all abbreviations can be read alphabetically; some appear only as written abbreviations which are to be read out in full (as, for instance Dr., Mrs. Hon., pp. etc.) Such cases can also become sources of humour:

    There is an old cook in N.Y.
    Who insists you should always st. p.
        He says he once tried
        To eat some that was fried,
    And claims he would rather ch. c.

This mechanisms does not involve homonymy, like alphabetical puns do, therefore it could be said to be based upon abbrevese only. Since abbrevese is not humorous in itself, or orally, the limerick above also presents a mechanism of situational humour which blends with abbrevese. The limerick could be paraphrased or translated into another language, since humour of situation is /+paraphrase/ and not language-specific; the effect of abbrevese would be, nevertheless, lost, since most abbreviations are language-specific. Still, one could imagine an effect based on abbrevese in Romanian as well, although no such instance has been found in the corpus. Something like:

    Ei atuncea îi spuseră „D-nă,
    Mai veniți peste cinci ani în t-nă."
might sound funny, although it might not be funny at all. Or, perhaps, a limerick in the same vein:
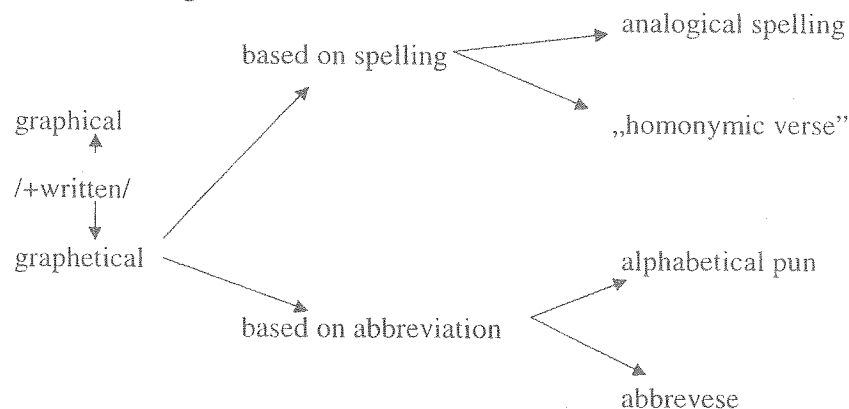
    După ce se-necă-n ms,
    Și de-o mie de ori l-a res.
        Cercetînd despre haz.

Ea muri de necaz,
Căci umorul e de nedes.

*

To sum up, /+written/ mechanisms of humour could be considered to fall into the following subclasses:

/-written/ mechanisms do not present spelling as a source of humour. Graphical mechanisms can be encountered in both languages. Analogical spelling and what Esar calls „homonymic verse" are quasi-inexistent in Romanian. Mechanisms based on abbreviation could become sources of humour in verse, in Romanian as well, because abbreviation is a linguistic universal. No cases have been found in the corpus, nevertheless.

IV. 4. The Criterion of Text-Type Analogy

As pointed out in Section 2 of the present chapter, this criterion distinguishes mechanisms based upon intertext from those which do not have this feature.

Although, as pointed out before, all expectation could be considered as intertext, in this section the concept of intertext will be limited to its

traditional theoretical content; *we will therefore, consider as intertext areas or elements of expectation referring to*:
a) non-artefactual text-type
b) authorial style.

IV. 4. 1. Non-artefactual Text-type

could be defined in relation to several major co-ordinates: that of functional styles (scientific, administrative, liturgical, literary etc.), that of dialect, sociolect, idiolect, that of register (frozen, formal, down to highly informal), and that of historical strata in the language: from archaisms, obsolescent words and constructions to neologisms. Finally, shifts into a foreign language enter this subclass, too. The axes present overlapping elements: for instance, highly informal could be, at the same time considered low colloquial and could present elements of vernacular. Legal and biblical terms have become, meanwhile, archaic, etc.

The problem of the proximal genre, neuter discourse „zero degree", in other words of the non-marked text-type against which the above-mentioned categories should be distinguished as such has been a matter of lengthy discussion with various authors.[8]

What we are interested in, here, is their liability to become sources of humour which will happen whenever elements pertaining to a style create an incongruity in any other text; *consequently any text can become the cotext of incongruities brought about by any other text-type.*

The vernacular of Germans has been, it seems, a fairly much exploited source of humour in Romanian literature:

Am auzit, – şi svonu-acesta
Se'nprăştie cu mare curs, –
Cã Regele la Moşi, deunãzi,
A pronunţat acest discurs

---

[8] Generally the background against which a discourse could be considered as metaphorical has been a matter of dispute; probably Ricoeur's opinion that this is an abstraction is the most convincing; Eco proposes scientific and technical text as proximal genre, etc.

„Hern negustori, la dumneafoastrã
Plãcut la mine ca sã vi;
Regina zis la ea sã cumpãr
Un oale şi un farfuri.
    ..."

(Tradem, *Discursul regelui la Mo• i*)

Similarly, the way Frenchmen speak English can become a source of humour:

'Monsieur Gauguin? E's gone to Tahiti,
Where ze girls are so friendly and pretty;
    'E paints them *tout* bare
    Wiz zair lovely black 'air,
And bodies zo- 'ow you say? – „meaty"!

or Chicano speech:

There was a young girl of old Natchez
Where garments were always in patchez
When comment arose
On the state of her Clothes
She drawled: „When Ah itchez, Ah scratchez."

(Ogden Nash)

A category somehow marginal to this would be the shift into foreign language in order to generate humour:

„Our author's meaning, I presume is
A creature *bipes et implumis*
Wherein the moralist designed
A compliment on humankind:
For here he owns that now and then
Beasts may degenerate into men."

(Swift, *The Beasts' Confession*)

This shift is normally performed in order to denominate something aggressive (a hen, in the case above), or a taboo:

It is clear that Napoleon's Queen
Was referring to army routine,
    When she said in a flummox,
    „*Marchons-nous sur nos stomachs?*"
And was told „Not tonight, Josephine."

(Moss Rich)

Unless the shift into a foreign language functions euphemistically, no humour is created:

Exposing his plate to the air,
Did its clever inventor declare:
    '*C'est venue, ma photo,*
    Complete-in toto -
C'est magnifique - je suis Daguerre!'

The same mechanism functions in Romanian, with both a mild effect:

„Cu murmurele lor blînde, un izvor de *horum-harum*
Cîştigînd cu clipoceală *nervum rerum gerendarum*."

(Eminescu, Scrisoarea II),

or with self-satire:

„N-am zurgãlãi, ci rime bufe
Ce sunã mult mai caraghios
În versu-mi plin de *Worcester Sauce*
    şi plin de trufe."

(D. Anghel, Şt. O. Iosif, Sãrmanul Yorik)

The dialogue between Fluellen, Jamy and Macmorris in Shakespeare's Henry V exploits dialectal vernaculars of English:

„*Mac*: By Chrish, la! tish ill done: the work ish give over, the trumpet sound the retreat. By my hand, I swear, and my father's soul, the work ish ill done; it ish give over: I would have blowed up the town, so Chrish save me, la! in an hour: O! tish ill done, tish ill done; by my hand, 'tish ill done!

Flu: Captain Macmorris, I beseech you now, will you voutsafe me, look you, a few disputations with you, as partly touching or concerning the

disciplines of the war, the Roman wars, in the way of argument, look you, and friendly communication; partly to satisfy my opinion, and partly for the satisfaction, look you, of my mind, as fouching the direction of the military discipline: that is the point.

Jamy: It sall be vary gud, gud feith, gud captains bath: [Aside] and I sall quit you with gud leve, as I may pick occasion; that sall I, marry."

(*Henry V.*, act. III, scene II)

The example from Shakespeare is, in a way, similar to the two examples given in Romanian; it is not dialect proper that is the object of mockery, but the way in which the three captains, Fluellen (Welsh) Macmorris (Irish) and Jamy (Scot) speak English under the strain of their mother-tongue. These peculiarities are essential for the portrayal of the characters in question, but only by contrast to other characters', language respectively to the author's voice in the two Romanian examples. When humorous verse is written in vernacular throughout, the dialectal element becomes collateral to other types of humour:

În căletcă o măimucă
Baş ca omu' mîncă nucă
Alta, blăstămată, şoadă
Să ţine numa în coadă
ş-alcele-mînca-le-ar focu! –
Nu-ş găsau o clipă locu.

Lupi, urşi mîţă, oi cornuce
Fel di fel de joavini slute;
Chiţorani, arici şi vulturi
Dă prîn lume dîn ţănuturi
D-elea gîbe, d-elea rele
Feri-mă, doamne dă iele!
(Victor Vlad Delamarina – *Ăl mai tare om gin lume*)

or: „What tho' they ca'me fornicator,
         An'tease my name in kintra clatter:

The mair they talk, I'm kent the better,
    E'en let them clash;
An auld wife's tongue's a feckless matter
    To gie ane fash.

Welcome, my bonnie, sweet wee dochter –
Tho' ye come here a wee unsought for!
And tho' your comin' I hae fought for
    Baith kirk an' queir;
Yet, by my faith, ye're no unwrought for!
    That I shall swear!
            (Robert Burns, *The Poet's Welcome
                to his Love-Begotten Daughter*)

What has been demonstrated above regarding dialectal elements as sources of humorous incongruity, could also be proved as to intrusive elements pertaining to other functional styles.

A mock-medical conference, for instance, mingles medical terms with elements pertaining to economic language:

„Îşi dă ades pe *credit* persoana lui culantă
Cu o *scadenţă* lungă, cînd nu e ... *galopantă*.
Regia de tutunuri îi face mult *rabat*;
La *băuturi spirtoase* e *cointeresat*;
Din orice - *abuz* profită ..."
            (Topîrceanu, *Bacilul lui Koch*)

If *credit, scadenţă, regie de tutunuri/băuturi spirtoase, rabat, cointeresat* are economic terms, *galopantă* and *abuz* are medical; yet, administrative language is also used:

„La primării el este „*consilier de drept*"
Şi, tare-n atmosfera *comunelor urbane*,
E cel mai mare duşman al speciei umane..."
            (idem)

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Neologisms when used in a neuter, non-marked context can also generate humour:

> „Iar cînd te duci la teatru sau intri în vreo şcoală
> Şi aerul de-acolo îţi pare *echivoc*,
> E mai recomandabil să nu respiri de loc ...
> (idem)

The fact that the entire poem is mock-medical is proved by the humorous breech in the „medical" text created by a colloquial expression:

> Pe lîngă asta-i bine, cînd suferi de-anemie,
> Cu propria ta viaţă să faci economie
> De nu vrei ca la urmă *să te trezeşti mofluz*.

Finally, medical terms themselves are used incongruously, to describe, in a sequence of „doctor's advice" the prophylaxy of a kiss:

> Evită surmenajul şi orice fel de-abuz,
> Răreşte-o cu tutunul, mai lasă băutura!
> Iar dacă, din păcate, vrei să-ţi apropii gura
> De epiderma unei persoane din elită, –
> Oricît ar fi persoana aceea de grăbită,
> La locul ce urmează să fie sărutat
> Să dai întîi c-o cîrpă muiată-n sublimat.

Philosophical terminology is used for the characterisation of Hudibras:

> His notions fitted things so well,
> That which was which he could not tell;
> But oftentimes mistook th'one
> For th'other, as great clerks have done.
> He could reduce all things to *acts*,
> And knew their nature by *abstracts*,
> Where entity and *quiddity*
> The ghosts of defunct bodies fly;
> Where *truth in person* does appear,
> Like words congealed in northern air.

> ...
> In school divinity as able
> As he that hight *Irrefragable*;
> Profound in all the *nominal*
> And *real ways* beyond them all,
> ...

> He could raise *scruples* dark and nice.
> And after solve them in a trice:
> As if divinity had catched
> The itch, of purpose to be scratched;
> (Samuel Butler, *Hudibras the
> Presbyterian Knight*)

or, walking on the beach, Lewis Carroll's Walrus expresses his... admiration and lofty feelings in the shape of a mathematical problem:

> 'If seven maids with seven mops
> Swept it for half a year
> Do you suppose', the Walrus said,
> That they could get it clear?'
> 'I doubt it', said the Carpenter
> And shed a bitter tear.

These mechanisms are /+paraphrase/; they perserve their effect when paraphrased or translated into another language, because functional styles, temporal strata in the language, register, dialect etc., are linguistic universals.

It should be mentioned, nevertheless, that verse is not a predilect area for the mechanisms of humour described above; as the quoted stretches demonstrate, poetry (out of reasons of discourse economy and versification constraints) rather uses only elements of different functional styles than a proper shift into another type of discourse. On the other hand, one incongruous element is enough to create a humorous effect, if the context permits it. These mechanisms, too, can combine with any other mechanism of humour to yield a complex humorous effect.

A final mention should be made on the problem of low colloquial, vulgarisms, four-letter words in humorous verse. One humorous species (the limerick) claims its status as a privileged space of such sources of humour, moreover, that the latter are somehow obligatory, constitutional, present by definition in it:

> The limerick packs laugh anatomical
> Into space that is quite economical,
> But the good ones I've seen
> So seldom are clean,
> And the clean ones so seldom are comical.

Out of our demonstration so far, it should have resulted already that *humour is not a function of theme*; certainly, the claim in the limerick above is a mock-claim and should be taken as such. It should not be overlooked that the limerick also has a „nursery" sub-variant which is, perhaps, as productive as the bawdy one.

The social significance of „smutty stories and ribald verse" is indisputable;[9] the limerick on the other hand, is a live popular species. One set of theories defining humour was based on postulating its function of release; as an escape-valve for accumulated social (or individual) tensions – among which the ban on bawdiness and its straightforward linguistic expression – humour functions successfully and in a relevant (since productive) manner.

Like any other items in the language, four-letter words can create humorous incongruities and the basic mechanisms by which this is achieved are similar to those involving any other elements. They certainly have an effect of amplification, since they are taboos in normal communication; yet, this effect comes into discussion only when the items in question are involved in a successful humorous act; the simple use of bawdy language does not always ensure the success mentioned above. On the other hand, if involved into a communicational act whose illocutionary intention is aesthetical, they can be treated, functionally, as any other means of achieving that intention.

The bawdy reading may be one possible reading of an ambiguity; this second (intended) reading is favoured by the non-restrictive cotext[10] and coexists with an equally valid „clean" reading:

> There was a young man of Ostend
> Who went for a drink with a friend;
> They had a few jars
> With two boys, in some bars,
> And so each had a friend in the end.

Moreover, at times an indecorous limerick coexists with a „clean" variant:

> There was an old Bey of Calcutta,
> Who greased his asshole with butter;
> Instead of the roar
> That came there before
> Was a soft oleagenous mutter.
>
> <div align="right">(Anon)</div>

and, respectively, the „clean" variant, signed Ogden Nash:

> There was an old man of Calcutta,
> Who coated his tonsils with butter;
> Thus converting his snore
> From a thunderous roar
> To a soft oleagenous mutter.

Both humour of language and humour of situation can be encountered in bawdy limericks:

> While Titian was mixing rose madder,
> His model reclined on a ladder.
> Her position to Titian

---

[9] „For surely it is impossible to write of the limerick, its life and high times, without on occasion approaching the indelicate." (W. S. Baring-Gould, 1993, p. 2)

[10] Anticipating the discussion of cotext and its role in humour, we will define non-restrictive cotext as a type of context in which two alternative readings of an item are equally possible (the cotext having no role in orienting the disambiguation preferentially towards one reading to the detriment of the other)

Suggested coition
So he leapt up the ladder and had'er.

or:

Said a luscious yound lady called Wade,
On a beach, with her charms all displayed:
   'It's so hot in the sun,
   Perhaps rape would be fun,
At least that would give me some shade'.

Romanian humorous verse also exploits this thematical zone. Pãstorel's famous retort to Veronica Porumbacu's „Simt Europa în mine" has had a long career in the history of Romanian humour:

   O, superbã Veronicã
   Eu credeam c-o ai mai micã,
   Dar mãrturisirea-ţi clarã
   Din „Gazeta literarã"
   Dovedeşte elocvent
   Cã în chestia matale
   Cu-adîncimi fenomenale
   Intrã-ntregul continet.

Topîrceanu also used a much more attenuated aggression of this kind in his *Scrisoare* (*Rãspuns d-lui Al. O. Teodoreanu*):

   Şi mai are ... Ce mai are?
   Cînd se duce la culcare
   E de genul feminin,
   Dar cînd scrie prozã
   Rozã,
   Iscãleşte masculin.

But not only polemical motivations can bring up this theme in Romanian humorous verse:

   În noapte cîntã Eros cu-un arcuş
   Şi curg de sus albastre divagaţii
   Cînd prin torentul surd de exclamaţii

   Perechi-perechi, pornesc dup-un culcuş
   ...

   Pe cînd la Capşa-mbrãţişaţi cu sete
   O florãreasã unui gardist îi spune:
   – Încet, Matei, cã intru în perete!
             (G. Ranetti, *Calea Victoriei*)

As pointed out before, humour can and will mock at taboos, at all times; incongruity can be very handily created by a disruption in decorum and this is not only the privilege of „debased, slum humour", but also the output of writers. The condition that a humorous act be achieved functions, nevertheless, as with any other theme; should we look beyond humour, the problem of voicing taboos in all literature ultimately amounts to one of achieving an aesthetic effect. Should one not admit that any means are permitted in order to achieve this aim, we would be back in the age when *Madame Bovary* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover* were on trial.

IV. 4. 2. Authorial Style

Four mechanisms of humour could be ranged into this category: quotation, mock-species, mock-style and mock-work. The label „authorial style" should not be taken *ad litteram*, but as a sign that, unlike the mechanisms in the previous category, the ones under discussion here function in the sphere of artefact, more precisely on the basis of already existing or literary texts not on the basis of rules of non-literary text-construction, like the previous mechanisms.

If they are not artefact proper, they could be considered at least, meta-artefactual (quotation as a mechanism of humour is not necessarily a quotation from literature, as it will be seen further; for instance, an ex-presidential syntagm, „sinergia faptelor", is developing a career as a source of humour, at present). The reason why the four mechanisms were grouped together is the fact that all four function on the basis of decontextualisation, which will be detailed further.

It should be mentioned that the parodical has been defined as a mode of the comic and classified as such, as against humour, satire the grotesque and irony. It would be interesting to probe into the degree of aggressiveness of the parodical, in order to ascertain whether it is clearly distinguishable from the humorous, our object here.

It might seem at first sight that the parodical acts by the deformation in some manner of a model; a critical-destructive overtone is assigned to it, in relation to this model, consequently, a certain aggressiveness is present, in relation to this model, consequently, a certain aggressiveness is present, as well. „A great work can be parodiated by a lesser author; a great author can parodiate the effect of a literary trend which did not give great values" (Popa, op. cit, p. 149). Such a disjunction should be taken with caution, nevertheless.

One of the criteria underlining the notion of „greatness" of a literary work could be its popularity, if one has parody in view, because, even if a great literary work *can* enjoy a small popularity, since parody heavily draws upon recognizability, such literary works are, at least statistically, less likely to become objects of parody, because they will not easily be recognised. The reader of a parody should be able to follow its development without confronting it face to face with the original; moreover, parodized aspects are those typical (and, therefore, recognisable) in a work. Lesser literary works can become the object of parody, as well, but, again, on condition that they are popular enough (which can happen in the history of any literature – for instance Richardson's *Pamela*, although a lesser work, was popular enough to become the manifest pretext of Fielding's *Tom Jones*).

The condition for a work to become the object of parody is, then, its popularity; parodies of unknown works, although they exist, fail to fulfil their effect outside or away from their original, so they are meant presumably for a restricted audience.

The relationship between parody and humour seems, in this light, a cause-to-effect relationship. Since popularity is not a necessary and sufficient condition for the value of a work, parody, more specifically, the reverse effect of the parody upon its original, is.

If a work can stand the test of coexisting with its parody and still preserve its literary value, it seems that that value really exists; if, on the other hand, the parody is destructive to the work in question, the latter may be

suspected to be a non-value. In the first case, humour is involved; in the second case, satire. The tone and degree of aggressiveness of the parody itself seem to be irrelevant in this case; no matter how aggressive in tone a parody after Shakespeare might be, it generates humour, because no aggression has actually taken place upon the intrinsic value of Shakespeare's works; on the other hand, however mildly Victorian didactic poems for children may have been parodiated, if the condition of parody (underlining „weak" aspects or idiosyncratic ones) is fulfilled, they cease to exist as „literature". In such cases the parody may prevail over its original; many such poems are remembered nowadays only because Lewis Carroll „re-wrote" them, although some of them were the output of Robert Southey, poet laureate.

Should this hypothesis be valid, manifestations of the parodical mode yield humour, if they are non-aggressive to the original and satire if they are destructive to the original. Therefore, parody could not be considered to be a mode of the comic, equal in weight with humour and satire; it is rather a means of achieving the latter.

IV. 4. 2. 1. Quotation

This is, perhaps, the simplest means of achieving humour among the four entering the category. The necessary and sufficient condition for a quotation to become a source of humour is an amount of popularity verging on commonplace; even if this condition is fulfilled, nevertheless, quotation-humour is a category with a relatively restricted audience, as are, in fact, all four subcategories in this class. As compared to mock-species, mock-style and mock-work, nevertheless, quotation-humour has, perhaps, the widest audience, because it can develop on the basis of non-literary quotations, as well.

The mechanism of quotation-humour relies on a two-step process of
a) decontextualization
b) re-contextualization.

The quotation involved in a humorous act is removed, first, from its original context, with the consequence that its original ties with the text in which it was initially embedded are cut off (at times, these ties can be tight, syntagmatic ones). This first step is insufficient for a humorous act to take place. Decontextualization can become the basis of a malicious reading of a

text or syntagm and can generate serious damage to its author's person or to the understanding of his work.

The „parti-pris" in the decontextualization which is in question here is, nevertheless, a humorous one; the next step will be, therefore, a re-contextualization of the quotation in such a manner that it should create a humorous incongruity. Since the syntagm or text is invariable, the creative aspect of the humorous act will be materialised in forging a new, (humorously) incongruous context in which the sytagm should function, not with its original value, but to create humour.

This mechanism of decontextualization/re-contextualization is valid even for apparently context-free items, such as aphoristic sentences, proverbs, etc. Even if these are not part of a text, there is a relatively limited set of contexts which social and historical experience has delineated for their bona-fide usage. Their transplant into a non-bona-fide context will lead to the same effect as if they had been part of a larger text.

Quotations can be used as such, or can be humorously modified. In this latter case, the modification is never beyond recognition; the mechanism is, nevertheless, closer to that of mock-literary work, rather than quotation-humour, because it involves the pastiche (which will be discussed in IV. 4. 2. 4. infra).

An example of pastiched quotation: Chaucer's Prioress wears a locket with the inscription *Amor vincit omnia*, instead of *Labor omnia vincit improbus*, its original. With pastiched quotations there is a certain independence from context because their original can become the background against which their incongruity appears, which is not the case with quotation-humour, the latter being entirely context-bound.

For instance, the humorous use of *Kyrie eleison*, in the popular song *Jolly Jankyn*:

> Jankyn at the Agnus beryt the paxbrede;
> He twynkelid, but sayd nowt, and on myn fot the trede.
> Kyrieleyson.
> Benedicamus Domino: Cryst fro schame me schylde;
> Deo gracias therto: alas I go with chylde!

(Jankin at the /song/Agnus/Dei/ bore the Host; he winked at me but said nothing and stepped on my foot. Kyrieleison. Benedicamus Domino:

Christ, shield (protect) me from shame; Deo gratias for that: alas I'm pregnant).

In one of his less known works, *The Hunting of the Snark. An Agony in Eight Fits*, Lewis Carroll uses a Shakespearean quotation in a mock-context:

> „Friends, Romans, and countrymen, lend me your ears!"
> (They were all of them fond of quotations:
> So they drank to his health, and they gave him three cheers.
> While he served out additional rations.)

> „We have sailed many months, we have sailed many weeks
>   (Four weeks to the month, you may mark),
> But never as yet ('tis your Captain who speaks)
>   Have we caught the least glimpse of a Snark!

Another modality of creating quotation-humour is to develop an entire humorous poem around a quotation, as is, for instance the *Ballad of Domestic Calamity* by M. H. Longson, whose undertitle, „*Our postillion has been struck by lightning*" is one of the'useful common phrases appearing in a Dutch manual on the speaking of English". A sample-stanza and the *Envoi* of the ballad:

> ...
> We had attained the topmost branch of all
> In our slow progress up the social tree;
> We had quite recently acquired the Hall,
> Our menial staff had swelled to twenty-three;
> And now, in this blest year of Jubilee,
> When all seemed fair and every hope was brightening,
> When Lady Parks had asked us out to tea,
> Our postillion has been struck by lightning.

Envoi

> Prince, we intended for a moderate fee
> To come and drown you in a pail of whitening;
> But life is life, and it was not to be,
> For our postillion has been struck by lightning.

Lewis Carroll wrote an entire book of mock-poems developing upon commonplace *Morals*, (*Useful and Instructive Poetry*, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1954, with titles such as: *Keep your wits about you, Don't get drunk, Pay the costs*, down to ... *Never stew your sister*); a short sample may be relevant for our discussion here:

                    My Fairy
          I have a fairy by my side
                Which says I must not sleep,
          When once in pain I loudly cried
                It said „you must not weep."

          If, full of mirth, I smile and grin,
                It says „you must not laugh,"
          When once I wished to taste some gin
                It said „you must not quaff."

          When once a meal I wished to taste
                It said „you must not bite,"
          When to the wars I went in haste,
                It said „you must not fight."
          „What *may* I do?" at length I cried,
                Tired of the painful task.
          The fairy quietly replied,
                And said: „You must not ask."
                Moral: You mustn't.

The same mock-gnomic mechanism functions in Romanian as well:
          iubito calci în strãchini ţi-am spus-o şi-o repet
          aceasta e gavota iar dînsu-i menuet
          seratele sunt seara, dejunul e dejun
          şi rufele se spalã cu apã şi sãpun
                    (Ion Nicolescu, *Mioritiada*, Cîntul XLVI)

Quotation-humour is also present in Romanian humorous verse:

          Îţi mai aduci aminte, toamnã?
          Era tîrziu. Eram o doamnã.
          Aveam lungi rochii roz, lila,
          şi îl aveam pe vino-ncoa.
                    (Nina Cassian, *Romanţã cu ţînţar*)

or
          Nu ştiu cum dracu fãcuse domnul cu gambetã,
          Avea în baracã o cuşcã cu tigri lihniţi
          ronţãind printre gratii oase de vacã
          şi-n fund mai era un loc cu galben drapat
          unde corbul celebru nemişcat croncãnea
                – Nevermore!
                    (Constant Tonegaru, *Pasãrea neagrã*)

IV. 4. 2. 2. Mock-species

This sub-category may, at first sight, consist of one member only: the mock-limerick; other mock-species could only improperly be called so: a mock-epic stays an epic; a mock-epitaph stays an epitaph, a mock-sonnet stays a sonnet or turns into another humorous poem. Perhaps a distinction should be made, in these cases, between:
   a) a formal factor
   b) a content-factor.
Whenever the formal factor is in question, the incongruity lies in some traditionally attributed formal constraint on the species, which is not taken into account; the content-factor preserves the form, but charges its expectedly serious substance with humour; consequently:
– with a) the humorous incongruity lies in disobeying the form itself
– with b) the humorous incongruity lies in the clash between the humorous content of a normally non-humorous species and the observance of the formal constraints of the latter.
   It results that a) can only refer to exclusively humorous verse-forms; these are rather few in the two literatures: the limerick (in English) and, perhaps, the epigram (in both); other verse-forms with a humorous content can be used in a „bona-fide" manner, as well. No cases of „miscarried" epigrams have been recorded in the corpus; this may be because the epigram

is a less rigid verse-form than the limerick, its only constraint being on the number of lines. Nevertheless, epigrammatic humorous verse can also consist of a distich:

'Why of the sheep do you not learn peace?'
'Because I don't want you to shear my fleece.'
(Blake, *An Answer to the Parson*)

or can cover more than four verses:

These panting damsels dancing for their lives,
Are only maidens waltzing into wives.
Those smiling matrons are appraisers sly,
Who regulate the dance, the squeeze, the sigh,
And each base cheapening buyer having chid,
Knock down their daughters to their noblest bid!
(Anon, *The Mother's Choice* – ranged under
„Epigrams" in *WH Auden's Oxford Book of Light Verse*, OUP, 1979).

Not only formally is the modern epigram a loose species, but also in point of content; if, classically, there is a certain sententious character attributed to it, what is nowadays called „epigram", need not be so:

La curtea din Hîrlău, în buza viei,
Făcea Măria-sa popas, nu rar,
De-şi mai uita de grijile domniei
Cu dumneaei, „Feteasca" de Cotnar.
(Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Inter Pocula*)

or:

Ridic paharul plin
Slăvindu-ţi trupul gol:
Să-ţi fie somnul lin
şi linul rasol.
(idem, *Închinare*)

On the other hand, „epigrammatic verse" is not a category specialised for humour; distichs or quatrains with „serious" content (sententious or not) can also be encountered in both literatures.

Quite different is the case of limerick. The limerick is fixed-form verse, specialised *only* for humour;[11] since it is the only exclusively humorous verse-form in both literatures in question, it is the only species which can engender a formally-determined mock-species. In point of form, the limerick exhibits a five-line stanza written in anapaestic rhythm and rhyming a-a-b-b-a. The metre is 8-8-6-6-8 or 9-9-6-6-9; at times there can be a graphical fusion between lines 3 and 4 with the preservation of internal rhyme, but the absolute length of the limerick is never altered. Whenever this form is altered, a humorous effect is obtained; at times, even, manifestly resorting to the self-reflexive function of expectation:

A decrepit old gasman named Peter
While hunting around the gas-metre
Touched a leak with his light.
He rose out of sight –
And, as everyone who knows something about poetry
can tell you, he also ruined the metre.

or: There was a young man of Japan
Who wrote verse that never would scan.
When they said: „But this thing
Doesn't go with a swing."
He replied: „Yes, I know it doesn't, but I always
try to get as many words into the last line as I
possibly can."

---

[11] with one (unhappy) exception: a limerick attributed to Queen Elizabeth I which (the legend has it) was finished by her Chancellor:

The daughter of debate
Who discord aye doth sow,
Hath reaped no gain
Where former reign
Hath taught still peace to grow.

The reader's awareness of the form of the limerick is presupposed to such an extent, that the incongruity may reside in the non-rhyming euphemistic avoidance of taboo words which, once completed, restore the rhyme:

> There was a young lady of Ulva
> Who kept a pet bee in her handbag.
> Her lover, called Jock,
> Was stung on the arm,
> So, to soothe him, she bought him a box of best Turkish delight.
> (T. Johnston)

The reverse limerick (8-6-6-8-8) was invented in some replies to Edward Lear's verse; for instance to the author's limerick:

> There was an old man with a Beard,
> Who said: 'It is just as I feared!
> Two Owls and a Hen,
> Four Larks and a Wren,
> Have all built their nests in my beard.'.

some replies were:

> My beard's overcrowded. Now that
> I freely admit
> But why should Lear sit
> In judgement? He might find a bat
> If he lifted his runcible hat.
> (Richard Unwin)

or:

> Dear Sir, You're quite wrong about me.
> No wren or small fowl
> Would nest with an owl,
> In one beard – they would never agree.
> How very absurd you can be!
> (M. Trench)

The form of the limerick can become a source of humour only inasmuch as it is not disobeyed beyond the limits of recognizability, in other

words, licenses from constraints should be made when the expectation is oriented towards receiving a limerick. The fringes of the species are clear enough; therefore, experiments like the limeraiku or the limick rely on other mechanisms for a humorous effect; the form is altered to such an extent that, instead of producing the type of incongruity described and exemplified above, it produces another kind of humorous poem, not a limerick:

> John Keats rose at dawn
> Still forlorn, too chaste to taste
> The amorous Brawne.
> (limeraiku by Nick Enright)

or:

> A young flirt of Ceylon,
> Who led the boys on,
> Playing „Follow the Leda",
> Succumbed to a swan.
> (limick by Ogden Nash)

In the first case above the mechanism combines /+paraphrase/ humour of situation with /-paraphrase/ internal rhyme; the second relies on /-paraphrase/ homophony; the form ceases to be involved in creating the humorous effect.

The content-factor, b) could be described as the opposite of what has been discussed above; it generates humour by using a normally „serious" form for a humorous content; it is a much larger category than the previous, because virtually any kind of verse can have a humorous content. Nevertheless, the incongruity is much higher when the form is consecrated for serious, even grave species; such is, for instance, the humorous epitaph, existing both in English and Romanian:

> Here lies Bill Dodge, who dodged all good
> And dodged a deal of evil,
> But after dodging all he could
> He could not dodge the Devil.

or:

> Here lies the body of Jonathan Mound
> Lost at sea and never found.

or:
          Here lies the preacher, judge and poet Peter
          Who broke the laws of God, and man and metre.
                        (Lord Jeffrey)

and in Romanian:
          Unui beţiv
          De sărăcie şi necaz
          Întîia oară doarme treaz

or:
          Aici zace Păstorel
          Suflet bun şi spirit fin;
          Dacă treceţi pe la el,
          Nu-l treziţi, că cere vin.
               (Aurelian Păunescu)

Another „serious" form *par excellence*, the epic, can be vested in humorous apparel: Pope's *Dunciad* and Byron's *Don Juan* or Budai Deleanu's *Ţiganiada* and *Trei viteji* could be some examples, in which, like with epitaphs, the very form is a source of humour alongside with other mechanisms.

Since virtually any type of verse can become humorous, this category verges on the parodical (which will be discussed below under *mock-work*) and the pastiche (labelled as *mock-style*); whenever the two categories are involved, a component of humour will necessarily be bound to form; a parody after Burns will be balladesque, one after Wordsworth may assume the form of a sonnet, as will a parody after Macedonski; moreover, to the extent to which a poet's style is defined by recurrent formal markers, these markers, reproduced in a parody after some work of his, or in a pastiche in his vein, will become sources of humour *in se*, distinct from other sources of humour present in the parody or the pastiche.

IV. 4. 2. 3. Mock-style

The difference between *mock-style* and *mock-work* (as well as that between the two and quotation-humour and mock-species) is only a theoretical one. A parody (which could be roughly labelled as *mock-work*) necessarily contains quotations humorously distorted, formally imitates the species of the parodiated work, as well as the style of its original (be it authorial or popular). In other words, the parody seems to be the most comprehensive sub-category among the four discussed in this section. Perhaps this is the reason why many pastiches in the corpus have been anthologised among parodies and vice-versa. Since our concern here is not to define literary species, we shall establish a delineation between:

    a) mock-style – characterising a humorous poem *in the vein (spirit)* of an author
    b) mock-work – characterising a humorous poem *by the letter* of a work.

In this subchapter mock-style will be analysed.

The recurrence-aspect of style implies to some extent a mechanics which is exploited by the pastiche. A distinction should be made, first, between the category of mock-style (which could be roughly labelled as pastiche) and the pseudo-pastiche, which has as its object, not a literary work, but hackneyed expressions, clichés, cant. An example of this type:

        ...
        Albumul ei cu scoarţe violete
        E plin de cărţi poştale ilustrate
        Vederi din ţară şi străinătate,
        Oraşe, fluvii, parcuri şi portrete.

        Pe una scrie: „dragă verişoară,
        Ai auzit că P.P.K. se-nsoară
        şi vrea să ia o fată din Buzău?..."

        Pe alta scrie numai: „*Cugetare.*
        Amorul e un lucru foarte mare."
        şi iscăleşte: Guţă Popîndău.
             (Topîrceanu, *Albumul*)

Although this is a mechanism of humour, as well, and it operates in a manner similar to that of mock-style, clichés and truisms rather pertain to social strata in the language and could be listed among mechanisms of

humour generated by non-artefactual text-type analogy (analysed under IV. 4. 1. supra).

The category referred to here operates exclusively on the basis of a literary intertext; as mentioned above, it contains texts *in the vein of* an author, another text or another literary style.

For instance, Swinburne's mockery at Tennyson:

One, who is not, we see: but one whom we see not, is;
Surely this is not that: but that is assuredly this.

What, and wherefore, and whence? for under is over and under;
If thunder could be without lighting, lighting could be without thunder.

...

God, whom we see not, is: and God, who is not, we see;
Fiddle, we know is diddle: and diddle, we take it, is dee.
(*The Higher Pantheism*)

Generally in such works the basic stylistic features of the original (metre, rhyme etc.) are observed; at times they can become the object of exaggeration (and humour), as is the case of a pastiche mocking Poe's style:

The tendrils the vine branches net us,
The lily, the lettuce, the lute –
The esculent, succulent lettuce,
And the languishing lily, and lute; –
Yes; – the lotos-like leaves of the lettuce;
Late lily and lingering lute.
(Thomas Hood the Younger, *Ravings*)

Criticism has already noticed that, at times, Poe forces meaning towards the contingent, subliminal areas, for the sake of musicality; more than often the rhyme-bearing word is repeated in full, for the same reason; Poe also has a passion for the hendiadys. The pastiche stresses these features: tendrils/vine branches is not a hendiadys, but simply a redundant collocation of synonyms, while the enumeration „The lily, the lettuce, the lute" is indeed of a high musical quality, but its second element (a vegetable) is incongruous to the others. The incongruity is further developed

into an alliterative (but ludicrous) verse (The esculent, succulent lettuce); finally, the whole 5-verse sequence is rhymed by repeating the same two words. If it is still not clear to the reader whose style underlies the pastiche, the title, *Ravings*, a punning echo of a key-title in Poe's work, is meant to make the connection with the intertext.

Similarly, Marin Sorescu's terse non-conformism is pastiched in:

Înainte de-a adormi, fraților
luați-vă tensiunea
și dacă o găsiți, nu-i dați drumul cu una cu două.
E bine să aibă fiecare tensiunea la el.
(Mircea Micu, *Sfaturi utile*)

Marin Sorescu himself uses mock-style in *Texte de muzică ușoară*:

Vino și tu lîngă mine,
Că altfel nu-i bine,
Nu-i bine, nu-i bine, nu-i bine
Decît lîngă mine...

...

Cînd voi veni să te iau de la servici,
Să ieși zîmbind în calea mea
și așa să-mi zici:
Tra-la-la-la-la!

It is questionable whether the cant of light music texts could be considered style; the defining feature of kitsch is the absence of style, as critics have pointed out; to the extent to which non-style is recurrent in a considerably relevant sector of our daily intoxication by the media, it can become, as well, the object of humour, since it can become intertext. Obviously, this type of text will not resist the test of the pastiche, which is destructive to its original; Sorescu's pastiche is, therefore, sarcastic.

An example of pastiche which is humorous could be Topîrceanu's *Chinurile lui Ulise*, written in Homer's vein:

„O, ce neghiob am putut într-o clipă să fiu de-a lăsare,
După himere-alergînd, nimfa cea grasă din mînă!"

...

Deci cam în chipul acesta plîngînd cu bărbată strigare
Bietul Ulise gemea, gata să sară în valuri.
Cel ce cu ageră-i minte sub zidul troian născocise
Gloaba cea mare de lemn care-a pătruns în cetate,*
Nu era-n stare acum, la strîmtoare fiind, să găsească
Vai! nici un mijloc onest pentru-a scăpa de ispită.

Topîrceanu's is, nevertheless, a double pastiche: the perfect iambic hexametres are not as much in Homer's style, as in the spirit of Murnu's translations, the variant a Romanian reader is familiar with. Since iambic hexametres are typical of Latin verse, the license Murnu took with the *Iliad* became itself a target of humour. Topîrceanu gives the following foot-note:

* Lucruri expuse pe larg în traducerea d-lui Murnu,
Harnicul nostru tălmaci care-a tradus Iliada,
Carte ce fu mintenaş premiată cu premiul cel mare,
Pentru că suntem un stat eminamente agricol...

Homer is, thus, to a great extent, the pretext to pastiche Murnu's obsolescent turns of phrase and word-choices (perfectly justified, otherwise): the syntagm *bărbată strigare* is in an oxymoronic contrast with *plîngînd*; *gloaba* which has a pejorative connotation implying weakness, age, disease, designates Ulysses' wooden horse, etc. Both Homer's and Murnu's texts stand the test of the pastiche; Topîrceanu's text is non-aggressive, it has a humorous effect.[12] Beneath the „pinches", genuine admiration looms: in such cases, perhaps, the fact that a work has been the object of pastiche (or parody) is an indirect recognition of its value.

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[12] The fact that this is a pastiche can be proved by Topîrceanu's choice of the *Odyssey* for a theme; had it been a parody, the subject would have been chosen from the *Iliad* itself. A fact worth noticing, nevertheless, is that Murnu's translation of the *Odyssey* (which appeared after the *Iliad*) was not versified in hexametres any longer. A hexametre variant of the *Odyssey* was given by C. Papacostea, who cannot have been Topîrceanu's source of pastiche because of the footnote quoted above.

IV. 4. 2. 4. Mock-literary work

This sub-category includes those productions of the parodical type which are generated *by the letter* of their original. It has been mentioned before that such examples are the most complex, including mechanisms of all the three subtypes discussed above:

a) quotation
b) mock-species
c) mock-style.

Unlike what has been discussed above under *Quotation*, with this category quoted elements are not taken over as such, but distorted in a humorous manner. Distortions should not affect the recognizability of the quotation and the subsequent identification of the original; any distortion, on the other hand, becomes a source of incongruity.

Mock-species is present in this subclass in its second acceptation discussed above: reproduction of the formal features of the original with a humour-loaded content.

Mock-style is also present in this sub-category with its features discussed above.

Like all other mechanisms of humour, intertextual ones do not act in isolation; they can (and usually will) combine with paronymy, homonymy, humour of situation etc.; nevertheless, usually a parody cannot be understood fully without the knowledge of its original. The exceptions are cases when the parody surpasses its intertext and becomes independent. Critics have argued[13] that Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* is, like all the other poems in his *Alices*, a parody; nevertheless, Fouqué's *The Shepherd of the Giant Mountains* (from whose version in English[14] the *Jabberwocky* seems to have been born) is almost unknown; on the other hand, Carroll's work is very far from the alleged original and, which is most important, has a far wider reputation. This reputation is due to the originality in the absurd of *Jabberwocky* which certainly has nothing to do with the original (a plain ballad).

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[13] Sidney Herbert Williams & Falconer Madan, *The Lewis Carroll Handbook*, Danson, Archon Books, 1979, p. 307 sq.
[14] Translation into English by Menella Smedley, in „Sharper's Magazine", 7 and 21th of March 1846, a variant Dodgson is certain to have known.

The difference between what is called in literary theory pastiche and, respectively, parody, has been discussed in the previous section. If all parodies are, at the same time, pastiches as well, the reverse is not valid, whence the loose limits of the two concepts in literary theory, as well as our option for two structurally-based categories: mock-style/mock-work.

The amount of mock-literary works is impressive in both literatures. Statistically, it seems that the more popular an author is, the more likely he is to be the object of parody. Still, if there exist very many parodies after Shakespeare, the same thing cannot be said about Eminescu. There might be several explanations for this; none of them is sufficient; perhaps they could be true if taken jointly. Since such a discussion is marginal to our subject here, we will only enumerate some possible reasons why Eminescu's works have almost never become the object of parodical production. One explanation may lie in mentality: our sense of danger has, perhaps, always been more acute than that of the British, therefore, even the slightest initiative to belittle one of our national values (as, for instance Macedonski's) has been immediately and violently reacted to, down to banishing the respective productions from re-print. No Romanian anthology of humour (or parodies) contains parodies after Eminescu. Another reason, connected to the previous, and to mentality, is the fact that, under the pressure of French culture, our concept of parody includes a negative, pejorative component, as if a value were threatened in its essence by parody and not re-confirmed as a value. Finally, a statistical reason: as compared to English humorous literature, we have far fewer anthologized parodists; on the other hand, popular parodies circulate and are produced; the explanation for this phenomenon lies perhaps in mentality and in the reasons formulated above.

Apart from any discussion on causes, there is a clear reluctance in Romanian literature to parodiate the classics (at least in writing); whether this comes from authorial (and popular) mentality or critical, pre-editorial censorship, is hard to decide and beside our point here.

English literature abounds in parodies after classics: Pope parodiates Chaucer, Shakespeare parodiates Marlowe, the Duke of Buckingham (George Villiers) parodiates Dryden's *Rehearsal*, etc.

In *A Quotation from Shakespeare with Slight Improvements*, Lewis Carroll makes up a particular type of parody; it could be called a „parody of

the meta-text". Shakespeare is quoted (*Henry IV*, Part 2, act. IV, scene V, 20–27) and the Shakespearean text is explained in a „humpty-dumpty"-an manner by the characters:

„Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet,
As he whose brow with homely biggin bound
Snores out the watch of night"

King Henry: Harry, I know not
The meaning of the word you just have used.
Prince: What word, my liege?
K. H.:   The word I mean is „biggin"
P.:   It means a kind of woolen nightcap, sir,
With which the peasantry are wont to bind
Their wearied heads, ere that they take their rest»

and, further,

«"My gracious lord! my father!
This sleep is sound indeed, this is a sleep
That from this golden rigol hath divorced
So many English –"
K. H.:   What meaneth rigol, Harry?
P.:   My liege, I know not, save that it doth enter
Most apt into the metre.
K: True it doth.
But wherefore use a word which hath no meaning?»

The question stands, since the two words, *biggin* and *rigol* are not listed in the dictionary; a glossary of Shakespearean terms traces the former back to Fr. *béguin* = nightcap; but the word must have dropped out of the language in Lewis Carroll's time, already. The word *rigol* (also used in *The Rape of Lucrece*) seems to mean *circle*, according to the same source: the etymology is not mentioned.

The fact that Carroll's text uses quotation *tale-quale* might mislead into considering the examples as illustrative for subclass IV. 4. 2. 1. above; the fact that it is not the quotation itself that is the source of humour, but its mock-comment in Shakespearean style should lead us away from quotation-humour only. Carroll's conclusion about the Shakespearean text is dire:

Your rhetoric is vain, for it is true:
Therefore no arguments can prove it false,
King Henry allegedly says.

The mock-attack on classics can at times become even more aggressive:

Then let us pray that come it may
And come it will for a'that,
That common sense may take the place
Of common cant and a'that.
For a'that and a'that,
Who cackles trash and a'that,
Or be he lord, or be he low,
The man's an ass for a'that.

(Shirley Brooks, *For A'That and A'That, A New Version,
Respectfully Recommended to Sundry Whom It Concerns*)

or:

Two voices are there: one is of the deep;
It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody,
Now roars, now murmurs with the changing sea,
Now, bird-like pipes, now closes soft in sleep:
And one is of an old, half-witted sheep
Which bleats articulate monotony,
And indicates that two and one are three,
That grass is green, lakes damp and mountains steep:
And, Wordsworth, both are thine: at certain times
Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes,
The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst:
At other times – Good Lord, I'd rather be
Quite unacquainted with the ABC
Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst.

(J. K. Stephen, *A Sonnet*)

Absurd humour can also be the effect of a parodical work; with very few exceptions all the poems in Carroll's *Alices* are parodies. A closer analysis of the sources of the absurd will be performed in Chapter V; it should be mentioned here that Lewis Carroll's parodies are not only destructive to their intertext but also to the Victorian mentality of educating little children by having them learn by heart moralising poems which were both incomprehensible to them, at times, but also uselessly fierce. The trite commonplace such productions had become (unlike, for instance. *Humpty-Dumpty* or *Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum*, who become characters in the two books) is another basis for their treatment in a parodical vein.

Yet, as pointed out before, even when the parody bears the touch of genius, its intertext will stand the test unaltered, on condition that its intrinsic value should be there. Such an example is a parody after Poe's *Raven*:

Once upon a midnight dreary, eerie, scary,
I was wary, I was weary, full of worry, thinking of my lost Lenore,
Of my cheery, airy, faery, fiery Dearie – Nothing more).
I was napping, when a tapping on the overlapping coping,
woke me grapping, yapping, groping ... toward the rapping.
I went hopping, leaping ... hoping that the rapping on the coping
Was my little lost Lenore.
That on opening the shutter to admit the latter critter, in she'd
    flutter from the gutter with her bitter eyes aglitter;
So I opened wide the door, what was there? The dark weir
    and the drear moor, the mere door and nothing more!

Then in stepped a stately raven, shaven like the bard of
    Avon: Yes, a rovin' grievin' Raven, seeking haven at
    my door.
    Yes, that shaven, rovin' Raven had been movin' (get
    me Stephen) from the warm and lovin' haven of
    my stove an' oven door –
Oven door and nothing more. (etc.)

(C. L. Edson, *Ravin's of Piute Poet Poe*)

A closer analysis of the text above might prove that the text of the parody may have a certain independence from its intertext; mechanisms of humour other than incongruity to the original combine with the former in

order to produce the effect. Even if the reader did not know that this is a parody after Poe's *Raven*, the shift to non-bona-fide communication is achieved by the cascade of alliterations appearing in hendiadis which have an incongruous element (cheery, airy, faerie *fiery* Dearie) or the attribution of a /+Human/quality to a / + animate/ subject who enters a comparative structure in which the second member is a (literary)cliché (a... raven, *shaven* like *the bard of Avon*). In the great majority of cases, the shift to non-bona-fide communication is performed only when mock-style or distorted quotations appear:

> Cel ce începe cu sine e singur
> *unu și cu una fac unu întotdeauna.*
> Vrînd să-ți prind silueta în aer
> de nevedere am nimerit luna.
> *Am un cal albastru de albastru*
> eu am, tu ai, noi avem.
> (Mircea Micu, *Floare verde și albastră*)

The first underlined passage performs the shift to non-bona-fide communication, not only because it is a distorted quotation from Nichita Stănescu, but also because it has a second possible reading, outside the intertextual hint, which is incongruous. *Nevedere* is a typical coinage for Nichita Stănescu; finally the last underlined verse is almost commonplace for anyone even slightly acquainted to the poet, because it alludes to one of his famous texts: „și-am zis verde de albastru / Mă paște un cal măiastru." Still, the parody is extremely mild, becoming even genuinely poetic in the end:

> Dacă aș avea un clopot
> care să cuprindă lacrima lunii sub el
> m-aș face scafandru de sunete
> muzical și vaporos ca un miel.

The parodical hint creating humorous incongruity is a mechanism which could be included into the same subclass; the humorous effect is enhanced by the sonnet-form in which Gypsy vernacular appears:

> Făcuse Gavrilache o trăznaie
> C-a-nfuriat pe danci și șatra toată

și pînă cînd să-l tragă-n judecată
I-au tras țiganii-o sfîntă de bătaie.

S-au strîns apoi la Maciu Barbălată
Cu furci, cu paparude, cu hîrdaie
și-n urmă vistavoiul Nicolae
A dat sentința binemeritată:

– Că ne-ai făcut tot neamul de *șocară*
Te *delo bengo*-n tine *mo* Gavrile.
Vei linge sare patruzeci de kile.

Iar ca să-ți fie și mai grea povara
Tu vei citi în patruzeci de zile
Volumul lui Voronca și-al lui Tzara.
(Ión Pribeagu, *Pedeapsă*)

Yet, mock-work, as it has been described above, also appears in Romanian literature; a text by Topîrceanu which is by the letter of Goga's *Oltul*:

> Mult iscusita minții limbă
> Nu-mi spune clipa năzdrăvană
> Ce mi te-a scos de mult în cale
> Ființă mașteră și vană!
> Uitat-am ziua și văleatul
> Ce-au înfrățit pe vremi, odată,
> A mele stihuri de aramă
> Cu proza ta cea nesărată.
> (*Vade retro* ...),

attacks, allegedly in Goga's name, Octavian Tăzlăuanu who brought to bankruptcy the review „Luceafărul" issued by the two in Budapest.
Another mock-diatribe, this time by the letter of Arghezi:

> În două surcele de vreasc să se facă
> Picerele tale, făptură buimacă.

Plesni-ți-ar timpanu,
Să n-auzi cînd trece traivanu.

Să uiți la cetanii tipicul
și psalmii în zi de Crăciun.
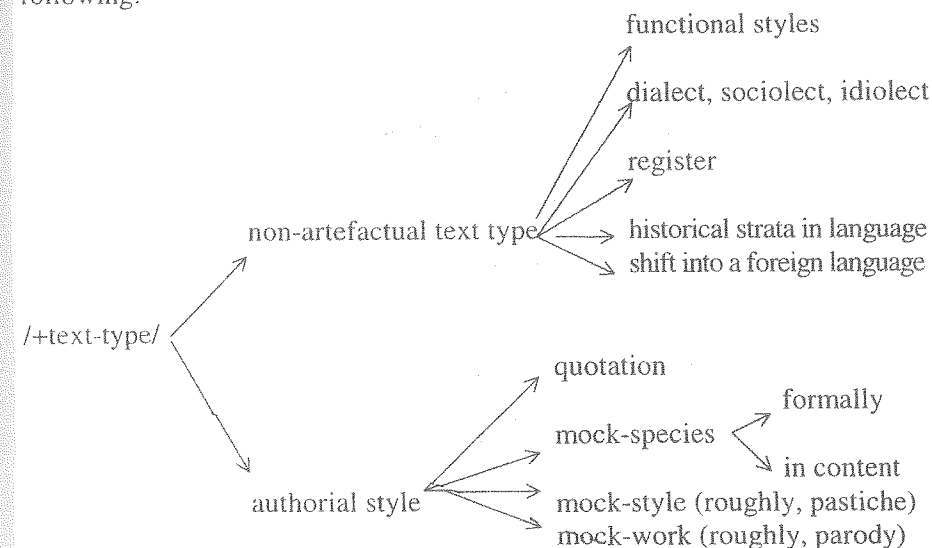Să n-ai dupã masã tutun.
Să-ți pută buricul.

Vedea-te-aș în vreo fițuicã
Pus cu litere de-o șchioapã.
Curge-ți-ar pe-o narã țuicã,
Pe cealaltã numai apã.
Lãuda-te-ar Bogdan Duicã
și pupa-te-ar Popa Iapã!
                    (*Blesteme*)

Finally, the destructive parody exists in our literature, as well, confirming the hypothesis that, however mild in tone, a parody can destroy its original: who would remember Depãrãțeanu's *Varã la țerã* if it hadn't been parodiated by Topîrceanu:

Acolo cînd n-are treabã
      Orice babã
Este medic comunal.
Viața ce aci palpitã
      E lipsitã
De confort occidental.
...
Ale satului mari fete
      Fãrã ghete
Ies la garduri pe-nserat...
(Am vãzut aci-ntr-o noapte
      Niște fapte
Care m-au scandalizat!)
                    (*Vara la țarã*)

From what has been discussed so far, the following conclusion ensues:
– *text-type analogy distinguishes /+text-type/ mechanisms, which involve some intertext from /-text-type/ mechanisms, in which other elements are involved.*

A schematic representation of /+text type/ mechanisms could be the following:

functional styles

dialect, sociolect, idiolect

register

non-artefactual text type → historical strata in language
                            shift into a foreign language

/+text-type/

quotation

mock-species → formally
               in content

authorial style → mock-style (roughly, pastiche)
                  mock-work (roughly, parody)

All these mechanisms are /-written/ unless they combine with /+written/ elements which are not intrinsic to them, they can be /± inferrable/ according to whether they exhibit humour or absurd humour and they can be /±paraphrase/, i. e. they preserve their humorous effect if textual equivalents can be found for correct paraphrase or translation of non-artefactual text type mechanisms, but generally lose it when mechanisms based on authorial style are involved; a parody is already a paraphrase of its intertext, so the attempt at re-phrasing it might destroy the humorous effect because the resemblance to the original may be annulled; on the other hand, parodies can be translated into another language, on condition that their new

recipients should recognise the intertext. Parodies which are relatively independent from their original can function in the foreign language as well, although it is problematic whether they function in the foreign culture in the same way. This made possible the translation of Lewis Carroll's *Alices* although it is doubtful whether the Romanian reader knows anything about Southey, Isaac Watts etc; this might allow a translation of Topîrceanu's *Vara la ţară* to function due to intrinsic humour, regardless of Depărăţeanu's poem:

> There, when she is left alone,
> Any crone
> Doctors the community.
> And the life around that place
> Lacks all trace
> . Of the West's amenity.
>
> ...
>
> Village maidens, barefoot all,
> Come and call
> At the fence, at evening-tide...
> (Here I saw, one night like pitch,
> Things by which
> I was shocked and mortified!)
> (my translation – C. T.)

CHAPTER V.
Immediate Inference and Paraphrasability.
Mechanisms of Absurd Humour

As pointed out in section 2 of the previous chapter, the criterion of immediate inference distinguishes mechanisms which generate humour only, from those generating absurd humour; they will be marked, respectively /+inference/ and /-inference/.

This is a level of analysis beyond intertext and context, involving cotext (seen as the entire text in which a mechanism appears, including the immediate left-right linguistic environment of an incongruous element). At this level discrimination regarding text-type analogy will not be made any longer; this means that any text, be it analogous to another or not, may present /± inference/ mechanisms (as well as, anticipating a little, /± paraphrase/mechanisms).

The problem of the absurd has been dealt with in section 1 of the previous chapter; some considerations on the absurd were also required by previous discussions in this paper. They could be summed up as follows:

1. the absurd involved in humorous verse is absurd humour and not humorous absurd (see note 12 p. 42 for the difference between the two categories);

2. unlike in the case of humour, the self-reflexive function of expectation acts after the reader's accepting a shift into an impossible possible world (defined as W_1 by a function $f(x)$ which, to continue the mathematical analogy, could be defined on „Q" – natural language – with values in „R" – possible meanings attributable to linguistic signs; the form of the function would be: $f(x) = \bar{x}$ where it is assumed (accepted) that there exists an x for which this function exists – $\exists x/x = \bar{x}$. Since this world is incompletely defined, its completion with real-world propositions will generate, as a second step, humorous incongruities (see supra, section 1 of Chapter IV).

If, then, with „pure"absurd (non-humorous, in our case) the decoding stops at the level of inference and, once the shift into the impossible possible world has been accepted by the reader within the boundaries of the text, with absurd humour a humorous incongruity appears in this impossible possible world as a sign of non-bona-fide communication; hence the decoding proceeds in a manner similar to that of plain humour, in the system of reference of real-world expectation. Since, then, the shift into an impossible possible world is proved to be a mock-shift, the mock-fictional character of humour is present (see supra III.2).

The decoding-mechanism of absurd humour is, then, similar to that of plain humour, after the humorous incongruity has occurred in the impossible possible world; it could be sketched as follows:

1. perception of the absurd incongruity – shift into an impossible possible world, where
2. a humorous incongruity signals non-bona-fide communication (as pointed out in III.2 above, this incongruity should be one of the rules describing the possible world, constitutive of it, not collateral to it), in the form of inconsistency of the impossible possible world; whence,
3. perception of the mock-fictional character; shift back into the normal, real-world system of expectation;
4. solution of the incongruity (shifting back its elements into their expected places – analysis yielding at least two possible ways of decoding the script);
5. return to the original script and superimposition of the incongruity with its solution (synthesis);
6. re-considering the absurd incongruity perceived first, as mock-fictional;
7. laughter.

Steps 4, 5 and 7 pertain to the mechanism of decoding typical to humour (described in II. 4 supra).

The type of humour involved is pure humour (unlike with humorous absurd, where it is hybrid), because the absurd is collateral to it, and could be seen, *mutatis mutandis*, as a mere illocutionary strategy of humour, based on a lack of immediate inference.

Perhaps an ultimate (although empirical) proof that pure absurd is not involved in absurd humour is the fact that the alienation always present with the absurd is not there among the reactions to absurd humour; catasthasis is, on the other hand. The lack of immediate inference is, then, only a postponement of laughter by complicating the decoding-algorithm by a few steps. In other words, the mock-fictional character of humour is perceived only after an excursus into a fake-fictional (absurd) world (for the discussion on the fictional status of humour, see supra III.2).

Logical-linguistic mechanisms involved in absurd humour should create an absurd appearance, therefore they are on the fringes of logical possibility and linguistic acceptability. Yet, their vehicles are incongruities, as well. In order to ascertain the level at which these incongruities take place, the criterion of paraphrasability should be considered, which differentiates predominantly logical, /+paraphrase/, from predominantly linguistic, /-paraphrase/ mechanisms, on the basis of preservation vs. loss of effect when the text is paraphrased.

This criterion, valid for plain humour, as well, has been preferred out of at least two reasons:

a) the insufficiently clear distinction between thought and language (whence the impossibility of a clear-cut dissociation of the logical from the linguistic and, for our discussion here, the insufficiency of the traditional categories „humour of situation"/"humour of language");
b) the insufficiently clear distinction between context and cotext; even if the latter could be restricted to the boundaries of the text, or to left-right linguistic environment, the problem of its limits is there, on the one hand, as well as that of the interdependence cotext/context, on the other.

Paraphrasability not only formally distinguishes predominantly logi-cal from predominantly linguistic mechanisms of humour, but can also ascertain which mechanisms are universal and which are language-specific.

/-inference/ mechanisms (of absurd humour) could then roughly fall into two categories, according to paraphrasability:

1. /-inference/ /+paraphrase/, containing incongruities in the logical status of the proposition(s), or even in the possible logic of the possible world;

2. /-inference/ /-paraphrase/ containing mechanisms of absurd language (involving grammaticality and acceptability).

The two subclasses can, obviously, be separated from each-other only methodologically; any item of absurd reasoning may generate absurd utterances; on the other hand, any absurd speech act is also underlain by or leading to some absurd piece of judgement. Their common feature is the fact that both 1. and 2. above are the output of a strong generative system (lacking one or several elements of censorship dictated by common experience, which generates expectation). This might be the explanation of the success of absurd productions with children (whose imagination is a strong generative system) and of the existence of a nursery variant of absurd humorous verse. Another reason is the fact that, being basically humour, absurd humour is non-aggressive to its receiver.

It should also be remarked, that, although by definition absurd incongruities are non-ambiguous (see chapter II section 1 supra), when absurd humour is involved, one and the same incongruity can be at the same time absurd and humorous, a fact which will ensue from the analysis upon the corpus. A short example would be Chomsky's famous „Colourless green ideas sleep furiously", which, apart from its absurdity, never fails to stir laughter when heard for the first time.

V. 1. /-inference/ /+paraphrase/.
Logical mechanisms of absurd humour

As pointed out before, in the case of these mechanisms immediate inference does not function because the system of reference of normal expectation seems inadequate for the situation to be judged (and understood).

The automatisms in judgement of a normal receiver imply, in the case of any utterance (be it literary or not) labelling it as true or false; with an artefact, these labels would become true-to-fact (mimetic), respectively, non-true-to-fact (non-mimetic); the second category implies the receiver's consent to shift into a possible world whose description he thus becomes ready to follow. His judgement leaves behind the system of reference of

true/false and shifts into that of possible/impossible (which is larger, since *true* and *false* are subspecies of the possible). Up to this point, the condition of any fiction could be described. Yet, the author can go beyond this system of reference as well, and describe an impossible possible world, assuming that his reader would accept this convention, as well. Logically, these worlds can be labelled as absurd; we have labelled them, previously, as fake-fictional (see III. 2. supra); yet, since any fiction is fake-real, it would paradoxically result that any absurd world should be fake-real. Ontologically this statement should be correct; yet, this is not our point here.

What makes all fiction function as such is a *consistency*, manifest in two aspects:

a) a necessary and sufficient description of the world in question;

b) the normal functioning of presupposition and entailment (i. e. of real-world rules of logic).

When either of the two conditions is not met, the world proves to be impossible, in as many ways as the number of rules ignored or violated; ways among which self-voiding texts or self-disclosing meta-fiction could be ranged.

With absurd humour, two basic situations can generate what was labelled before as „situational absurd":

a') either the possible world is incompletely described in its constitutive aspects; the reader's completing the gap(s) with real-world rules creates a humorous incongruity, and/or:

b') already-accepted absurd propositions enter into syllogistic judgement-models creating humorous sophisms.

The two aspects seldom act in isolation; they could be labelled jointly as mechanisms of analogy; when the propositions implied are not absurd, humour is generated in the same manner.

Both types of fallacy reduce the fictional world to the real world (whence the label „mock-fictional") ultimately pointing at the fact that the pretence of fictionality is, also, a source of humour.

The following example could be illustrative of a') above:

> There was an old fellow named Green
> Who grew so abnormally lean
> And flat and compressed

That his back squeezed his chest
And sideways he couldn't be seen.

The incommensurate quantifier, *ab-normal*, is clearly diagnostic of a possible world; yet, some limit of ab-normality should be there for the reader to be able to conceive of it (we can imagine how tall or how small Swift's entities are, for instance). Leanness down to one's back squeezing his chest could, perhaps, also be conceived of, as a hyperbole (in Romanian, „mi s-a lipit burta de spinare", denotes hunger, for instance). Yet, our real-world knowledge comes into play when trying to conceive of an entity *infinitely* lean (so as not to be seen sideways): something beyond our perception from one angle is *necessarily* altogether beyond our perception; no orthogonal projection of an object can lack one of the three complementary, plans. In other words, some „thing" that cannot be seen „sideways" cannot be seen *at all*. Were this a possible world, one of its constitutive, ontological propositions would have had to be bidimensionality; on this condition we could conceive of a world populated by entities that we, earthlings, cannot see sideways. Instead, we are driven to complete the image of the possible world with the real-world number of dimensions: three. This *fact* becomes incongruous to the situation in the limerick; since the incongruity does not affect our essence (no bidimensional human being has ever been described in our world), the incongruity can be laughed at; the „There was" at the beginning of the limerick becomes „There has never been/There cannot exist"; at this point we realise that the entire story was made up in order to make us laugh due to the self-reflexive function of expectation.

On the other hand, an author of science-fiction could exploit this impossible possible world otherwise; postulating its bi-dimensionality from the outset and superimposing, perhaps, a world of entities invisible to us upon our world, a threatening extrasensorial possible world would come to life, ready to interfere with ours. Only the manifest fictitiousness of the limerick (the fact that bi-dimensionality is not postulated) makes us react by laughter; it seems that the limits of humour are very clearly identifiable, although subtle.

b') above could be illustrated, for the sake of symmetry, by another limerick:

He died in attempting to swallow.
Which proves that, though fat, he was hollow.
For, in gasping for space
He swallowed his face
And hadn't the courage to follow.

Laying aside the antonymical pun fat/hollow, where *hollow* is used ambiguously (one cannot tell whether it refers to the stomach or to the mind, i. e., whether it denotes hunger or stupidity), we are suggested analogical judgement from the outset of the limerick („Which proves" ... „For" ...).

A possible manner of judging the limerick would be starting from the fact that *to swallow* has no direct object; we normally assume that one can swallow something *distinct* from oneself; yet, we are told in verse four that our character „swallowed his face". If we pick up the convention that the impossible is possible, i. e., that a (presumedly) human „he" can swallow himself, the limerick can be paraphrased into a „syllogism":

P$_1$: Swallowing is made through one's mouth, which is on one's face
P$_2$: *If we* admit that one can swallow oneself
Conclusion: Then we must necessarily admit that swallowing oneself will start by swallowing one's face.

Not only does the image of the fellow turned inside-out „gasping for space" make us laugh, but also the humorous incongruity between this piece of reasoning and verse 5:

And hadn't the courage to follow.

We realise that the ambiguous „hollow" in verse 2 refers to something in the sphere of courage; swallowing, then, is an act of bravery, provided that it refers to one's own person. This incongruity is already humorous; again, the self-reflexive function of expectation points at the mock-fictional character of the limerick.

Similar is the case of:

There was a young lady from Crete
Who was so exceedingly neat,

When she got out of bed
She stood on her head
To make sure of not soiling her feet.

The mock-syllogism will look as follows:
P_1: Stepping out of bed soils
P_2: *she stepped* out of bed with her head
Conclusion: One can get out of bed with one's head, and, perhaps, one's feet are more important than one's head.

Even if we admit that in some possible world thinking is performed with one's feet, exceeding neatness should not refer to which part of the body is submitted to soiling, but to lack of dirt on the floor, altogether. So, then, exceeding neatness proves to be no neatness at all, by our (imperfect) standards.

As pointed out above, the two mechanisms, a' and b' can seldom be identified in isolation. The world described in Edward Lear's *The Daddy Long-legs and the Fly* lacks one feature: the possibility of accomplishing one's desires apparently lies in the length of one's legs. This absurd condition is what prevents the Fly from going to Court:

If I had six long legs like yours,
At once I'd go to Court!
But oh! I can't, because *my* legs
Are so extremely short,

and the Daddy Long-legs from singing:

For years I cannot hum a bit,
Or sing the smallest song;
And this the dreadful reason is,
My legs are grown too long!

Moreover, a mock-syllogistic explanation follows:

My six long legs all here and there
Oppress my bosom with despair;
and if I stand, or lie, or sit,
I cannot sing one single bit!

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out of which it could be inferred that the physical and the psychological are more or less one (the polysemy of *bosom* = *chest* and *soul* obliterates the difference between *to press* and *to oppress*).

Since neither of the characters has legs of *appropriate* length to accomplish his wishes, Lear's implicit comment is: although the condition for one's dreams to come true is appropriateness, the latter refers not to the content of the wish, but to the length of one's legs; in other words, appropriateness is a matter impossible to define, since one can never tell what it might refer to. The conclusion is humorous, although an excursus into an impossible possible world was needed in order to identify it. The final reference is, clearly, to our world:

They said, „This is a dreadful thing!
The world has all gone wrong,
Since one has legs too short by half.
The other much too long!

A case of absurd humour of the situational type could be that of the absurd parody. Although it has been discussed above in relation to text-type analogy, the absurd parody is a mixture of two mechanisms: a mechanism pertaining to the absurd, which gains its humorous quality by comparison to the (presumably and presumedly known) intertext, which is the original of the parody, i. e., a humorous incongruity, when the absurd text is superimposed upon its original. Perhaps the most popular examples are the poems in Lewis Carrol's *Alices*; for instance:

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

The text is absurd (why should a crocodile's tail need *improvement*?); yet, when confronted with the original of the parody (an almost self-understood layer embedded in the expectation of children in Victorian England) the issue is a series of humorous incongruities in Carroll's text, as against Isaac Watts' *Against Idleness and Mischief*:

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How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

It might seem that Carroll's text stays obscure to children who are not familiar with its model; the success of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with non-British children is, none-the-less, indisputable. The reason may lie in the fact that, as pointed out before, children's minds are strong generative systems and, among other features, such systems may lack the data necessary to distinguish the rational from the absurd. Unlike with grown-ups, with children there seems to be no need to consciously step into a possible world, since their sense of the fictional develops later than their capacity of understanding. Carroll's story of the little crocodile is, on the other hand, a fully delineated episode, with a humorous conclusion:

How cheerfully he seems to grin
How neatly spread his claws
And welcome little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws!

a type of „pure" humour, based on an incongruity between essence/ appearance which can be perceived even if the intertext is unknown to the receiver.

Yet, the absurdity may lie in the sphere of already-accumulated experience of a child; in:

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you're at!
...
Up above the world you fly,
Like a tea-tray in the sky,

any child will perceive the absurdity, regardless of his being familiar or not with Jane Taylor's *The Star*. The Queen of Hearts reacts accordingly, in Carroll's text, ordering the Hatter, who sang this song, to be beheaded, strangely denying access into such a world where bats twinkle and tea-trays

fly, or, perhaps, reassuring somehow the little reader that such things cannot exist. This is one of the few cases, in Wonderland, when a possible world does not open by immediate materialisation of the absurdity.

Carroll's text is no exception to the mechanisms of situational absurd postulated above, if taken as a whole. It seems the basic rule one must abide by, in order to accept the convention of Wonderland and the world beyond the looking-glass, is that any utterance can and will gain material (and ontological) status. Once this condition accepted, an extremely complex network of mock-syllogistic judgement chains the books together in order to reveal the possible worlds to Alice, the embodiment of normal expectation.

Obviously, /+paraphrase/ mechanisms of absurd humour can coexist with /-paraphrase/ ones; yet, as it has been demonstrated, they can be reduced to two basic ones:

– completion of non-postulated constitutive rules of a possible world with real-world propositions;

– mock-syllogism on the basis of absurd propositions.

V. 2. /-inference/, /-paraphrase/
Linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour

Like predominantly logical mechanisms, predominantly linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour could be defined as a blending between a characteristic of the absurd (lack of immediate inference) and the basic structural feature of humour (the presence of a humorous incongruity). With linguistic mechanisms, the humorous incongruity appears at the level of the expression; therefore the categories of grammaticality and acceptability are involved, obviously, with their influence upon meaning. Since they are ultimately mechanisms of humour, the linguistic mechanisms in question are parallel to the latter; they, too, are the outcome of analogy in attributing a certain meaning to a certain signifier. Like mechanisms of humour, mechanisms of absurd humour could be grouped into two basic classes, according to the levels of language at which they appear and to the type(s) of effect(s) they generate.

Assuming that the signifier is characterised by a double linearity, a horizontal one, bound to syntagmatic arrangement and a vertical one, bound to paradigmatic choice, methodologically, two spheres in which effects take place could be identified:

a) effects on the morpho-syntactical level (bound to meaning differentiation)
b) effects on the lexico-phonetical level (bound to meaning choice).

The two categories could characterise humour in general; with absurd humour they can be identified only after the gap created by the lack of immediate inference has been bridged. In the case of linguistically-based incongruities the gap in comprehension is due to *ab-normal* utterances when considered in the system of reference represented by linguistic norm. If this delineation is valid for any kind of text, with verse a second set of constraints may be versification-rules and/or the formal requirements dictated by fixed-form verse. The only case of this type is represented by violations in the form of the limerick (as pointed out in IV. 4. 2. 2. supra, the limerick is the only fixed-form species of humorous verse) which, involving a component bound to text-type analogy, may yield absurd effects when, for instance, rhyme is disobeyed:

> There was an old man of St. Bees
> Who was stung in the arm by a Wasp.
> > When they asked: „Does it hurt?"
> > He replied: „No it doesn't.
> I'm glad that it wasn't a Hornet."

This example is among the few illustrative of a mechanism acting in isolation; there hardly is any incongruity in the limerick except for the lack of rhyme.

Examples in Romanian combine this mechanism with one of situational humour:

> Profesorul explică răsunător şi calm
> Eu stau tîmpit în bancă cu capul între palm.
> > (example quoted by M. Popa in *Comicologia*, p. 335)

or:

> Deci lipsit de iluzie
> Din cînepa cenuşie
> Impletit-am o funie
> (Cuvenita mea pensie
> Pentru sarbăda funcţie
> De-ucenic la poezie)...
> > (Al. Davila, *Basmul fără rost*)

Licenses from versification appear in the two examples above as secondary to situational humour. This might illustrate the statement that „pure" cases of versification license as a mechanism of the absurd very seldom appear. Generally, with either plain or absurd humour, an elementary mechanism can seldom be found in isolation.

With plain humour, one and the same incongruity can be due to and illustrative of more than one elementary mechanism. This is especially the case of humour of language (in the logical realm, where humour of situation is engendered, fallacies are distinct and/or distinguishable from one-another), and especially the case of English (where, due to analytism, polysemy is higher – see III. 4. above). For instance, in:

> This *lanthorn* doth the *horned* Moon present
> > (Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1),

a case which classical rhetorics would label as an atypical use of *polyptoton* (echoing one word with another, similar in sound), part of a „compound noun" is echoed with one of its „components"; yet, the „compound" is an analogical forging, due to the character's ignorance; *lanthorn* is both a „paronym" of *lantern* and a nonce-compound between „to lend" and „horn". Consequently, the following elementary mechanisms of humour can be identified in the example: lexical invention, paronymy, homophony, polysemy. It clearly is, on the other hand, a /-paraphrase/ example.

With absurd humour, as pointed out above, one and the same incongruity can be interpreted as both absurd and humorous; it is absurd in the system of reference of normal expectation (the linguistic norm, in our case), and humorous in the system of reference of an accepted possible world (for instance, in the example above, Starveling's idiolect).

The assumption underlying our analysis at this point is that *there is a certain degree of absurdity in any ab-normal (nonce) instance of language-use* (by ab-normal, licenses in grammaticality and/or acceptability are meant)*; its interpretation as humorous depends upon its intelligibility in the larger system of reference of possible performance and its interpretability as humorously incongruous to real-world norm.*

In such a light, both humour and absurd humour preserve their basic status as incongruities, yet, if plain humour is incongruous to expectation *within/in the limits of* the linguistic norm, the absurd is incongruous to norm as a system, involving some instance of norm infringement. Absurd humour could then be labelled as performance *astray from/outside* the norm, yet possible, since intelligible.

It seems that *intelligibility* plays in our case the part allotted to *accessibility* in the general theory of possible worlds. Perhaps *conceptual possible worlds* (so far extensively discussed in theory) are only one aspect of the problem, the other one being that of *linguistically possible worlds*. The case of inaccessible possible worlds has been, so far, defined conceptually (as those which we cannot conceive of); yet, a linguistic definition might also be added, according to which inaccessible possible worlds would also be those described in a language we cannot understand.[1,2]

Languages we could not conceive of, would be, perhaps, those having no morpheme-combinatory rules and/or morphemes which could have any meaning (i. e. no meaning at all). Languages we cannot understand are those whose morphemes and morpheme combining rules we do not know. Such languages exist and could exist outside our spatial-temporal and social-

historical limits. We can conceive of them on the basis of their underlying systematicity, among other things.

We are, nevertheless, in the realm of humour and absurd humour; of mock-fictionality and non-bona-fide communication. *As an instance of non-bona-fide communication, linguistically-based absurd humour is a non-systematic infringement of norm* (were it systematic, it would engender a possible and conceivable-of and, perhaps, even intelligible variant of a natural language). The norm in question is the linguistic norm of a natural language (in our case, here, English and Romanian), forming a layer of expectation against which non-systematic possible performance can be judged as absurdly and/or humorously incongruous. If possible performance is virtually unlimited, possible competence is not; it is delineated by the concept of intelligibility which, in its turn, is a function of grammaticality and/or acceptability.

Hence, the apparently hazy limit between plain and absurd humour may result, a limit that could be more or less case-specific, but which is clear enough if we take into account what was previously stated about the condition of the absurd in our realm of investigation, that of illocutionary strategy ultimately leading to humour.

V. 2. 1. Morpho-syntactically based mechanisms of absurd humour

It should be again pointed out, before identifying mechanisms which could enter this subclass that the delineation between morpho-syntactically and lexico-phonetically based mechanisms is and can be only methodological, and therefore, to a certain extent, mechanical.

On the other hand, infringements of the norm in the realm of morphology and syntax (i. e. ungrammatical performance) have much tighter limits than, for instance, lexical invention, especially if we refer, as we intend to, not to lexical morphemes, but to grammatical affixes which, like syntax, have a direct influence upon intelligibility.

In other words, the degree of inferrability should be higher with such mechanisms, a requirement at times met by means of the cotext, otherwise

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[1] However challenging a classification of linguistical possible worlds ranging from registers, sociolect, dialect and down to idiolect and literary style might be, this line of discussion will be left aside in this work, being outside its scope.

[2] From a philosophical point of view, the dichotomy linguistic/conceptual could be subject to debate as to whether linguistically possible worlds should be considered as equal weight counterparts to conceptual ones, or as a subcategory of the latter. Such a discussion would ultimately amount to one about the prior status of language or thought, a matter which is beyond our concern here. For the sake of symmetry, nevertheless, with our previous methodological dichotomy logical/linguistic, as well as because the two components are, in fact, inseparable, we shall consider the two aspects (linguistic/conceptual)as having equal weight in our discussion here.

humour cannot be perceived any longer. The extreme case is that in which a sequence is not perceived as a text any longer; such cases, if any, are beyond our corpus of examples.

Although few, examples of morpho-syntactically based absurd humour exist; one type is based on rearranging a set-phrase:

There was an old bear at the Zoo,
Who could always find something to do.
When it bored him to go
On a walk to and fro
He reversed it, and went fro and to.

Even if, conceptually, *to and fro* is the same thing as *fro and to* because of the cotext, to *go fro* (m something) *to* (wards something is absurd because it implies spatial doubling; had the verb *came* been used, instead of *went* in the last verse, perhaps only humour would have been implied. It is clear that the structure and content of the set-phrase itself is mocked at.

Morpheme-attachment rules can also become objects of mockery: for instance a case in which the ordinal numeral is forged by analogy:

A dentist who lives in Duluth
Has wedded a widow named Ruth
Who's so sentimental
Concerning things dental
She calls her dear Second her Twoth.

The mechanism is doubled with one of humour (homophony), because unacceptable morpheme addition is not a source of humour in itself. If, for instance, instead of forging the numeral by analogy with *fourth*, *fifth*..., i. e., by - *th* -attachment, the author had made up the ordinal numeral on the pattern of *third*, *tword* would not have been humorous. The occurrence of *dentist* and *dental* in the cotext might also orient the decoding of the heard form of this limerick towards the intended absurd equation Second = tooth; the „synonymy" is only apparent in the real form, consequently a /+written/ component is also involved.

Morphologically-based mechanisms of absurd humour can appear in /-written/ cases; as well; mockery at irregular verbs is such a case, for instance:

A professor who hailed from Podunk
And was rather too frequently drunk,
Said: „Sometimes I think
That I can parse pink:
Let me see: it is pink, pank and punk."

In this example the mechanism is doubled by another morphologically-based one, favoured by the analytism of English. The syntactical status of *pink* in *parse pink* could be, accordingly that of adverbial of manner or direct object; morphologically, the word could be an adverb or a noun. The absurdity underlying the *parsing of a noun* is humorously solved in the last verse where *pink* becomes an irregular verb whose „forms" are analogous to „drink-drank-drunk" or „sink-sank-sunk". Moreover the noun *punk* is homonymous with the last „form" of the „verb" enhancing the humorous effect.

If the examples above were cases of blended mechanisms, purely morphological mechanisms of absurd humour can be quoted in isolation in a subspecies of the limerick called „the beheaded limerick". The mechanism here relies on an unacceptable split in a compound word in which at least one component is homonymous to another word in the language; by analogy other words which are not compounds are split up arbitrarily creating at first an absurd incongruity, then a humorous effect:

A certain young pate who was addle (addle-pated = blockhead)
Rode a horse he alleged to be saddle,
But his gust which was dis,
For his haps which were mis,
Sent him back to his lac which was Cadil.

or:

In gonia once which was Pata,
A clysm occured which was cata.
A gineer which was en
Lost his ture that was den,
In a torium there that was nata.

If such mechanisms have not been found in the Romanian corpus, in verse, Romanian humorous prose exploits this morphological device: „Mã

cărării pe-o dusă și mă lupii cu niște întîlniți. /.../ și toporîi cu lovita, da fugai o luată și mă deluii pe-o suită, că gata erau să mă lupărească mîncatele; /.../ Imi mai firii în venită și luîndu-mi dințata în inimă, mă josii de sculat, – și-mi tremuratele că-mi piciorea înghețatu, da-mi curaj făcuta, și unai o zbierată ca din pămîntul fundului." (*zi sucite și-nvîrtite*, in „Ha, ha, ha," fasc.10/17 XII 1905, ap. *Almanahul umorului*, ed. Viața Românească, 1987). If in this text the morphological mechanism combines with a syntactic one, Romanian also permits, in the limits of its analytism, purely syntactical mechanisms exploiting the same structural pattern:

> De la beat cîrciumă vin,
> Merg pe gard, de drum mă țin,
> Nici nu latră nu mă cîine
> Nici nu punge nu mă bou
> și cu partea-ntr-o căciulă
> Merg cu subțioara-n pîine.

Obviously, such mechanisms are not language-specific; a famous quotation from Shakespeare is forged on the same mechanism:

Pyramus: I see a voice: now will I to the chink
> To spy and I can hear my Thisby's face.
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V., 1)

The examples above could lead to the conclusion that the infringement of syntactic rules is a mechanism of the absurd; yet, it is not licenses at this level in themselves that bring about absurd humour, but the ensuing violation of the selectional restrictions attached to the shifted items. This brings about a series of semantic clashes with the cotext i. e., incongruities. Our idea of coherence and cohesion generating predictable distribution is mocked at by confrontation with apparent non-text which, once re-arranged according to an extremely simple algorithm, becomes (neuter) text. The simplicity of the algorithm is a sine-qua-non condition of (absurd) humour; otherwise, by infringing morpheme-attachment rules a non-text is obtained which may be absurd but is certainly not humorous. The possible world is inaccessible since unintelligible.

It has been mentioned above that the limits of possible performance are, in the cases discussed in this subchapter, much tighter than with lexical invention, for instance. A nonce-word carries some morpho-syntactic information in any grammatical and acceptable cotext; the semantic value assigned to it ensues, also, from the latter; if, nevertheless, the cotext itself is undermined by morpho-syntactic licenses, it becomes non-text. Whether non-textuality is a morphologically or syntactically-dependent phenomenon is an absurd question. Yet, our previous statement, distinguishing between the traditional categories of grammatical/lexical affixes should be taken into account, in that, with the second category there is, perhaps, a greater liberty in usage and the limits of intelligibility are wider, allowing a higher degree of creativity (possible performance). This is, perhaps, what makes such texts as Carroll's *Jabberwocky* possible.

On the other hand, as Chomsky has demonstrated with his classical „Colourless green ideas...", the sphere of grammaticality is more drastically delineated than that of acceptability. Referring to our object of analysis, here, this might mean, perhaps, that instances of absurd humour of language are rather likely to appear in the sphere of acceptability than in that of grammaticality. This statement does not exclude infringements of grammatical rules altogether, as it results from the examples above; statistically, none-the-less, such examples are fewer than those presenting unacceptable performance, because of the condition of intelligibility.

V. 2. 2. *Lexico-phonetically based mechanisms of absurd humour*

Like morpho-syntactic mechanisms, the mechanisms in question, here, are parallel to those of plain humour, because of the ultimately humorous condition of absurd humour; as mentioned above (V. 2. 1.), absurdity results from infringing upon the linguistic norm, whereas plain humour is a game *inside/within the limits of* the norm. The hybrid condition of absurd humour manifests itself in the double value of the incongruities generating it: absurd and humorous.

Like with morpho-syntactic mechanisms, the cut between exclusively lexical and exclusively phonetical causes of incongruity is hard to achieve since phonemes have no meaning in themselves, they being only the vectors of meaning differentiation.

In (humorous) verse, nevertheless, phonetically-based devices (like alliteration, for instance) can enhance the effect intended; on the other hand there is a phonetic component involved in homonymy, polysemy, conversion-based wordplay, syntactic parallelism etc. Lexical invention, finally, is based, in its humorous acceptation at least, upon the phonetically-based recognition of existent, or would-be morphemes, the latter being, in most cases, evocative of the former, whence, the possibility of analogical meaning-attachment.

If the border between the lexical and the phonetical is hard to draw, the existence of a category of non-alliterative (in the broadest sense) mechanisms of absurd humour may entitle us to differentiate, methodologically, between:

a) mechanisms based on absurd distribution,
b) mechanisms based on lexical invention,
both classes presenting a non-alliterative and an alliterative variant.

V. 2. 2. 1. Mechanisms based on absurd distribution

The fact that these mechanisms have been ranged here and not among syntactically-based ones is the outcome of their being based upon paradigmatic choice rather than upon syntagmatic arrangement. In other words, the absurdly distributed item (which creates the incongruity) is a member of the morphological class required cotextually: a noun if the cotext requires a direct object, for instance, or an adjective, if an adjective is required. Yet, the choice of the semantic charge of the item is incongruous to expectation. This can occur by plain incompatibility of meaning, by opposition or accumulation of meaning.

One of the characters who embarked on Carroll's Snark hunt, who had „wholly forgotten his name", for instance,

> ...would answer to „Hi!" or to any loud cry,
> Such as „Fry me!" or „Fritter my wig!"

To „What-you-may-call-um!" or „What was his name!"
But especially „Thing-um-a-jig!"

> While, for those who preferred a more forcible word,
> He had different names from these:
> His intimate friend called him „Candle-ends,"
> And his enemies „Toasted-cheese".
> (L. Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark*,
> *An Agony in Eight Fits*, Fit the First)

The list of apellatives is backed by no cotextual data as to *why* they are used; perhaps, had there been an explanation as to why the character was called „Candle-ends", the text would have been merely humorous. Further on, a first-aid recipe is provided for waking up the Baker who had fainted:

> They roused him with muffins – they roused him with ice –
> They roused him with mustard and cress –
> They roused him with jam and judicious advice –
> They set him conundrums to guess.
> (idem, *Fit the Third*)

The absurdity of the „substances" used to the purpose is topped by two elements which do not fall into the category any more: *advice* and *conundrums*; advising or telling riddles to a person who has passed out (and cannot hear) is already humorous beside absurdity.

Absurd distribution can be more clearly identified in Edward Lear's limericks, for instance:

> There was a young lady of Smyrna
> Whose grandmother threatened to burn her.
> But she seized on the cat
> And said „Granny, burn that!
> You incongruous old woman of Smyrna!"

If perchance our dissertation up to this point has shaped at least a hazy idea about the meaning of the word *incongruous*, it will be clear why its distribution in this cotext is absurd.

Such cases can also be obviated in Romanian literature; Urmuz's *Cronicari* could be an example:

> Cică niște cronicari
> Duceau lipsă de șalvari
> și-au rugat pe Rapaport
> Să le dea un pașaport.
> Rapaport cel drăgălaș
> Juca un carambolaș,
> Neștiind că Aristotel
> Nû văzuse ostropel.
> ...
>   MORALA
> Pelicanul sau babița.

The text might seem purely absurd at first sight; its humorous character could be detected, nevertheless, in the jocular strife for verse and rhyme; such, too, is the case of:

> Împăratul roșu
> Papă lacom borșu';
> Acum soarbe tușu'.
> ...
> Împăratul verde
> Speră să se certe
> Cu trei babe știrbe...
>   (Romulus Vulpescu, *Spectru imperial*)

These examples may provide the transition towards the alliterative subclass of the same category; a type of humorous verse called by Esar „abecedary" (acrostics in the ABCD order) may be illustrative both in English and Romanian:

> The Absolutely Abstemious Ass,
> Who resided in a Barrel, and only lived on
> Soda Water and Pickled Cucumbers

The Bountiful Beetle
Who always carried a Green Umbrella when it didn't rain,
and left it at home when it did.
...
The Judicious Jubilant Jay,
Who did up her Back Hair every morning with a Wreath
                                        of Roses
Three Feathers and a Gold Pin
                (Lear, *Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes*
                                        & Pictures)

or:

> Adalbert cel fiert:
> Sterp cert, celt pe sfert.
> Blegoslav cel sclav:
> Graf grav, slab ștab slav.
>
> Cleobul cel nul:
> Chiul scurt, bulb fudul.
>   (R. Vulpescu, *Pomelnicul regilor –*
>   *„Experiment aliterativ"*)

The resources represented by Romanian borrowings can form the substance of entirely alliterative enumerations (such examples have not been found in English):

> – Geaba, gear, ghiul, ghiol, ghizduc!
> – Getbeget, gealat, giugiuc!
> – Geanabet, giol, guguștiuc!
> – Geam, geambaș, giumbuș, geambal!
>   (R. Vulpescu, *Marcia alla turca*)

Although all these words have a lexigraphical description, it is little likely that the average reader should know them all; some have a wide circulation, although they have denotative synonyms of different origin in Romanian. Beside the value due to versification, the game is rather a connotative one; therefore, perhaps, the reader's awareness of all the meanings attached to the items is collateral. The example is clearly /-

paraphrase/, because, even if the items are not arranged into sentences, only the denotation can be preserved in paraphrase, losing both connotational and alliterative values:

– Inutil, șal, inel, lac, margine!
– Neaoș, călău, grozav!
– Ticălos, arșice, porumbel!
– Fereastră, negustor de cai, acrobație, țambal!

The extreme cases of absurd distribution are oxymoron and pleonasm, respectively based on opposition of meaning (a is at the same time b and $\bar{b}$) and cumulation of meaning (a is at the same time b and $\bar{b}$). Both can be considered logical and semantic fallacies and, since so, they generate non-ambiguous incongruities. Although basically absurd, the fact that they can be qualified as 'mistakes, by the receiver obliterates the unfulfilled expectation the absurd normally brings about and sets them in the realm of the predominantly humorous, rather than in that of the absurd.

Therefore, perhaps, regarding oxymoron and pleonasm as extremes of semantic incompatibility only would not be sufficient. A more accurate description of the two would be in the realm of mechanisms of humour. Oxymoron could be described as the extreme of antonymy and pleonasm as an extreme of synonymy. Both are charged with a certain mechanics of miscarried analogy (much more so than the pun, for instance) which brings about absurdity; yet, this is easy to detect, so that the reader's inference is rounded in an ultimately humorous reaction.

If, then, the two are absurd by unacceptability, they can be humorous once they are labelled as mistakes and their non-aggressivity to the reader is instated. Our option has been, therefore, to discuss the two in details in the chapter devoted to mechanisms of humour, because they are /+inference/ mechanisms (see infra VI, 2, 3).

V. 2. 2. 2. Mechanisms based on lexical invention

Such mechanisms could be described, broadly, as underlain by incongruities based on would-be lexical morphemes which appear (in isolation or in combination) in a grammatical and/or acceptable sequence. Since the number of phonemes in a language is limited, on the one hand, and

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there exists a preference of certain languages for certain sound combinations to the detriment of others (Vraciu, 1982, p.75), on the other, any new sound-combination will be evocative of another, lexicographically described one. This fact has at least two consequences:

– a possibility of judgement by analogy in the attempt at attributing meaning to a sound/letter combination, favoured by
– an implicit (partial or total) homophonical character of the new combination, whence a possible alliterative feature.

Since the condition of evocativeness (implying some intelligibility) has to be met, the sequence in which such items appear meets (in all the cases identified in the corpus) the condition of grammaticality, thus including the new item into a morpho-syntactical class.

Lexically, on the other hand, three further subdivisions could be identified:

a) nonce-combinations of already existing morphemes
b) entirely new combinations
c) combinations between invented and existing morphemes.

a) *Nonce-combinations of already existing morphemes* can materialise, for instance in nonce-portmanteaux:

„Just the place for a Snark!" the Bellman cried
As he landed his crew with care;
(L. Carroll, *The Hunting...* Fit the First)

The word *snark* is a portmanteau[3] between *snail* and *shark*. Similar is the case of Edward Lear's adjective *borascible* (bored + irrascible) in:

There was an Old Person of Bangor,
Whose face was distorted with anger,
He tore off his boots and subsisted on roots
That borascible person of Bangor.

In Romanian, Creangă's uncle calls him: „Bine-ai venit, nepurcele!" where *nepurcel* is a combination between *nepot* and *purcel*.

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[3] We owe the very lexicological denomination to Carroll; it is explained in the Humpty-Dumpty episode in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

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Nonce-compounds could also be quoted in this category: *un-birthday presents*, for instance, are much better in Humpty-Dumpty's view than plain birthday presents; Edward Lear's *Nonsense Botany* contains plants like: *Smalltoothcombia Domestica, Bottlephorkia Spoonifolia, Tureenia Ladlecum, Bluebottlia Buzztilentia, Manypeeplia Upsidownia* etc. The cotext of these denominations is represented by the graphical „image" of the would-be plant: for instance *Manypeeplia...* consists of a stem from which several manlets hang upside-down (the peeping must have been pretty hard to represent).

In Romanian almost all fairy-tale characters have nonce-compounds as names: Statu-Palmă-Barbă-Cot, Păsări-Lăți-Lungilă, Strîmbă-Lemne etc. They can, obviously, also appear in humorous verse, as collateral sources of humour:

> „Eu sînt, dulce primăvară,
> Statu-Palmă-Barba-Cot.
> Din lăcașul tău afară
> Am venit ca să te scot."
>
> (Alecsandri, *Noaptea albă*),

but they have a basically metaphorical value, on the one hand, and enjoy a wide circulation which makes their lexicographical description possible, on the other.

The mechanism is not language-specific; this could be proved by a „classic" of German children's literature:

> Der Ochsenpatz
> Die Kamelente
> Der Regenlöwe
> Der Menschenbrotbaum
>
> (Chr. Morgenstern, *Neue Bildungen der Natur vorgeschlagen*);

Romanian also permits such combinations, a fact proved by Nina Cassian's attempt at „translating" the poem as a series of portmanteaux:

> Cangurangutanul
> Vităunul

Muscămila
Cioarădașca.
(ap. Popa, 1975, p. 339)

Even back-formation can become the mechanism by which such instances are generated. An unacceptable Immediate Constituent split in the phrase *mock/turtle soup*, interpreted by Alice as *Mock Turtle/Soup* can give birth to a character, the Mock Turtle. By a procedure somewhat similar to folk etymology (due to Alice's reduced vocabulary and experience) characters materialise by the superposition of two set-phrases which have a common element: the Rocking-horse-fly (rocking horse+horse-fly) or the Snap-dragon-fly (snap-dragon+dragonfly). Nonce-affixation can generate words like *beasticle* or *cheerious*, *slobaciously*, *to becook* (Ed. Lear).

Although examples do not appear in the corpus under analysis, perhaps it could be stated that virtually all morpheme-combination patterns described in lexicology could generate mechanisms of absurd humour by violation of the selectional restrictions of the items combined (a horse-fly, for instance, feeds on horse-blood; a rocking-horse is made of wood; so that it feeds on „sap and sawdust", Alice is explained to, in an attempt at reducing the absurdity which generates another absurdity).

b) Combinations between invented and existing morphemes

These are, statistically, the most numerous instances of lexical invention; generally, the pattern consists of an invented „radical" to which normal affixes (grammatical and/or lexical) are added.

Nobody could say more about Lear's famous words *scroobious, runcible*, than that they are adjectives:

> There was an Old Person of Philoe
> Whose conduct was scroobious and wily;
> He rushed up a palm when the weather was calm,
> And observed all the ruins of Philoe.
>
> (*A Book of Nonsense*)

respectively:

> They dined on mince and on slices of quince
> Which they ate with a runcible spoon;

(Lear, *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat*)

Runcible appears in Edwars Lear's work in the following cotexts:

the Rural Runcible Raven (*Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes ∝ Pictures*)
Runcible Cat (*The Pobble Who Has No Toes*)
runcible goose (*Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos*)
runcible wall (*idem*)

None of these collocations offers information as to what the radical *runc–* might mean; the addition of the adjectival suffix *–ible* can, nevertheless, identify the word as an adjective. Distribution confirms this status, yet, no semantic information on the radical can be inferred. *Scroobious* only appears twice in Edward Lear's work: in the quoted text as well as in *Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures*, in the cotext *Scroobious Snake*. The same case of a non-identifiable radical to which an existing adjectival suffix is added can be quoted in the singular occurrences of: *crumbooblious* (sauce), *gosky* (patties), *plumdomphious* (manner). In *crumbooblious* and *plumdomphious* the first element could be identifiable by analogy with *crumb* or to *crumble*, respectively with *plum* or *plump*. Nothing in the English language resembles – *oobl* – and – *domph* – nevertheless. Adjectival coinages with an alliterative quality, such as *Tom-Tommy* or *Higgeldippigledy* (*Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes ∝ Pictures*) underline the jocular feature in these items. Traces of meaning can also be identified in the „noun" *amblongus* (*Nonsense Cookery*) which should be, according to distribution, some kitchen ingredient, the Latin ending (present in English only with recently borrowed nouns) might lead us to interpret the elements in the radical as: amb-< (Lat) ambo or (Engl) *to amble* < (Lat) *ambulo, - are* respectively – longus < (Lat) *longus, -a, -um* or (Engl) *oblong* < (Lat) oblongus.

By combination of these possible meanings we could obtain:
a) amb- + longus → a thing long in both ends/sides/dimensions
b) amb- + oblongus → thing oblong in both directions (absurd)
c) ambulo + longus → a thing that is long and moves/walks
d) ambulo + oblongus → a thing that is oblong and moves/walks.

If the element - long - is interpreted as an adverbial element, reminding not of *longus* but of *longis*, four other possible meanings could be attached to the item. The fact that this „noun" seems a portmanteau is, nevertheless, the output of the analogical judgement of a person who knows some Latin. For a child (who encounters the item in a book of mock-cookery) the only identifiable element is the nominal ending; he might as well perceive *amblong-* as a compact radical and not as a compound or a portmanteau. Finally an adverb (the only one forged on this pattern in Edward Lear's work) can be identified in *flumpetty*, an item which is irrelevant in isolation (because of the homonymous adjectival /adverbial ending - *y*) but which appears in *Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos* in an adverbial distribution.

The same type of lexical invention exists in Romanian, as well:

A țiripat un pruț, ce-i drept
Cam bumburat.
Dar drîmbăvea o ghioală încă trează
și-a cripolit pe-aproape prin cordac.
Ce pițindreaua mea de burtișlagă,
Chi morbul tău de zdrălăcită
Mi-a-mburticat frogolojina?
Tichi-mi-ai biza să mi-o bleagă!

(Anonymous poem,
in „Viața studențească" 2/1982)

Like Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, this „poem" exhibits all three above-mentioned types of lexical invention; for the time being we shall only identify those pertaining to the subcategory under discussion here.

Items combining existing morphemes with invented ones would be: the verb *a țiripat*, the adjective *bumburat*, the verbs *a drîmbăvi, a cripoli*, the noun *pițindrea* combining a would-be „radical" with a diminutival suffix), *burtișlagă* (obtained by the same procedure), the adjective *zdrălăcit(ă)*, the verbs *a (î)mburtica* and *a tichi*, the noun *biza* (blending a „radical" with a feminine singular accusative ending). *A țiripa* could be a portmanteau between *a ciripi* and *a țipa*; hence *pruț* may be interpreted as a noun denoting some bird; yet, its paronymy with a four-letter-word in Romanian, which is lexicographically described (if so) as a feminine, crea-

tes a double humorous incongruity enhanced by the fact that the children's language euphemism for some four-letter words in Romanian meets the selectional restrictions of *a cîripi* (*to chirp*). *A cripoli*, on the other hand, has no analogous model in Romanian; it is our belief that it is a coinage from the English radical *to creep* (because of the collocation with *pe-aproape*, *prin cordac*, two locatives introduced by prepositions with an iterative connotation); the suffix *-oli* could be interpreted as a variant of the iterative verbal suffixes *-ăvi*, *-ăi*, *-ăli*; the connotation of these suffixes in Romanian is extreme laziness, idleness, loitering (cf. *a trîndăvi*, *a lălăi*, *a tîndăli*).

Obviously, this is only a possible interpretation of the newly coined elements; still, the observance of grammaticality eases their interpretation as nouns, adjectives etc. Even traditionally called lexical affixes may be identified in these coinages. Since their deciphering is thus made much easier, the requirement of intelligibility is met to a greater extent than with entirely newly-forged items, therefore, perhaps, they are more numerous in both the English and the Romanian corpus.

c) Entirely new combinations

These items can be identified morpho-syntactically only on the basis of their distribution; two mentions should be made, none-the-less:
– that the existence of the ∅ suffix in both languages complicates the identification;
– that word-order in English (which is a feature of its analytism) allows a quicker labelling of the new items, as compared to Romanian, where, at times, distribution is irrelevant and, moreover, cases of invented affixes could be suspected.

In Edward Lear, for instance, some „characters" are denominated as *Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo*, *Akond*, *Pobble* or *Dong*; yet, the fact that they have articles (like common nouns) being meanwhile spelled with a capital letter is misleading as to their status. It is clear that in the *Twangum Tree* the new coinage is a noun with adjectival function, by analogy with plum-tree, cherry-tree etc; moreover, *a twangum* ought to be some imaginary fruit; (since there is no such fruit as a yew, a willow or a fir, these nouns can denote the tree without the addition of the noun *tree*); yet, the noun *Akond* in *The Akond of Swat* can only be identified as a common noun denoting an animate entity, while *Swat* can be either a toponym or a substance. The *Dong* in *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* is an entity having the feature in the title, yet, it is not all clear whether this feature pertains to the entire would-be species or to the individual described in the poem. In:

> There was an old person of Ware
> Who rode on the back of a bear:
> When they asked: „Does it trot?"
> He said: „Certainly not.
> He's a Moppsikon Floppsikon Bear.",

the coinage *moppsikon-floppsikon* can only be identified as an adjectival compound by its distribution; *-on* is not an adjectival suffix in English, consequently it could be labelled as invented, as well, or, perhaps, as a „borrowing" from Greek where it is a nominal suffix.

The idea underlying such inventions undermines the human reflex of judging by analogy: the attempt at finding correspondents or possible meanings for the items in question is as absurd as themselves. This issue becomes clear when entirely new coinages in avant-garde poetry become the object of discussion:
In:

> Damirozã, culp nastralp,
> vestrapunã, pulc diricã
> (colimard, culp nabaroascã)
> spurinaxului gubert!
>   (Romulus Vulpescu, *Trebug crenalc*)[4]

the information on some items (the use four times of the fem. sg. N-Acc ending *-ã* and once of the masc. sg. G-D ending *-lui*, word order and punctuation) might lead us to some traces of meaning: for instance, *culp nastralp* may be used appositively and *nastralp* may be an adjective; yet, there is no agreement in gender with the „feminine" *damirozã*, consequently the construction between brackets may be an incident construction or the second member of an enumeration; *culp*, on the other hand, is used in collocation with another fem. sg. „noun", consequently it may be a

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[4] Ap. Marian Popa, Comicologia, p. 337

preposition; yet, in Romanian, at least, prepositional phrases are normally not separated by comma from the noun they determine. Neither the use of the brackets or of the exclamation mark are clear. The fact that -ard is a diminutival suffix in French and that *gubert* rather sounds like the name of some Merovingian king could, perhaps, suggest that mr. Vulpescu is familiar with French; yet, his being a reputed translator of old French literature does not seem to be the point here. This could be interpreted as a „self-voiding" text, one that undermines its own cotext, or, perhaps, as non-text, since inaccesible by its unintelligibility.

The final argument towards the absurdity of any attempt at interpreting these texts is given by Lewis Carroll. Putting his *Jabberwocky* in parallel with its „decyphering" by Humpty-Dumpty it becomes obvious that the strife to understand is even more absurd than the text itself. The first stanza of *Jabberwocky* should be analyzed, perhaps, here, because it presents the reader with all three types of lexical invention generating absurd humour:

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
> All mimsy were the borogoves.
> And the mome raths outgrabe.

Although Humpty-Dumpty's explanation for *brillig* is „four o'clock in the afternoon - the time when you begin broiling things for dinner", the two final sounds of the coinage may suggest an analogy with the ending -*ing* (a temptation to which the Romanian translator of *Through the Looking-Glass* even gave in translating the word by *friglind*). *Slithy* is a portmanteau between *lithe* and *slimy*, Humpty-Dumpty explains, but then adds: «"Lithe" is the same as „active"», making his explanation absurd, since the dictionary meaning of *lithe* is *supple, flexible*. „«toves» are something like badgers – they're something like lizards – and they're something like a corkscrew", the ovoid character goes on explaining; this time, the word is an entirely new coinage which can only be identified as a noun by its plural ending and its collocation with an adjective. Similar is the case of *wabe* explained as „the grass-plot round a sundial". Even an „irregular verb" is forged: to *outgribe-outgrabe* - (?outgribben), which

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allegedly means: „something between bellowing and whistling with a kind of sneeze in the middle".

The „poetic art" of lexical invention is also formulated by Humpty-Dumpty: „When I use a word, /.../ it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more, nor less."

„The question is", said Alice, „whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

„The question is", said Humpty-Dumpty, „which is to be master – that's all."»

Such instances are, in other words, meant to mock at our idea of coherence and cohesion, at our reflex to judge by analogy and attribute some meaning to a sound-complex.

Lexical invention should not in such cases, be subjected to any strife for understanding: it should rather be seen as an exorcism: surrealistic poetry stands proof for this idea:

> Hau! Hau! Hau!
> rota dria dau
> simo selvo valen
> fatā cu pār galben
> vermo sisla dur
> aici împrejur
> Klimer zebra treu
> nici tu
> nici eu
> rugāri lui Dumnezeu
>
> (Geo(rge) Bogza, *Descîntec*,
> in „Urmuz" 3 mar. 1928)

Hence, perhaps, the extensive usage of such pseudo- or non-communicational games in nursery-poetry: for children, as for poets who try to find their way in the intricate and responsible act of conveying information, whether they are unaware or painfully aware of the distance between signifier and signified, these instances could represent an escape from the strain of making thought coincide with the word.

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Linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour could, then, be summed up as follows:

a) based on infringement of versification rules (for poetry)

b) morpho-syntactically based:
  – rearrangement of set-phrases
  – violating morpheme-attachment rules
  – unacceptable splits in compound words
  – inversions in word-order

c) lexico-phonetically based:
  – based on absurd distribution
        – based on incompatibility of meaning
        – based on oppositeness of meaning – oxymoron
        – based on cumulation of meaning – pleonasm
  – based on lexical invention – nonce-combinations of existing items
        – combinations between existing-invented morphemes
        – entirely new combinations.

All lexico-phonetically based mechanisms can be:
        – non-alliterative
        – alliterative

CHAPTER VI.
Immediate Inference and Paraphrasability.
Mechanisms of Humour

Mechanisms of plain humour could be characterised, according to the criterion of immediate inference as /+inference/, that is, a humorous incongruity can be disambiguated immediately in the system of reference represented by normal expectation. Whether these are predominantly logical or predominantly linguistic could be ascertained by applying the criterion of paraphrasability. Thus, the following distinction might appear:

a) /+inference/ /+paraphrase/ – logical mechanisms of humour, and:
b) /+inference/ /-paraphrase/ – linguistic mechanisms of humour.

The dichotomy is, certainly, methodological; yet it could roughly differentiate between:

a') *humour of situation* – which is perceived and reacted to as humour even if the text containing the incongruity is paraphrased, and
b') *humour of language* – which does not preserve its quality as humour when paraphrased.

The previously used term *roughly*, is important, because the above-mentioned categories do not cover in all respects the classically ascertained content of the two terms. In classical literary theory, they coexist with a third: *humour of character*, which we might consider to be, structurally, a blending of the two previously described categories. Should a character be considered as a fictional entity consisting of name, looks, non-verbal behavioural patterns and speech, regardless of the fact that such entities rarely appear in humorous verse otherwise than as summary sketches (as against prose or drama, where they are much more completely defined and/or described), humorous incongruities can appear in all four of these fields. Wherever incongruities appear, they could be reduced to our dichotomical model, in the following manner:

1. humorous incongruity in the character's name /-paraphrase/
2. humorous incongruity in the character's looks /+paraphrase/

3. humorous incongruity in the character's non-verbal behaviour
   /+paraphrase/
4. humorous incongruity in the character's speech /-paraphrase/.

It would be hard to cover connotationally by any paraphrase fictional names in Shakespeare, for instance, not only because they are incongruous to our onomastical expectation (*Bottom*, *Quince* – strangely enough, Romanians have also used, at a time, the name *Nea Gutuie* with a precise address – or *Starveling*) and, in Romanian:

> Sîsîilā şi Gînganul
> Vin cālāri pe rîşi de munte,
> *Caragaţā*, cāpitanul,
> Pe-un haram cu corn în frunte;
>
> ...
>
> *Fāt-Frumos Cercel Pālincā*
> Sare jos dintr-o poveste,
> Bate malul din opincā
> şi se-nchinā la neveste.
> (Duiliu Zamfirescu, *O noapte în pādure*, *Poezii nouā*, 1899),

but also because they are reflections or sums of the character's other features. A description of a character could be, on the other hand, paraphrased, with a quasi-complete preservation of the humorous effect:

> Braţ rotund şi crupā plinā
> Organism de gelatinā,
> Cu structurā androginā, –
> Iar la-nfāţişare
> Pare
> O statuie de slāninā.
> (Topîrceanu, *Scrisoare.*
> *Rāspuns d-lui Al.O. Teodoreanu*)

could, perhaps, be paraphrased as:

> Braţ rond, plin posterior,
> Trup de-aspic tremurātor,
> Ce umanoid îţi pare;

Caractere secundare,
Însā, n-are,
Iar de-aproape... mare brînzā!
Un memento de osînzā.

The paraphrase has been conceived in verse to preserve the effect of rhythm and rhyme; although Topîrceanu is unique and the paraphrase is longer than his stanza, it was possible and, hopefully, is humorous, as well.

Humorous incongruities in the character's non-verbal behaviour could also be paraphrased. For instance:

> The Devil, having nothing else to do,
> Went off to tempt My Lady Poltagrue.
> My Lady, tempted by a private whim,
> To his extreme annoyance, tempted him.
> (Hilaire Belloc, *On Lady Poltagrue,*
> *a Public Peril*)

could, perhaps, sound something like:

> Since bored, one day, the Devil thought it meet
> To tempt My Lady Poltagrue a bit.
> Yet, since her views were different about this,
> He didn't snatch her soul, but she snatched his.

Finally, when the humorous incongruity is present in the character's speech with a view to his characterization,[1] it normally cannot be paraphrased without the loss of the humorous effect:

„By Cheshu, he is an ass, as in the world: I will verify as much in his peard: he has no more directions in the true disciplines of the wars, look you, of the Roman disciplines, than is a puppy-dog."
(Shakespeare, *Henry V*, III, 2 – Fluellen)

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[1] Any character can „accidentally" utter humorously incongruous texts; here we have in view those which appear idiosyncratically, and are, therefore, typical

Perhaps this demonstration could prove that the category *humour of character* is a mixture of /+/and/-paraphrase/ features; on the other hand, the two categories defined on the basis of paraphrasability are not identical with what has been traditionally called *humour of situation*, respectively *humour of language*. Although in practice the two aspects cannot be separated, our terminological option for /±paraphrase/ mechanisms would be *predominantly logical*, respectively *predominantly linguistic mechanisms of humour*, a dichotomy which has been observed with absurd humour as well.

It should be mentioned that the other criteria discussed so far operate in this field of analysis as well; the mechanisms we shall analyse in what follows on the second level of analysis can (and should) be classified according to first-level criteria as well, as a previous step. Form and text-type analogy act simultaneously with immediate inference and paraphrasability and should be considered for a full description of a mechanism. For instance, a pun based on homonymy preserves this status even if it is perceived only in the oral form:

> A canner exceedingly canny,
> One morning remarked to his granny,
> „A canner can can
> Anything that he can,
> But a canner can't can a can, can he?
> (Carolyn Wells)

A complete description of this mechanism would be: /+written/ /-text-type/ /+inference/ /-paraphrase/ /+homonymy/. Likewise, the description of a logical mechanism of humour can contain a /+written/ feature/ as well:

> A very polite man named Hawarden
> Went out to plant flowers in his gawarden.
> If he trod on a slug,
> A worm or a bug,
> He would instantly say „I beg pawarden."
> (Carolyn Wells)

The mechanism could be described as:

/+written/ /-text-type/ /+inference/ /+paraphrase/

It is easy to imagine that such mechanisms could appear in a parodical context, as well, or in a text written in dialect, so that text-type analogy should be a positive marker. It has been pointed out previously (see supra, IV.2) that no criterion acts prior to another (which makes the order in which the features above were enumerated arbitrary), but it is also clear that, at least theoretically, any combinations are possible since mutual exclusiveness functions only inside subclasses defined by the same criterion.

For a greater illustrativeness and since form, text-type analogy and absurd humour have already been described (see supra IV.3, IV.4 and V) in details, only /-written/ /-text-type/ /+inference/ cases were selected for this chapter, i. e. examples containing mechanisms of plain humour. We have also abstained from using the label „pure humour", attached to a category defined previously (see supra II.1), because tinges of satire or irony could be identified in the cotext or context, even, of the incongruities which will be analysed here; this fact is, nevertheless, irrelevant for the structural description of the mechanisms in question. Elements of the pragmatics and the rhetorical value attached to „pure" and „hybrid" humour have also been previously discussed (see supra, III.3).

Like with absurd humour, all mechanisms of plain humour are the outcome of judgement by analogy, either in reasoning, or in attributing meaning to a sound complex. With plain humour, the step of extrapolation in another system of reference which was obligatory for absurd humour, is not present any longer. In other words, incongruities can be interpreted in the system of reference of normal expectation, be it logical or linguistic.

VI. 1. /+inference/ /+paraphrase/. Logical mechanisms of humour

Incongruities upon which the mechanisms in question rely appear at the level of logical reasoning (whence their paraphrasability), where judgement by analogy can engender sophisms. The requirement for a sophism to become humorous is that its erroneous condition should be

very obvious (it has been pointed out before that accessibility is a function of the simplicity of the decoding algorithm). Still, ontologically, it should not fringe upon a possible world, i. e. it should not imply a construct as a necessary, larger system of reference, in order to be perceived as humorous, lest it be absurd humour. Needless to say that the delineation here is extremely frail, as frail as, perhaps, that between absolute and modal syllogisms. One statement that could be safely made is, nevertheless, that plain humour is a matter of unexpected permutation *within* or *among* layers of normal expectation; therefore humour is a construct only inasmuch as it re-connects already existing elements unlike absurd humour which somehow extends and/or creates expectation; we laugh, perhaps, at both the outlandishness, unexpectedness of this connection but also at the easiness with which the connection could be cancelled and the elements put back into their places, confirming our ontological safety.

Since all items of reasoning pertaining to this field of analysis are fallacious syllogisms (i. e. sophisms), they could be characterised as having formally defective premises. The matter of a sophism disguises the defection, nevertheless, making it seem conclusive, but the conclusion is „fallacious, illusory, defective." (Maritain, 1946, p. 248)

Generally, sophisms can be built up on the pattern of any kind of syllogisms; a „classical" example:

> A table has four legs.
> An ox has four legs
> A table is an ox.

The rule of transitivity operates by analogy (if a = b and c = b then a = c); it is clear that the quality of „four-leggedness" is what creates the fallacy. Were a humorous poem forged on this pattern it would certainly make us laugh, but it takes a logician to say that the first premise is false, that even if it were true, both premises thus formulated are minor and the identity of subjects is stated on the basis of an accidental identity of „predicates" which are actually attributes unessential to the subject.

The type of syllogism underlying /+paraphrase/ mechanisms of humour is the absolute syllogism; modal syllogisms, involving the

categories of *necessity* and *possibility* are typical of absurd humour (and generally imply some manifest or non-manifest quantification).

An absolute syllogism has as premises so-called „propositions *de inesse*" (i. e., depicting one *definitory* quality of the subject: either inclusion into a class or specific difference characterising one member of a class). (Maritain, 1946, p. 249 sq)

Mechanisms of humour forged on this pattern fall into two further classes, according to the form of the sentences in the surface structure. A first class will contain syllogisms based on conjunction of sentences, which in the deep structure are disjunctive by contradiction or contrariety. This subclass could be labelled as /+contradictory/. Another class, the opposite, exhibits an apparent contradiction which is neutralised by inference. This subclass will be labelled, accordingly, as /-contradictory/.[2]

VI. 1. 1. /+contradictory/ logical mechanisms of humour

These mechanisms are based, consequently, upon an apparent conjunction of sentences, which are in fact, contradictory.

The major premiss of such a syllogism is a conjunctive sequence: „A cannot be at the same time B and C", which „denies that propositions having the same subject can at the same time be true".[3] In other words, one and the same notion cannot have two distinct definitions which should both be valid. Consider:

> There was an old lady of Brooking
> Who had a great genius for cooking.
> She could bake sixty pies
> all quite the same size
> And tell which was which, without looking.

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[2] Evan Esar calls these two types of humour *bull*, respectively *paradox* (Esar, 1978, p. 97); the author calls them „species of humour" and remarks their oppositeness.

[3] Maritain, 1946, p. 237. Or, in John Ross' terms, A₁ and A₂ are not only daughters of A₀" (John Ross, ap. *Gruiţă*, 1978, p. 245)

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Apparently, the limerick consists of a conjunctive sequence:

P_1: The old lady had great genius for cooking /and/

P_2: *She* was able to tell one of sixty equal pies without looking

Concl: Genius for cooking consists in the ability of telling one of sixty equal pies without looking.

Such an item of reasoning consists of a series of contradictions which make it utterly fallacious:

1. formal contradictions: the order of premises is incorrect, they are both minor and the conclusion is what should be the major premiss
2. contradiction between the two predicates *bake* and *tell*. If the subject „genius for cooking" is compatible with the former, it clashes semantically with the second. „Tell which was which" shifts the „definition" from the category of quantity into that of order (what is the significance of order in a row of sixty equal pies?).
3. contradiction between *bake* and *sixty*, which clashes with our presupposition („a good cook will bake *good* pies, not *many* pies")[4], i. e. is explained in terms of quantity, not of quality.
4. contradiction between „tell which was which" and „without looking".

In other words, „genius for cooking" is equated with two propositions completely different from each-other (and, from at least one point of view, even mutually exclusive), incongruous both in their own system of reference and to the subject.

The same type of logical mistake could be identified in:

There was an old man of Tarentum
Who gnashed his false teeth till he bent'em.
When they asked him the cost

---

[4] Russell connects the truth-function of utterances to both expectation and memory: „Every belief which is not merely an impulse to action is in the nature of a picture, combined with a yes-feeling or a no-feeling; in the case of the yes-feeling it is true if there is a fact having to the picture the kind of similarity that a prototype has to an image; in the case of the no-feeling, it is „true" if there is no such fact. A belief which is not true is called „false" (Russell, 1948, p. 154)

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Of what he had lost
He said: „They weren't mine, I was lent'em."

The interlocutor fails to communicate here because of misfocussing the question. The centre of interest of the one who asks is in the category of price (cost, value), whereas the answer centres on possession (*he* had lost – they weren't *mine*).

The logical scheme might looks as follows:

P_1: He was lent some false teeth (they were not his)

P_2: He bent them

Concl: No damage was caused, though, because what is not one's possession does not have a value.

Logically, the mistake is mis-reference (which will break cohesion) in the „syllogism", i. e., the premises have nothing to do with the conclusion.

The logical „scheme" is, certainly, more obvious in limericks, perhaps because of their proportions. Yet, it can be identified in any other type of humorous verse in which this kind of logical mechanism is involved. Since based upon a piece of reasoning, predominantly logical mechanisms are, at times, apparent only when the entire text is considered:

Popa Toader, din scripturi,
Dă lui Mitru-nvățături:
–"Mitre, știi ce spune psaltul?
Să nu faci în viața ta
Ceea ce te-ar supăra
De ți-ar face altul!"

Mitru stă și stă gîndind
De el multe nu se prind
– „Dar mai știu eu cum e asta!
Altul, da! zici înțelept,
D-apoi eu? Să n-am eu drept
Să-mi sărut nevasta?"
(G. Coșbuc, *Logică*)

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The mistake is one of omission, here; the commandment should have been „să nu faci/*altuia, aproapelui tău*/ ceea ce ţie nu-ţi-ar place" The piece of reasoning which equates doing harm with doing what one wouldn't like to be done to, seemingly includes kissing one's own wife into the category of wrongdoing, obviously contradicting the essence of the predicament (You wouldn't like your wife to be kissed by somebody else, so don't kiss somebody else's wife).

Carroll's *Alices* abound in such pieces of „reasoning"; the pattern upon which /+contradictory/ mechanisms are forged could be said to function in prose as well.[5]

„Then you should say what you mean", the March Hare went on.

„I do," Alice hastily replied; „at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know."

„Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. „You might just as well say that «I see what I eat» is the same thing as «I eat what I see!»"

„You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep," that «I breathe when I sleep» is the same thing as «I sleep when I breathe»!"

Apart from the fact that, in this case, the mechanism of /+inference/ is combined with a pun on two possible meanings of the verb *to mean*, a discussion of this item of reasoning would, perhaps, amount to one about the relationship thought-utterance, with all its psychological (and psycho-linguistic) implications, including the speaker's intentionality and the illocutionary value of an utterance. The fallacious character of Alice's analogy (if a = b implies b = a, then *I say what I mean* implies *I mean what I say*) is stressed by the Hatter's and Dormouse's replies. If a = b ⇒ b = a is valid for any a and b, Alice's two propositions, even if reformulated as apparent propositions *de inesse*,

What I say is what I mean implies
What I mean is what I say,

---

[5] It could be demonstrated that, with the exception of mechanisms based on versificational patterns, all the other mechanisms analysed here work in prose or drama, as well. It has also been demonstrated that there are no mechanisms in prose or drama that could not appear in verse, as well.

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cannot be valid for any thought and respective utterance, at least because of the imperfection of the human mind, on the one hand, and of a natural language as against mathematical language, on the other. The mathematical formula establishes no priority between the two terms, a and b; Alice's propositions do, because they are not propositions *de inesse* (they do not establish inclusion into a class or specific difference characterising one member of a class as against the others).

If the examples selected to illustrate this type of mechanism were chosen among the most obvious, /+contradictory/ humour can appear in combination with other mechanisms, on the one hand, or develop in lengthy stretches of text extensively describing fictional worlds whose nucleus is a /+contradictory/ item of reasoning. Whenever non-aggressivity is present, these texts are liable to be interpreted as humorous. Countless humorous characters which could be traditionally described as developed on an irreconcilable clash between essence and appearance and countless humorous situations based on the incongruity between deed and intention could ultimately be reduced to the scheme of /+contradictory/ mechanisms *a cannot be at the same time b and c*, although, apparently, it seems so.

VI. 1. 2. /-contradictory/ logical mechanisms of humour

These mechanisms could be defined as the opposite of the previous: apparently sophistical items of reasoning actually function as correct syllogisms, where the rules of conjunction and entailment function:

A baritone star in Havana
Slipped horribly on a banana.
He was sick for a year
Then resumed his career
As a promising lyric soprano.

The second presupposition making the syllogism correct should be inferred by the receiver; otherwise the sequence seems illogical:

P_1: A baritone slipped on a banana
P_2:

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Concl: He became a soprano

P$_2$ = inference = one's voice can be altered by a fall.

This piece of reasoning carries the receiver further, into a taboo-zone where he further infers the precise part in male anatomy which, once damaged, engenders apparently female physiology, manifest in voice pitch. The contradiction between *baritone* and *soprana* (x is /+male/ becomes x is /+female/) is thus made possible. Still, the lack of one premiss breaks the coherence of the text, making it elliptical, so that it suggests an *enthymeme* (Maritain 1946, p. 249), whose two propositions are contradictory by assigning the same pro-form, *he* (III-rd person singular masculine) to *soprano*, which has a /-male/ marker.

Once the missing (major) premiss is added by inference, the syllogism becomes correct.

Such, too, is the case of:

> There was a young man from the city
> Who saw what he thought was a kitty.
>> To make sure of that
>> He gave it a pat.
> They buried his clothes - what a pity!

Although the contradiction is neutralised by the verb „thought", which draws the receiver's attention upon the fellow's fatal mistake, there is a missing premiss. The major premiss should be inferred for the syllogism to be complete: „All felines resemble", which implies „dangerous felines resemble innocuous ones", and, further, „Thus a panther (lion, lynx etc.) might be taken for a kitty by someone who has never seen either species."

Another example:

> A famous theatrical actress
> Played best the role of malefactress.
>> Yet her home life was pure
>> Except, to be sure,
> A scandal or two, just for practise.

The contradiction is, apparently, that between *malefactress* and *pure*. Yet, the reasoning is correct:

P$_1$ = inference = A person cannot be two different persons at the same time.

P$_2$: An actress is to seem many different persons

Concl: Yet, this is only appearance, not essence (or else she would not be a single human being any longer).

The implication of the apparent contradiction is: she was herself on stage and acting „pure home life" outside stage.

Countless instances of situational humour can be forged upon the pattern of apparent contradiction. For instance:

> Condiţiile fericirii
> Sunt şapte. Iată-le: Să fii frumos
> şi sănătos şi tînăr şi bogat.
> Incult şi prost şi singur.
>> (Mihai Codreanu, *Condiţiile fericirii*),

where the hidden thesis seems to be a plea for egoism, having in view that socially acceptable things culture, intelligence and... marriage) are not (necessarily) prerequisites of happiness, on the contrary. Humour combines with irony, in this case, since the apparent bona-fide enumeration in fact hides the author's disapproval of such hypothetical individuals. The discussion of the underlying question whether all that is socially acceptable can lead to individual happiness is beyond our scope; what ensues from the text is clear, nevertheless, as to the author's cynical attitude towards this problem.

A possible development of this mechanisms of apparent contradiction would be the source of *quiproquo* in drama, whether solved by a *deus-ex-machina* (like Ariel who dissipates the spell that had made Titania fall in love with ass-headed Bottom), or by the game of circumstance (the revelation of Jack Worthing's real identity in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*). Like anything else, *quiproquo* can not only generate humour, but become the object of humour, itself:

> In form and feature, face and limb,
> I grew so like my brother
> That folks got taking me for him
> And each for one another.

It puzzled all our kith and kin,
It reached an awful pitch:
For one of us was born a twin,
And not a soul knew which.

...

Our close resemblance turned the tide
Of my domestic life;
For, somehow, my intended bride
Became my brother's wife.
In short, year after year, the same
Absurd mistakes went on;
And when I died – the neighbours came
And buried brother John.
(H. S. Leigh, *The Twins*)

Not only apparent contradiction, but also our strife to find some logic in everything can be mocked at. Perhaps an excerpt in *Through the Looking-Glass* is relevant for the ultimate absurdity of starting from an incorrect premiss and trying to assign degrees of probability and, ultimately, truth-values to utterances:

„I know what you're thinking about," said Tweedledum: „but it isn't so, nohow."

„Contrariwise," continued Tweedledee, „if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."
(L. Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*, 235)

Like /+contradictory/ mechanisms, /-contradictory/ones are paraphrasable without the loss of their humorous effect; one way of demonstrating this fact would be via translation (which, at least in one of its meanings, could be viewed as interlinguistic paraphrase); some of the examples above in translation could prove the preservation of the effect:

Un bariton faimos din Havana,
Lunecă groaznic pe o banană,
şi boli preţ de-un an.

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Iar apoi, năpristan,
Cariera-şi relvă ca soprană.
*

Un june-orăşean, într-o doară,
Zărind un soi de mîţişoară,
Incercă s-o alinte
Ca pe-o mîţă cuminte.
Păcat! Ţoalele-i îngropară.
*

O actriţă faimoasă juca
Cel mai bine în rol de lichea.
Insă - acasă - nici gînd!
Numai din cînd în cînd
Cu-un scandal, două, se exersa.
(my translations – C. T.)

Although /+inference/ /+paraphrase/ mechanisms can enter virtually infinite combinations with other elements which are not only other mechanisms of humour or of the absurd but also mechanisms of irony and satire or, furthermore, incongruities which could be interpreted as tragical, grotesque etc., whenever laughter accompanies an incongruity which can be characterised as /+inference/ /+paraphrase/, among other possible features, the latter falls into either of the two categories /+ or - contradictory/, regardless of the type of text it appears in. Although the corpus under analysis contains only humorous verse, it is likely that the same mechanisms could be traced in prose, and drama as well, having in view the previously demonstrated statement that there are no mechanisms of humour in prose or drama which could not appear in verse as well.

VI. 2. /+inference/ /-paraphrase/ Linguistic mechanisms of humour

A possible synthetic definition of the mechanisms in question would be obvious, having in view the previous discussion. They could be defined

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as those linguistically based mechanisms of incongruity which are reacted to by laughter. Since any clear-cut borderline between the logical and the linguistic is impossible to draw because of the tight interdependence and interconnection between thought and language, the criterion of paraphrasability can be resorted to for a definition of the mechanisms in question as against the previously described ones (see supra VI. 1.). In such a light, the term *linguistically based* would be equivalent to *unparaphrasable without the loss of the expected humorous effect* a category noted as /-paraphrase/.

The mechanisms in question are clearly mechanisms of ambiguity; the incongruities generating such ambiguity could be defined, as in the cases described so far, against the background of expectation; yet, the layer of expectation involved is not that of logical reasoning (which is universal) but that of linguistic competence (which is language-specific).

In a manner similar to linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour (see supra, V. 2.), /+inference/ /-paraphrase/ mechanisms rely on analogies in attributing meaning to signifier, the latter being characterised by a double linearity:

a) horizontal, regarding syntagmatic arrangement;
b) vertical, regarding paradigmatic choice.

Therefore, the respective functions of meaning differentiation and meaning choice are involved, as with absurd humour, in the decoding mechanism of plain humour, as well.

Should we consider:

> There was a young lady named Hall,
> Who fell in the spring in the fall.
> > 'Twould have been a sad thing
> > Had she died in the spring
> But she didn't; she died in the fall,

an attempt at disambiguation would necessarily contain:
a) differentiating the items *spring* and *fall* as sources of ambiguity, because the arrangement into sentences does not offer data as to which of their meanings is to be taken prior to the others (*fall* (n) – *to fall-fell-fallen* (v.); where the noun *fall* can have, in its turn, three meanings: 1. (Am) autumn; 2.

waterfall; 3. (as a deverbal noun) act of falling, and, on the other hand, *spring* (n) and to *spring-sprang-sprung* (v) where the noun *spring* can mean: 1. season; 2. source of water; 3. act of springing).
b) choosing one or another meaning of the two items in question, in order to build up possible interpretations of the limerick.

There are nine such interpretations (the number of permutations possible in this case), out of which some would provide a „correct" meaning, but destroy the humorous effect. For instance:

– Young miss Hall fell into the waterfall in spring, but she only died in autumn;

– Young miss Hall fell into the spring in autumn, but she only died when she reached the waterfall;

– Young miss Hall fell while springing into the waterfall, but she didn't die because of springing, but because of falling, etc.[6]

It is clear that this intricate interplay among homonymy, polysemy and paronymy is language-specific; perhaps possible only in English (see supra, III. 4); the attempts at paraphrase, all devoid of humour, plead, on the other hand, for a uniqueness or maybe, a *text-specificity* of the wordplay.

In this case decoding (by which we mean, here, the identification and disambiguation of the incongruity) will be oriented first syntagmatically and afterwards paradigmatically. The fundamental condition for ambiguity to exist in a text appears at the syntagmatic level and could be labelled as *non-restrictive cotext, i. e. a cotext which permits at least 2 possible equally valid links between signifier and signified, offering no information as to which decoding is prior to the other*. Laughter could then, arise from at least two situations:

a) the receiver's very indecision as to priority and the subsequent impossibility of option for one or another possible decoding (as is the case above)

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[6] An interpretation of this limerick as humour of situation (why should dying in spring be sadder than in some other season?) is excluded by the presence of the article the in front of the noun *spring*, thus orienting the decoding towards only two of the three possible meanings: either *source of water* or *act of springing* and excluding the third. „Thus a word may have several distinct meanings; several meanings connected with one-another; several meanings which need one-another to complete their meaning" (Empson, 1965, p. 5)

b) when one of the possible options is a taboo, laughter arises from the clash between the strained would-be priority suggested by the social-historical notion of decorum and the real one, the option which fulfils the release-function of humour. An example, illustrative of this latter case:

> There was a young man of Ostend
> Who went for a drink with a friend;
> They had a few jars
> With two boys in some bars,
> And so each had a friend in the end.[7]

A complex pun (as is the one on Miss Hall, above) involves the inventory of the subsequent paradigms, in order to be decoded; yet, it seems that, in some cases, the ambiguity can be solved syntagmatically. The second limerick quoted above, whose taboo-meaning results from a literal interpretation of a set-phrase, does not require the inventory of a paradigm in order to be decoded; a set phrase is, normally, monosemantic, and the syntagm in which it appears will sufficiently clear up its misuse.

Like mechanisms of absurd humour, /-paraphrase/ mechanisms of humour can produce two categories of effects, according to whether their decoding stops at the syntagmatic level or goes further into paradigms, respectively:

1. effects on the morpho-syntactical level and
2. effects on the lexico-phonetical level,

obviously separable only methodologically, if the interdependence syntagm-paradigm is considered, on the one hand, but also because almost all incongruities (and especially in English) combine several elementary mechanisms of humour.

The analogy with absurd humour is not only possible but necessary, since the latter is a species of humour as well. Still, at least one set of major differences can be identified between the two varieties (plain vs. absurd humour), due to the fact that the latter is marked for absurdity. As discussed

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[7] This distinction could, perhaps, become the starting point in a study of genre, since „clean" versus „bawdy" could be described adopting this point of view.

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above (see supra, V. 2.), *absurd humour is performance astray from/outside the norm, whereas plain humour is incongruous to expectation within/in the limits of the linguistic norm.*

This seems to be a definitory constraint upon the type of linguistic creativity (seen as generative system) implied in the two species; if absurd humour of language is characterised by the presence of nonce-elements entering grammatical sequences, plain humour of language is perhaps characterised by an unexpected distribution of already existing elements. *Puns could then, be defined to the extent to which this distribution (in a non-restrictive cotext) is liable to be interpreted as humorously incongruous to expectation (in this case, linguistic competence) because of the analogy with the latter it leads to.*

Such a definition of the pun has been preferred to the point of view of traditional stylistics (at times overlapping with elements of what has been, again traditionally, labelled as rhetorics), because of reasons which will be demonstrated in what follows.

VI. 2. 1. Arguments for a redefinition of the pun

Almost all traditional definitions of style stress two basic aspects: *recurrence* and *collocation*. Since any particular idiolect could fall into this definition, the following aspects ought to be added to it: *intentionality* and *effectiveness*.

Should *style*, then, be definable as *any intentional systematic recurrence of collocational patterns which produces a certain aesthetic effect*, the „cultural competence" of the receiver should be considered, in its social and historical determinism. The Shakespearean pun, for instance, is, nowadays, to a great extent perceived as wordplay devoid of any humorous effect; since non-humorous puns were extensively used as rhetorical devices in Shakespeare's time, there is little we could infer by conjecture as to the reaction to and effect of puns in the epoch.

Stylistics, on the other hand, has often been referred to in a double meaning (as consisting of a more or less limited stock of tropes and figures to which a description of functional styles or registers is added).

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Having in view our previous definition of humour, as an instance of non-bona-fide communication in which ambiguity triggers off at least two alternative readings of a script, one of them incongruous to expectation, at least theoretically, all tropes and figures of speech are liable to produce incongruity to expectation in a text.

Various authors at various times have given more or less „exhaustive" lists of tropes and figures of speech, either heavily drawing upon medieval rhetoric or upon more recent deconstructivist research.[8]

Two aspects seem to have been constantly overlooked:

1. that one mechanism never acts in isolation, but combined with others, thus listing all the possible combinations would make any such taxonomy uselessly complicated[9]; that there is one or several simple linguistic mechanisms that can be isolated in each of these instances of incongruity, whose listing is not only less difficult, but also more general, because it leaves open the possibility for new combinations to appear.

Should alliteration be considered, in the traditional sense (repetition of similar sounds in close succession), its „pure" variant is not likely to create incongruity in a text, on the contrary, it is liable to give more cohesion to the text in question, imparting to it a mnemotechnical quality. Yet, alliteration is involved in homophony, paronymy, repetition and syntactic parallelism which could become mechanisms of humour, its association with the latter, enhancing the humorous effect.

The limerick on Miss Hall discussed above (see supra p. 196) could prove this point, as well; similar words in stress-bearing syllables:

Who *fell* in the spring in the *fall*

create an alliterative effect which adds up to homonymy and polysemy; moreover, there is also an antonymic relation between *to spring – to fall*, on the one hand, and *spring – fall* (seasons) on the other.

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[8] Genette's reduction of all figures of speech to one fundamental mechanism, that of metonymy, is notable in this respect

[9] Such are, for instance Sister Miriam Joseph's or Brian Vickers' attempts at analysing Shakespeare's wordplay

A traditional handbook of stylistics will call this a „sustained or multiple pun" (Galperin, 1977, pp.151-2), making no further specification as to *how* it is sustained or multiplied.

In the case of:

If flies are flies because they fly,
And fleas are fleas because they flee,
Then bees are bees because they be.,

a traditional stylistic analysis could point at the following elements:

– repetition accompanied by syntactic parallelism (and, perhaps, gradation)

– the existence of a rhythmical pattern and rhyme in verses 2-3

– the placement under main stress of similar or slightly different sound-clusters (alliteration).

– ultimately, the whole sequence could be characterised as *zeugma* („use of a word in the same grammatical but different semantic relations to two adjacent words in the context, the semantic relations being, on the one hand literal, and, on the other, transferred" – Galperin, 1977, p. 150)

Before trying to make sense of what „literal and transferred semantic relations" might mean, let us point at the fact that the tercet is a mock-definition, trying to point at some would-be etymology, and that it is arranged in the if... then pattern of a syllogism.

If the first line correctly points at the etymology (the noun *fly* is a deverbal derivative of *to fly*, by conversion), in the second line there is no correct etymological explanation; (*flea* < OE *flea* < O. Du. *vlo* has nothing to do with to *flee-fled-fled* < OE *fleon* – OHG – *fliohan* – ON *fly*); the „catch-line" which creates incongruity is the third, where confusion arises between *bee*(n) and *to be*, because of homophony. The verb used in the short infinitive instead of the present tense (which is frequent dialectally and in poorly educated speech) will enhance the effect of homophony; attributing to the verb its first dictionary meaning, „to exist", leads to the absurd interpretation X *is X because it exists*. Considering the definition of *zeugma* quoted above, let us point at what sorts of „semantic relations" could possibly be involved.

Paradigmatically, there is the relation of homophony (a variant of homonymy which might lead to confusion of signifiers assigning a new, non-existing meaning to the verb *to be*, as a would-be denominal of the noun *bee*).

Syntagmatically, the relationship of affinity (given by the parallel construction) will supersede the relationship of attraction (which, under normal circumstances, would dictate the agreement of the verb *to be* in the present, III-rd person plural); the confusion is favoured by the mimetic aspect of the syntactical parallelism and enhanced by the fact that the correct agreement appears earlier in the verse (bees *are* bees).

Since there is an underlying linguistic mechanism to *zeugma* and it consists of several sub-mechanisms which can not only be analysed further (homophony + syntactic parallelism + affinity), but can also enter other combinations and form new mechanisms of the pun (for instance, the same combination: syntactic parallelism + affinity + antonymy of a certain type can generate the oxymoron in Caragiale's „curat-murdar"), we consider that *characterising mechanisms of humour by means of stylistic devices, exclusively, is insatisfactory.*

The pun has been generically called *paronomasia* (Vickers, 1971) and has been analysed into several subspecies; Vickers' examples are from Shakespeare:

a) *polyptoton* (echoing a word with another word in the same family)

    Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood

b) *paronomasia* proper (repetition of a word similar in sound to one already used)

    Not my deserts but what I will deserve

or: Cousins indeed; and by their uncle cozen'd.

c) *antanaclasis* (repetition of a word while shifting from one meaning to another)

    O, cursed be the hand that made these holes,
    Cursed the heart that had the heart to do it!
    Cursed the blood that let blood run from hence!

d) *syllepsis* (use of a word having two different meanings without repeating it)

    Your imprisonment shall not be long;

    I will deliver or else *lie* for you.
  where lie means either *go to prison* or *tell lies*.

e) *asteismus* (in which a word is returned by the answerer with an unlooked-for second meaning)

    – With this, my lord, myself have nought to do!
    – Nought to do with Mistress Shore! I tell thee fellow,
     He that doth nought with her, excepting one,
     Were best to do it secretly alone.

Vickers' manner of defining the pun may lead to multiple confusions between the types; a brief analysis of his subspecies reveals at least the following aspects:

1. *polyptoton* and *paronomasia* are not differentiated clearly enough; *desert* and *deserve* are members of the same word-family, as well, so that they could be an example of *polyptoton*; *cousin* and *to cozen* are genealogically related (the latter being a XVI-th century cant term for *to cheat*, probably obtained, according to the COD (*COD*, 1976, p. 237), from the former, by degradation of meaning and conversion).

2. *Paronomasia* is, consequently, defined and illustrated astray from its essential feature: paronymy (or even homonymy) which is, by definition, accidental, not etymologically grounded.

3. *Antanaclasis* could be confused with *anaphora* (defined by Vickers among the figures of speech which are not puns, and illustrated by:

    Then curs'd she Richard, then curs'd Buckingham
    Then curs'd she Hastings).

No „change of meaning" results, on the other hand, in the verb *to curse* as it appears in the quotation with which *antanaclasis* is illustrated.

4. The difference between *syllepsis* and *asteismus* (non-repetition/repetition of ambiguous item) seems to be a purely quantitative, mechanically-based one; the fact that they rely on homonymy respectively polysemy and that in the case of *syllepsis* the context is non-restrictive, whereas with *asteismus* the repetition of the item is a disambiguating one, in a restrictive context, is not grasped.

Finally, *antanaclasis* could be confused with *zeugma* (defined as „the same verb for two disparate objects", with no mention of the fact that a proper/figurative meaning interplay occurs).

Such inconsistencies could, perhaps, be accounted for by the shift in mentality and interpretation separating us from Shakespeare's age. Without venturing into any conjecture on the possible effect of these devices on their original receivers it should be mentioned that not all of them are perceived as humorous nowadays. Nor is the contemporary notion of pun always associated with laughter, and this might be an outcome of its double function: rhetorical and humorous.

If, then, all humorous instances of pun can be assigned a rhetorical value, as well, the reverse statement is not valid.

It is our aim to demonstrate in this section of our discussion that non-restrictive cotext is the marker of the humorous pun, in other words, *that humorous puns are those puns which function in a non-restrictive cotext* (which is the sine-qua-non condition of ambiguity).

For this purpose, our analysis ought not only to list some formal features of the pun, but also to probe into the potential sources of humour and give the basic mechanisms which could combine to create new types of pun. These basic mechanisms are linguistic and they pertain to two formalizable levels:

   a) the syntagmatic level (arrangement in an *and ... and* sequence). At this level all morpho-syntactic features of the would-be pun can be analysed in terms of affinity, attraction, etc.

   b) the paradigmatic level (choice within an *and ... or* series) where the lexico-phonetical structures function and allow the pun to take shape through polysemy, homonymy, paronymy, antonymy, synonymy, etc.)

Obviously, this delineation is methodological, both levels being cotextually determined. Still, such an approach could be justified by the fact *that normally one such mechanism will always generate the same type of pun*; the great typological variety of the existing puns and the virtual infinity of potential ones could be accounted for by the incalculable number of possible combinations of two or more such „primary" or „elementary" mechanisms which we shall try to list and analyse in what follows.

VI. 2. 2. Mechanisms of humour based on syntagmatic arrangement

There are rather few mechanisms of humour based on licenses from the rules of morphology or syntax. Such a license will usually be judged as ungrammatical and, as it has been discussed above, ungrammatical performance does not lead to plain humour, but to absurd humour, on condition that a certain degree of intelligibility be still discernible. Intelligibility is a function of cotext, like non-restrictiveness. In this light, a morpho-syntactically based mechanism of humour will function under the double cotextual constraint of:

   a) *intelligibility*, which dictates the balance between grammaticality and acceptability necessary for a script to function as text (and not fake-text or mock-text as is the case with humorous absurd and absurd humour)

   b) *non-restrictiveness*, which dictates the possibility for at least two equally valid readings to coexist for the same script, either of them validating it as text, a coexistence traditionally defined as ambiguity. At least one of these possible readings should be in some way incongruous to expectation; the type of incongruity should entitle its interpretation as humorous.

The notion of text seems to be, thus, the object of two contradictory definitions, apparently pulverising its traditional content. Various examples in our discussion so far could be questioned as to their status as text, in accordance with what has been so far defined and described as such. Although it is not our intention to re-discuss here the concept of text, it must be mentioned that, in the case of literary humour, any script endowed with a humorous illocutionary potential might induce the reaction of laughter, even if it cannot be qualified as text. Even „unintelligible" scripts, like *Jabberwocky*, stir up laughter, although they cannot be fitted into the consecrated category of text.

Still, *Jabberwocky* is grammatical; its sources of humour lie in the game on acceptability, a game within much larger limits than those of grammaticality.[10] Theoretically, at least, there should be a fair chance for

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[10] Grammaticality and acceptability in generative-transformational terms.

non-grammatical performance to become a source of humour as well. Practically, although such examples exist, they are very few as compared to the great bulk of other sources of humour, because exclusively ungrammatical performance has a much slighter chance to become ambiguous. Grammaticality involves the linguistic concept of *norm* and the labels correct/incorrect cannot and do not give room to interpretation (by which we here mean a potentiality for a second reading to be possible). No mechanism of humour in the corpus considered for analysis functions exclusively on the basis of misadded morphemes or an incorrect sequence of tenses, for instance, unless these blend with another elementary mechanism of humour like, say, homonymy or polysemy. In other words, a grammar mistake is never funny unless the author makes it so, by ambiguating it and placing it in a non-restrictive cotext. On the other hand, accidental grammar mistakes are excluded from the area subject to discussion here (that of artefact).

The decisive factor setting the mechanisms discussed in this section apart from those involving paradigmatic decoding is their *relative self-containedness*; the cotext *offers the necessary and sufficient data for their disambiguation and full decoding*.

For instance, in:

    An amoeba named Sam and his brother,
    While having a drink with each-other,
      In the midst of their quaffing
      They split their sides laughing,
    And each of them now is a mother.

The mechanism of humour is based on an unacceptable split inside a set-phrase which is taken literally (split their sides/laughing). The last verse ignores part of the set-phrase and refers only to „split their sides". In any other context, this would be absurd; yet, when amoebae are involved, the reader faces the *only* instance in which a split in one's side could make one a mother, since amoebae multiply by scissiparity (division of cellular nuclei) and, being monocellular organisms, the division will include a split of their cellular membranae, i. e., „their sides". Once this incongruity solved, three other secondary incongruities are neutralised as well:

  a) an amoeba /+animate/ cannot have a name and a brother /+human/,

  b) neither can it have a drink proper,
  c) nor can someone named Sam and his (male)brother become mothers (-male).

All three aspects can be assigned to the personification resulting from the cotext.

Moreover, there seems to be a specific polarisation of the cotext around the incongruity, in that the data necessary for decoding are given *before* the structure-breaking item appears; the word *amoeba* as well as elements of personification appear before the split set-phrase; „split their sides laughing" is accepted alongside with the convention of personifying an „animal". The last verse reveals the unacceptable split in the set phrase, its having been taken literally, meanwhile being a kind of reinforcement of the inference. Perhaps this is what saves the limerick from being absurd.

Another example might reinforce this hypothesis:

Fable: There was a young lady named Rood
     Who was such an absolute *prude* – datum for decoding
      That she pulled down the blind
      While *changing // her mind* – split set phrase
       end of fable
Denouement: Lest a curious eye should intrude – confirmed inference.

A similar mechanism is the one based on prepositional verbs (which could be considered somewhat halfway between set phrases and compounds):

    A housewife called out with a frown
    When surprised by some callers from town:
      „In a minute or less
      I'll slip on a dress."
    But she slipped on the stairs and came down.

The unacceptable split is that between *slip//on* vs. *slip on*, with the respective meanings:

  a) slip on//something (article of clothing) = dress, put on
  b) slip//on something (locative) = lose equilibrium

By analogy with *slip//on the stairs*, *slip//on* a dress might be reinterpretable as absurd, if the cotext did not contain the word „surprised"; in oral form, the accentual structure of /'slip'n/ versus /'slip'n/, as well as the jun-

cture which is open, respectively close, will also help disambiguate the limerick. The fact that, in this case, the decoding must go further into paradigms could be accounted for by the blending of a morphological device with a lexicological one: the adverbial particle *on* has become part of the verb *to slip on* (something = article of dress) and has no linking function, generating, by radiation, a meaning completely new for the phrasal verb, while the phonemical structure has remained the same, thus creating polysemy.

It is obvious that whenever a word becomes part of a set phrase or the core of a phrasal verb, its meaning undergoes a shift from proper to figurative, at times even metaphorical, meaning. Although this is basically a mechanism of *zeugma*, it is almost always involved in unacceptably split set phrases, as in:

> • „La Capşa" unde vin toţi seniorii
> Local cu două mari despărţituri
> Într-una se mănîncă prăjituri
> şi-n alta se mănîncă... scriitorii.
>
> (N. Crevedia, *Cafeneaua*)

This example is not only illustrative for the mechanism under discussion in this section; the homonymy between the impersonal particle „se" and the reciprocal pronoun „se" which appear in syntactically parallel constructions favour the analogy in interpreting the second occurrence of „se mănîncă" as an impersonal construction as well (which could lead to an absurdity). This is a mechanism typical to Romanian, which disappears in a raw translation (cookies are eaten/writers eat at each-other). Even if a literary translation is possible, the mechanism in Romanian cannot be fully equated; the English text becomes something different:

> At „Capşa's", where the highlife often come,
> There are two giant rooms, preventing bother:
> There's folks who feed on cakes and sweets in one,
> And' round, there's writers feeding on each-other.
>
> (my translation – C. T.)

A less complex mechanism, where the split happens inside a word, which absolutely fortuitously contains a sound-combination homonymous with the beginning of an idiomatical construction, is that in:

> Pentru ostaşul pişicher,
> De pui şi preţul în balanţă,
> Vermutul cel mai bun e ver-
> Mutul de la manutanţă.
>
> (Al. O. Teodoreanu, $x^x x$)

Since fortuitous, such mechanisms are extremely rare (and so much the more effective); plain misaffixation, on the other hand, which could sum up some of the features of the type of pun described here, generally has an absurd overtone, as performance outside the norm, and has been discussed above (see supra, V. 2.1)

A far greater number of mechanism of humour could be identified in the syntax of humorous verse, especially in word-order (because of the reasons enumerated above, licenses in agreement, tense, mood, aspect, etc., are not likely, in themselves, to yield plain humour, but absurd humour).

Mention should be made of the fact that plain versification alone can be a source of humour in jokes (probably because it is incongruous to expectation in a stretch of prose); humorous sayings are, also, often versified to the same effect.

The simplest mechanism in this category is enumeration and its derivative (quantitative or qualitative hendiadys): the elements are generally rhymed, unlike in prose or drama, and thus engender short, extremely effective lines:

> Prieteni şi rude,
> Bibani, caracude,
> Defilare,
> Ambetare,
> Decoraţii
> Luminaţii
> Artifiţii
> Căţelul coanii Siţii,
> Pierdut în mulţime!
>
> (George Ranetti, *10 Mai*)

To enhance the humorous effect, elements incongruous to the initial semantic field break the hendiadys, expectation, and become sources of humour (for instance, the puppy above); in either cases, the same pattern telegraphically describes an incident:

> Combinaţii,
> Altercaţii,
> Soţie infidelă,
> Sudalme, palme, umbrelă,
> Bătaie,
> Spart capu nea Nae,
> Secţie,
> Infecţie,
> Comisar,
> · Potlogar,
> Cinci lei jumătate, –
> Libertate.
> (idem)

or:

> Work!
> Did I used to work? /sic!/
> I seem to remember it
> Out there.
> Millions of fools are still at
> It
> Jumping about
> All over the place...
> And what's the good of it all?
> Buzz,
> Hustle,
> Pop,
> And then...
> Dump
> In the grave.
> (J. C. Squire, *The Parodist's Impression of the Impressionists.*
> *If a New Poet Had Written, The Lotus Eaters"*)

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The primary mechanism can become the skeleton of a more complex structure also involving non-humorous elements (simile, metaphor, epithet) which combine, in the context, to create incongruity:

> Un zgomot curios ce-l fac
> Guzganii cînd încep să roadă
> Apoi un miorlăit ce-auzi
> Cînd tragi pisicile de coadă...
>
> Pe urmă, lătrăturile de cîni,
> Oftări de bufniţe ascunse,
> Uruituri ca de tramvai
> Cu osiile-n veci neunse...
>
> Orăcăieli ca de broscoi
> şi gemete de agonie,
> Sughiţuri grele de om beat,
> Gorgoane ca din psaltichie
> (D. Teleor, *Critica unei bucăţi muzicale.*
> *De D-nul G. S.)*

The epithet can become oxymoronic and the enumeration can grow into hendiadys; here is but one of the many such instances in Shakespeare's work:

Berowne:
> I that have been love's whip,
> A very beadle to the humorous sigh;
> A critic, nay, a night-watch constable,
> A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
> Than whom no mortal so magnificent!
> This wimpled, whining, purblind, wayward boy,
> This senior-junior, giant-dwarf, Dan Cupid;
> Regent of love-rhymes, lord of folded arms,
> The anointed sovereign of sighs and groans,
> Liege of all loiterers and malecontents,
> Dread prince of plackets, king of codpieces,
> Sole imperator and great general

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Of trotting 'paritors[*]:

　　　(Love's Labour's Lost, III, 1)

and, in the same vein, in Romanian:

　　Apariţie banală ca un fund de farfurie!
　　Talere cu două feţe! Cap de monstru fără trup!
　　Orologiu fără ace! Nastur de manta! Chelie!
　　Felinar! Conrupătoare de minore! Cantalup!
　　　(Topîrceanu, *Apostrofe la lună* in *Parodii
　　　originale. Unui începător de talent*)

or *Cioara*, which is an entire poem consisting of one uninterrupted hendi-
adys.

　　Plain enumeration contains in itself a certain mechanics of repetition;
still, it can be blended with manifestly repetitive patterns which can become
distinct mechanisms of humour. Such repetitive patterns can envisage a word,
a line (becoming a refrain) or a syntactical pattern: repetitive question,
recurrent clause – arrangement (or, in classical terms, syntactic parallelism);
the latter can occur as plain repetition of elements, symmetrically, or by
successive substitutions of elements in analogous structures.

　　The repetition of a word can not only create incongruity by displa-
cement, but also implicitly has an alliterative character:

　　　I saw a jolly hunter
　　　　With a jolly gun
　　　Walking in the country
　　　　In the jolly sun.

　　In the jolly meadow
　　　　Sat a jolly hare.
　　Saw the jolly hunter.
　　　　Took jolly care.

　　Hunter jolly eager –

---

[*] paritor < apparitor = officer in the bishop's court

Sight of jolly prey.
Forgot gun pointing
Wrong jolly way.
　　(Charles Causley, *I Saw a Jolly Hunter*)

　　The repeated word is not only highlighted but can, as in the example
above, illustrate, ironically a ludicrous linguistic habit; the stereotypical
usage of certain items or turns of phrase (in this case with a jargon – based
connotation) can also become a source of humour when repetitive questions
are involved. The text below is also marked for text-type analogy, in that it
pastiches a famous quotation as well as logical patterns studied in the
medieval *Trivium*:

　　… „he came, saw and overcame: he came, one; saw, two; overcame,
three. Who came? the king: Why did he come? to see: Why did he see? to
overcome: To whom came he? to the beggar: What saw he? the beggar. The
conclusion is victory: on whose side? the beggar's. The catastrophe is a
nuptial: on whose side? the king's, no, on both in one, or one in both. [...]
Shall I command thy love? I may: Shall I enforce thy love? I could: Shall I
entreat thy love? I will. What shalt thou exchange for rags? robes; for tittles?
titles; for thyself? me."

　　　(Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, I)

　　Other elementary mechanisms, beside the succession of questions, are
involved in the excerpt. „both in one or one in both" is an antiparallel or
symmetrical construction; *rags/robes* and *tittles/tattles* are puns based on
antonymy + paronymy, respectively, plain paronymy; the gradation in the
deontic value of the modals *may/could/will* also has a rhetorical function. To
add that this is a mock-love letter only justifies the lavish display of
mechanisms of incongruity.

　　In a different register, a succession of exclamations also achieves a
rhetorically-based humorous effect; by coincidence Topîrceanu's *Blesteme*
is also marked for text-type analogy, being a parody after Arghezi:

　　　In două surcele de vreasc să se facă
　　　Picerele tale, făptură buimacă.
　　　Plesni-ţi-ar timpanu,

Să n-auzi cînd trece traivanu.
Să uiți la cetanii tipicul
și psalmii în zi de Crăciun.
Să n-ai după masă tutun.
Să-ți puță buricul.

Vedea-te-aș în vreo fițuică
Pus cu litere de-o șchioapă.
Curge-ți-ar pe-o nară țuică
Pe cealaltă numai apă.
Lăudat-te-ar Bogdan Duică
și pupa-te-ar Popa Iapă!
                    (Topîrceanu, *Blesteme*)

Topîrceanu's text also exhibits a mechanism of humour somewhat apart from plain syntactical arrangement, but impossible outside or away from it, although it could be rather labelled as semantical-stylistic: any enumeration in a cotext marked for style, involves the expectation of some gradation, climatic or anticlimatic. When no gradation occurs, a quantitative hendiadys is liable to appear; when the gradation is involved, the potential hendiadys is qualitative. A series of curses is expected to be climatically gradated and Topîrceanu's text observes the rule, depicting the character's growing irritation, in the first six lines of the quotation. The seventh line is humorously incongruous to this expectation of gradual development towards a climax. The implication that running out of tobacco after lunch (the time when one's need to smoke is the most irrepressible) is a catastrophe greater than to forget the psalms on Christmas day is, obviously, humorous; the mechanism is, nevertheless, rather logically-based than plainly linguistic, since it implies situational humour.

Another simple repetitive structure is implied in the humorous refrain, consisting of generally one syntagm repeated regularly. The most widely encountered such cases are those implying the repetition of a verse at the end of a stanza; yet, half-verses can also become refrains and the number of lines or logical units after which such structures occur can be variable or irregular.

Like repeated words, refrains imply a certain mechanics of incongruity, resulting from the manner in which the stretch between two refrains is organised to become incongruous to the latter. The extreme case is that in which a text becomes its own refrain, being repeated with the successive loss of a word or a letter; two popular humorous songs might prove that the mechanism exists both in English and Romanian. By successively eliminating the last word in the sentence:

Oh, sir Roger, do not touch me!,

the following sequence is obtained:

Oh, Sir Roger, do not touch!
Oh, Sir Roger, do not!
Oh, Sir Roger, do!
Oh, Sir Roger!
Oh, Sir!
Oh!

The same mechanism of successive ellipsis, bringing about a shift in the semantics of illocution could function in Romanian, as well: potentially, a translation of the initial sentence into Romanian (O, domnu'Roger, nu m-atingeți!) could undergo the same change and become a humorous song as well; still, Romanian word order imposes a different gradation in the illocutionary value of the sentences.

A popular song in Romanian, on the other hand, is based on a mechanism of apocope; the initial text consists of three lines, of which the first and third are identical:

Stă de veghe și privește ploșnița în *zare*
E atît de *mare* și atît de *tare*
Stă de veghe și privește ploșnița în *zare*.

By successive apocope, only the first clipped item stays a word, the other two elements become absurd. If *zare* and *za* mean something in Romanian, *mar/ma* and *tar/ta* do not. The second repetition of the text is altogether absurd: *ploșnița în zar* (the bedbug in the die), which is *mar* and *tar*, is as Jabberwockian as *ploșnița în za* (the bedbug in a *coat of mails* or *ring*) and its attributes *ma* and *ta*. Finally, *ploșnița în z* which has the

attributes *m* and *t* is absurdly incongruous to a new expectation, that of abbreviation. Z, *m* and *t* do not abbreviate any taboos in Romanian, no (evident, at least) hidden polysemy or homonymy is discovered, so the expectation remains open. A strong suspicion that the song could be a nursery rhyme might account for its absurdity.

No such examples are present in the corpus under analysis, though, since such texts are little likely to be written down. Much of their humorous potential lies in their being lengthily sung (the lines in the English text are even intercalated with another refrain), thus building up, somewhat mechanically and time-consumingly an expectedly humorous dénouement which is only obvious in the English text, the Romanian one remaining absurd.

Written humorous verse meets, in this respect, a simpler pattern of refrain. Refrains can be a logical conclusion to a situation or, contrarily, revert it radically towards its opposite. If the latter case is manifest in all but the last stanza of Topîrceanu's *Catrene imporvizate*:

> Ai tot ce-ți trebuie: hîrtie,
> Cerneală, public indulgent,
> Parale și tipografie, -
> Dar n-ai talent.
>
> Te-ai instalat în Capitală
> Ca să creezi și tu curent.
> Vrei să te-afirmi ca cap de școală,-
> Dar n-ai talent.
>
> La cafenea cînd vii alene
> Iți iei un aer grav, absent...
> Satisfăcut te umfli-n pene,-
> Dar n-ai talent.
>
>> (Topîrceanu, *Catrene improvizate*
>> (*în onoarea ilustrului Tăzlăoanu*)),

in the „envoi" of the mock-ballad the refrain becomes somewhat conclusive of the entire ironical diatribe:

> Nu ne distruge dintr-odată,
> Catone, fii mai indulgent!
> Tu ai o mutră indignată,-
> Dar n-ai talent.

If with Topîrceanu the refrain beginning with *dar* (*but*) was obligatorily a contradicting of what was depicted in the stanza, the refrain can also turn into a conclusion or explanation:

> If I were only dafter
>> I might be making hymns
> To the liquor of your laughter
>> And the laquer of your limbs.
>
> But you turn across the table
>> A telescope of eyes,
> And it lights a Russian sable
>> Running circles in the skies...
> Till I go running after,
>> Obeying all your whims-
> For the liquor of your laughter
>> And the laquer of your limbs.
>> (Witter Bynner & Arthur D. Ficke, *Liquor,*
>>> *Laughter and Limbs*)

The two types of refrains can combine: the incongruity, in this case, is also created by the semantic collision between the conclusive/contradictory attitutes[11]:

> A Friend of mine was married to a scold;
> To me he came and all his troubles told.
> Said he, „she's like a woman raving mad."
> „Alas! my friend," said I, „that's very bad!"
> „No, not so bad," said he; „for, with her, true

---

[11] The „It could have been worse" theme is also exploited in Romanian humorous verse, with the same effect. See Ion Pribeagu, *Putea să fie și mai rău*, for instance.

I had both house and land, and money, too."
,,That was well," said J;
,,No, not so well," said he;
For I and her own brother
Went to law with one another;
I was cast, the suit was lost,
And every penny went to pay the cost."
,,That was bad", said I;
,,No, not so bad," said he:... etc.
(Anon, *All's Well That Ends Well*).

Even two distinct refrains can appear in a humorous poem, thus enhancing the effect:
Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime – Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air –
But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!
(T.S. Eliot, *Macavity: the Mystery Cat*)

The refrain can add a humorous-absurd note to the text it appears in, when it has apparently nothing to do with the cotext:
The auld wife sat at the ivied door,
(Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese)
A thing she had frequently done before;
And her spectacles lay on her aproned knees.
The piper he piped on the hill-top high,
(Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese)
Till the cow said ,,I die" and the goose asked ,,Why?"
And the dog said nothing, but searched for fleas.
(C.S. Calverley, *William Morris, Ballad*)

Syntactically analogous constructions, whether parallel or symmetrical could also be labelled as both enumerative and repetitive. They might

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originate in refrains; what differentiates them from the latter is the fact that one or several elements change every time the structure is repeated. These elements clearly contrast with one-another; on the other hand, the accumulation of parallel structures creates a type of expectation which will highlight even more the non-identical elements[12]:
Where the Lobsterlet lurks, and the Crablet
So slowly and sleepily crawls:
Where the Dolphin's at home and the Dablet
Pays long ceremonious calls:
Where the Grublet is sought by the Froglet:
Where the Frog is pursued by the Duck:
Where the Ducklet is chased by the Doglet -
So runs the world's luck!
(Lewis Carroll, *The Manlet* – parody after Swinburne)

The same mechanism can be identified in Romanian, too:
Las dracului necazurile mele
și-un post vacant la ,,Contabilitate".
Las dragei mele scumpa libertate,
De azi încolo poate să mă-nșele.
Nepoților le las instincte rele,
Dușmanilor, o dragoste de frate.
Las doamnei șvarț în urma mea un "nume"
și-n loc de bani – supremă mîngîiere –
Un geamantan de opere postume.
(Topîrceanu, *Testament*)

or:
E profesor (onorabil),
Autor (interminabil),
Om politic (execrabil),
Critic (foarte vulnerabil,

---

[12] By parallel structures such repetitive structures are meant whose order is resumed more or less identically (abc, abc, abc); symmetrical structures are also repetitive, equivalent quantitatively and qualitatively, but antiparallel (abc, cba, or ab, ba).

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Dar pasabil),
Președinte (incurabil).

> (Topîrceanu, *Scrisoare.*
> *Răspuns d-lui Al. O. Teodoreanu*)

Antiparallel or symmetrical structures (traditionally called chiasmus) could also be viewed as repetitive mechanisms which permit the highlighting of the elements repeated; like parallel structures they are cotext-organizing strategies by which, in the case under discussion, i. e. humour, the incongruous elements can be obviated. An antiparallel construction combined with a logical pattern (that of transitivity) can yield a highly effective and complex series of incongruities:

> One, who is not, we see: but one whom we see not, is;
> Surely this is not that: but that is assuredly this.
> What, and wherefore, and whence? for under is over and under;
> If thunder could be without lightning, lightning could be
> > without thunder.
>
> ....
> Parallel all things are: yet many of these are askew.
> You are certainly I: but certainly I am not you.
> ....
> Springs the rock from the plain, shoots the stream from the
> > rock;
> Cocks exist for the hen: but hens exist for the cock.
> God, whom we see not, is: and God, who is not, we see;
> Fiddle, we know, is diddle: and diddle, we take it, is dee.
>
> > (Swinburne, *The Higher Pantheism in a Nutsh ll*
> > (*a parody after Tennyson*)).

The same construction pattern can appear in Romanian:
> „Căci gingașele broaște sînt dulci poeți de baltă,
> Precum mulți poeți gingași sînt broaște de uscat."
> > (Alecsandri, *Odă către Bahlui*)

or:
> Cînd simți că ești mai mult decît „ciupit"
> și ca să fiu mai clar, cînd ești „făcut",
> Nu-i oportun să bei tot ce-ai plătit
> Ci numai să plătești tot ce-ai băut.
> > (Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Memento*)

Polysemy can combine with this type of construction, as well:
> In teatrul nostru liber, e liber fiecare
> Să intre, cînd arată biletul de intrare,
> Dar dacă nuditatea ideilor nu-i place
> E liber să se ducă și să ne lase-n pace.
> > (Topîrceanu, *Jos cortina*).

Chiasmus can also become a parenthetical structure represented by an absolute construction:
> Din spirit caritabil și din filantropie,
> știind mai dinainte ce toată lumea știe,
> Cu voia dumneavoastră, ne-abatem de la modă
> și-n loc de conferință, veți asculta o odă.
> > (Topîrceanu, *Bacilul lui Koch*)

Finally, the only item in the corpus where a grammar mistake is a mechanism of humour:
> Un zapis... de neagresiune,
> Precum că nu vom merge în vecii vecilor
> Nici ei asupra noastră, nici noi asupra lor –
> > (Topîrceanu, *Papură-Vodă*)

The fallacious agreement between *nu vom merge* and its first subject *ei*, generating the understatement *Ei nu vom merge asupra noastră* is, in some way, similar to a pattern in Creangă, exploiting the same mechanism:
> – Măi, Ioane, dragi ți-s fetele?
> – Dragi!
> – Dar tu lor?
> – Și ele mie! > (Creangă, *Amintiri din copilărie*, II)

Esar (1978. 227) calls this construction „echo gag". His example:
„– Do you love me for myself alone?
– Yes, for myself alone."

Nevertheless, the antiparallel construction in Topîrceanu makes the grammar mistake harder to identify, becoming a secondary mechanism of ambiguity. Chiasmus in its classical definition seems not to cover all antiparallel patterns which generate humour:

In: Înnegrim sinonim, înnegrim
                        Mii de topuri de file curate:
                        Unanim urmărim, unanim,
                        Un bust bárem în posteritate.

                        Mormăim monorim, mormăim,
                        Aspirînd cu sforţări desperate
                        Patronim sã rodim patronim
                        Osebit de-al oricărui confrate,
                                (R. Vulpescu, *Poezie*)

the antiparallel structure is obtained by the identity of the first and third element in a sequence of three; the second element becomes a kind of symmetry axis in an unorthodox type of antiparallel construction.

Tu sum up the discussion in this subchapter, the mechanisms of humour based on syntagmatic arrangement identified in the corpus fall in the following groups:
1. unacceptable split inside set phrases (with a variety based on prepositional verbs) or, rarely, inside a word
2. enumeration patterns (and hendiadys) combined/not with
3. repetitive patterns (repetitive words, refrains, interrogative or exclamatory repetitive patterns, syntactically analogous patterns – parallel and symmetrical).

These elementary mechanisms can combine among themselves or with other elementary mechanisms of humour into more complex, double or manifold incongruities. There seems to be no restriction, at least theoretically, as to the number or nature of the mechanisms that can enter a

complex pun, whence the virtually infinite possibility of generating new combinations. Nevertheless, if elementary mechanisms are identified and taxonomized a formalisation of the anatomy of incongruity is possible and this is the aim of the present discussion.

VI. 2. 3. Mechanisms of humour based on paradigmatic choice

This subcategory is extremely wide including what has been traditionally labelled as *pun* along with other mechanisms which will be described in what follows.

Like with mechanisms based on syntagmatic arrangement, the dictate of *intelligibility* is observed with the items under discussion, as well (see *supra*, VI. 2.2.)

Still, unlike the former, *mechanisms based on paradigmatic choice are not self-contained* (the cotext does not offer the necessary and sufficient data for their full decoding and disambiguation). Therefore, an inventory of a paradigm (or several) is necessary in order to decode the text. The effect of such incongruities pertains to the lexico-phonetical level (see *supra*, p.193–197). The notion of *cotext-non-restrictiveness* (see VI.2.2.supra) undergoes a significant mutation, in that, since paradigmatic decoding is necessary. apparently there are cotextual clues as to which member(s) of the or...or series should be chosen.[13]

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[13] It seems that effectiveness with humour is a function of its plainness; unlike with wit, subtlety is not necessarily a matter of decoding-length, but rather of unexpectedness. Plain humour (unlike irony) should be a fully and irreversibly solved incongruity (by irreversible we here mean that no ambiguity remains as „second thought" or possible different decoding). This quick-shot puzzle should be immediately decoded and the receiver must necessarily have the feeling that he grabbed the clue, i. e. that this consensus with the author is complete. Hence his feeling of accomplishment, the non-aggressive character of humour manifest in his becoming, for a fleeting instant, an accomplice of the author, whence the pleasure of decoding. On the other hand, the irreversibility of the ultimate disambiguation, the „no-second-thought" feeling of the receiver might be held responsible for the ephemerity and staleness of the live joke. With literature, nevertheless, there is a possible second step: the re-reading of a humorous text clearly no longer activates the reader's competence as a decoder as dramatically. as first-sight-reading, but introduces a new element which is not present with

For instance, in:

> There was a young girl of Madrass
> Who had a magnificent ass,

the oscillation between the two meanings of the word *ass* would be possible because the cotext is, at first sight, non-restrictive.

Still, one of the meanings, that of *donkey*, is less liable to be selected because the epithet *magnificent* is seldom (if ever) attributable to a donkey. It is doubtful whether the selection of the meaning *human backside* would turn the distich into a humorous one: the priority of one meaning to the detriment of the other disambiguates to a certain extent the distich but also creates a state of expectation, a feeling of incompleteness. Were the two lines not to be ambiguous, the word would have, maybe, been spelled *arse*; consequently there is some intended confusion between the two meanings; the attribute *magnificent*, on the other hand, establishes a priority between the meanings, leading to a preference of *backside* to *donkey*. Also, the homonymic series only has two members; a possible personification, as in *you're an ass* is eliminated by the epithet *magnificent*; an oxymoronic combination (*magnificent stupid man*) would be justified by nothing in the cotext. Since the cotext appears to be restrictive, no humour seems to be implied. Still, the limerick continues:

> But not rounded and pink
> As you probably think
> But grey, had long ears and ate grass.

It is, again apparently clear that, nevertheless, it is the meaning *donkey* that should be prior in selection. The humorous effect seems to lie in the clash between the reader's first choice, the meaning *backside* and the author's manifest preference for the second, that of *donkey*, which, he alleges, can normally be collocated with *magnificent*. This would contradict

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oral (anonymous) jokes: the acknowledgement of the author's performance. And, perhaps, should we speculate further, this is what literature should be all about. Humorous literature, then, could be successful because it is non-aggressive to the receiver, but also because it develops the pleasure of kinship with the authorial intention. All this comment should prove the capital necessity of plainness and immediacy in the decoding of humour.

one of the tacit assumptions in one's expectation: that the author is beyond suspicion of linguistic incompetence. But so is the reader himself, in his own eyes.

What happens, in fact, is that the cotext becomes non-restrictive under an apparent restrictiveness; the humorous effect lies in the author's mockery at the receiver's first impulse to search for the taboo interpretation which is then denied him with an innocent „what-did-you-think-I-meant?" Since the reader has been skilfully led, in the first two lines, to validate the taboo interpretation (because of „magnificent"), the rest of the limerick only seems to state the author's intention to validate the non-taboo meaning, but actually allows both, to an equal extent.

The game is, consequently, one upon the apparent restrictiveness of the cotext which ultimately proves to be non-restrictive.[14]

The non-restrictiveness of cotext could be obviated even more in the case of mechanisms based on paradigmatic choice which do not belong to the category of pun. Should we consider as puns all the mechanisms of humour relying on ambiguity, not all mechanisms involving paradigmatic decoding are charged with the latter.

Mechanisms of humour based on paradigmatic choice could fall, accordingly, into two categories:

a) those which do not involve ambiguity

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[14] This type of humorous verse was called by Esar *catch-verse* (Esar, 1978, p. 127) and can be broadly illustrated to prove the point above:

> When she wants it, she wants it bad;
> When she can't have it, it makes her mad;
> When it's in her, she sure gets frisky –
> I know what you think, but I mean whisky.

or:

> She sat on the bridge in the moonlight
> And tickled his face with her toes–
> For she was a restless mosquito
> And the bridge was the bridge of his nose. (Esar, 1978, 127)

The mechanism exists in Romanian as well:

> Pentru subtilul amator
> Care-ţi respectă al său gît,
> E bună apa de izvor,
> Dar ca uzaj extern. Atît! (Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Apa de izvor*)

b) involving ambiguity.

The great bulk of items in this class falls into the second category, that of puns.

VI. 2. 3. 1. Paradigmatic mechanisms which do not involve ambiguity

Two types of effects could be ranged into this subclass: a category based on *cumulation* and one based on *opposition*. Neither is likely to create ambiguity.

a. *Cumulation* has been previously discussed under a syntagmatic angle (see *supra* VI.2.2.); the type of cumulative effect generated by the hendiadys can certainly be discussed in point of paradigmatic choice as well. It seems that the component elements of a hendiadys (or of an enumeration) are, in a relation of equivalence since they are almost always juxtaposed; paradoxically, it is this very juxtaposition in an *and...and* sequence that creates a paradigm, be it of punctual elements:

Sir Toby: You mistake knight: „accost" is front her, board her, woo her, assail her.

(Twelfth-Night, I, 3)

or: *Fluellen*: The rascally, scald, beggarly, lousy, pragging knave, Pistol

(*Henry V*, V, 1)

or consisting of entire self-contained units:

> Suspendată ca o notă
> Pe un portativ gigant;
> Slută, ca o hotentotă
> Părăsită de amant;
>
> Mică-n mijlocul naturii
> Ca un fir de praf de puşcă
> Neagră cum e cerul gurii
> La un cîine care muşcă;
> ...
> Atîrnînd de bolta goală

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> Ca un uger de catran
> Unde pruncii lui Satan
> Vin, plîngînd, să sugă smoală;
> (Topîrceanu, *Cioara*)

Since synonyms can only be validated as such by cotext, from the paradigmatical point of view a hendiadys, as well as any series of juxtaposed elements which are normally in a relation of mutual exclusiveness but appear in succession could be considered to be a cumulation of synonyms or of synonymous constructions. In our case, the stylistic effect is humour, whose cause is not ambiguity but the redundancy brought about by the cumulative effect of the juxtaposed items.

A certain gradation in the degree of redundancy is, perhaps, possible. The least redundant in a possible series would be qualitative hendiadys (see the passage from Topîrceanu, above). There is a certain appositive quality in this type of hendiadys suggesting a series of different but relevant points of view. Quantitative hendiadys would come next, with a higher degree of redundancy due to a tighter synonymy between the elements, still preserving a certain explanatory (or, according to the receiver, overexplanatory) tinge; the mania of synonymic series can become a feature of a character's language not only with Shakespeare (as in the quotation above) but also with flat characters in Dickens, for instance, and is thus relevant for the identification of a certain fictional entity.

Not only synonymic series cam form the elements of a hendiadys; with Shakespeare, co-hyponyms of the same superordinate term can be juxtaposed. Co-hyponyms are, to the extent to which they contain the semantic markers of the superordinate term, partially synonymous; in most cases they are homogeneous[15] morphologically as well:

Thersites: Now the rotten diseases of the south, the guts-griping, ruptures, catarrhs, loads o'gravel in the back, lethargies, cold palsies, raw eyes, dirt-rotten livers, wheezing lungs, bladders full of imposthume, sciaticas, lime kilns i'the palms, incurable bone-ache, and the rivelled fee-simple of the

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[15] The term homogeneous was preferred to similar because it also includes periphrases with identical function.

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tetter, take and take again such preposterous discoveries! (*Troilus and Cressida*, V, 1)

This homogeneity imposed by juxtaposition gives room to incongruity: invented diseases are enumerated among real ones, creating a secondary source of humour.

The most redundant mechanism in the series is *pleonasm*. Unlike hendiades where a certain degree of diversity in the elements still exists, pleonasm is bluntly qualified as a logical and semantic mistake; logically it has an absurd tinge, semantically it is marked for redundancy. Since it can be easily discarded as a violation of norm, pleonasm is only at first sight an ambiguous or an absurd incongruity; psychologically it may instate the receiver's feeling of superiority and complicity with the author, therefore it is almost exclusively an instrument for characterising fictional entities of the low mimetic type. (Frye's term, Frye, 1957):

Falstaff: I have speeded hither with *the very extremest* inch of possibility.

(*Henry IV*, part 2, IV, 3)

Pleonasm need not be as drastically obvious as in the double superlative above. The female character in Lewis Carroll's *Clara* (probably a parody after Coleridge's *Chrystabel*) calls her dearheart „baseborn churl" (churl < OE Ceorl (peasant)boy; the connotation baseborn is contained in *churl*, to some extent). Also she exclaims:

I would I were a maniac!
I would I were insane!

or, at a certain point she has the vision of „an *aged hoary* monk". Similarly, Caragiale uses pleonasm to mock at his highlife female character:

Pe canapeaua elegantă
Se-ntinde doamna nonșalantă
și cu-un papyrus se evantă
De *atmosfera ambiantă*.

Synonymy and, to a certain extent, hyponymy are consequently responsible for mechanisms of humour based on cumulation. The two categories overlap to the extent to which perfect synonyms do not exist in any language, but are distinct by the specific semantic markers individuating

co-hyponyms from one-another. Cumulative effects present us, accordingly, with various degree of redundancy.

b. Opposition as a mechanism of humour is based on the paradigmatic relation of antonymy,[16] still cotext is capital for the relation of oppositeness between items. Antinomies which function exclusively in a certain cotext can become sources of humour in that text; for instance the items *ochi* and *vin* which are only nonidentical as such, when placed in an antinomical cotext become pivots of an opposition:

Tu, care te pricepi la sucul viții,
Te-ncrunți cînd intri-n crîșma lui Țugui;
Te-mbată ochii dulci ai crîșmăriții,
Dar te trezește, acru, vinul lui.
(Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Pacoste*)

The verbs *a îmbăta/a trezi*, as well as the oppositions *crîșmărița/crîșmar* and *dulce/acru* prepare the cotext for the opposition *ochi/vin*, an opposition which would not exist in another cotext, where, perhaps, *ochi* and *vin* could have the common feature *îmbătător*. The two items become antinomical by affinity with their attributes which are antonyms. A relatively parallel syntax also favours this interpretation.

As cotext-organizing strategies, parallel and symmetrical constructions (see *supra*, VI, 2.2) are often found in collocation with, or grouped around antonymic words:

Ca să n-ai necaz
Cînd bei vin curat,
Nici să te culci treaz,
Nici să te scoli beat.
(Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Disciplină*)

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[16] 16. By antonymy we here mean all subtypes of oppositeness of meaning: complementarity, antonymy proper and reversibility; (Chițoran, 1973, pp. 102–105)' it will be demonstrated in what follows that, for a doublet of opposites to function as a source of humour the oppositeness of one semantic feature is enough, consequently their gradability/non gradability as well as their reciprocal presupposition are irrelevant for our analysis here.

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Such items of doggerel[17] are countless in English humorous verse:

> I have known life's tears and laughter
> And I've gained this bit of lore;
> I don't mind the morning after
> If I've had a night before.

or:

> The modern girl
> In modern dress
> Puts more and more
> In less and less.

Obviously not only doggerel exploits this type of mechanism; Shakespeare was a master of antinomies:

Clown: Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools; and I that am sure I lack thee, may pass for a wise man: for what says Quinapalus?' Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.'

(*Twelfth-Night*, I, 5)

The extreme case of opposition is *oxymoron*, basically consisting of a combination „of two contradictory terms or opposite ideas to give striking or comic point to an expression" (Esar, 1978, p. 223). Two features seem to be of capital importance in this definition: one is *juxtaposition* (which limits off oxymoron from a construction containing antonyms), the second is *contradiction* (which is a cotext-dependent notion) and/or *oppositeness* (suggesting the two poles of a semantic axis-consequently paradigmatic relations). Oxymoron seems to be a metaphorical construct by both succinctness and a certain cotextual determination, but stays, meanwhile, under the mechanical strain of a necessary opposition which need not, it seems, be necessarily antonymical in the lexicographical meaning (as in Caragiale's famous „Curat-murdar!") but can be conceptually antinomical (as, for instance Eminescu's „un purec de fulger"). Hence, at least two extreme types of oxymoron can be identified, allowing for gradations and

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[17] „Derogatory term for any bit of humorous verse that is slight and light and trivial" (Esar, 1978, 219)

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subtypes between the two extremes: a *lexicological type* (based on consecrated antonymical doublets) and a *conceptual type* (based on a minimum of one opposition in the respective set of distinctive notes of two nonidentical, not necessarily contrary, notions). The metaphorical charge seems to grow as the second type is approached on a possible axis uniting the two extremes, on the one hand, and seems to be higher as the definitory character of the opposing note for the notion in question is lower. In other words, the more collateral, unessential the opposing feature is (on condition that it is distinctive, obviously) the higher the metaphorical charge of the oxymoron in which that notion is part becomes. The relevance of this discussion for our demonstration here consists in the fact that the closer oxymoron is to metaphor the less humorous it is likely to be perceived.

Several oxymoronic constructions in Shakespeare's work might prove this point. In:

> To show our simple skill
> That is the true *beginning* of our *end*.
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1),

like in Caragiale's *Curat murdar*, where *curat* is used figuratively with the meaning *indeed*, the word *end* has one of its secondary meanings, that of *purpose* (probably coined by analogy with the French word *fin*, presenting the same polysemy). The oxymoron seems to be unintended and due to the character's ignorance. Likewise, in:

> If we offend, it is with our good will
> (idem)

or:

> Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.
> (idem)

or:

> ... on his wedding-day at night.
> (idem)

In the same scene, though, Lysander Demetrius and Theseus commenting the performance develop an entire conceit on the basis of a conceptual oxymoronic construction. The notions *fox* and *goose* which are not antonymical by nature, unless the conceptual link *predator/prey* comes into question, become the pivots of an extremely complex construct

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involving both a contextually justified oxymoron and another mechanism of humour (parallel constructions, set-phrases based on zoosemy and fallacious syllogistical judgement):

Lysander: This lion is a very fox for his valour.
Theseus: True, and a goose for his discretion.
Demetrius: Not so, my lord, for his valour cannot carry his discretion: and the fox carries the goose.
Theseus: His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour, for the goose cannot carry the fox.

(idem)

Instances of conceptually-based oxymoron which do not develop into conceits:

Sir Andrew: Bless you, *fair shrew!*"

(*Twelfth-Night*, I, 3)

or: *Sir Toby*: Thy reason, *dear venom*; give thy reason

(idem, III, 2)

The same typology can be obviated in Romanian humorous verse; the plain antonymical juxtaposition:

Vîntul fuse? ... Cine este?
Ori vreunul din părinți?
Ce tăcere făr'de veste!
Smirna-s ... *diavolii de sfinți!*

(Șt. O. Iosif, *Lumea Lor!*),

an intermediate type, based on a reciprocal exclusion of concepts:

Dragul meu, de-aceea zic
Că scriind *sudalme*
Calme,
Nu poți cîștiga nimic.

(Topîrceanu, *Scrisoare-Răspuns*),

the cotextually-built oxymoronic construct:

Unui om, săracul, într-o dimineață
I-a murit o rață.

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Bietul om, de ciudă, tare s-a-ntristat,
Cînd văzu că-i moartă cu adevărat;
Dar la scurtă vreme, în aceeași lună,
I-a murit și soacra - tot de moarte bună...
Morala:
Să nu pierzi nădejdea, orice-ar fi să fie-
după întristare, vine bucurie.

(Topîrceanu, *Omul și rața*)

and the oxymoron with a high metaphorical value:

Se tăvălea peste cap și, pișcat de-un *purec de fulger*,
Se scărpina de-un șir de păduri ca de-un gard de răchită.

(Eminescu, *Mitologicale*)

*

Although the mechanisms discussed above do not imply ambiguity proper, being easy to understand and react to, they were included into the /-paraphrasable/ category because they either imply language-specific constructions (either idiomatic or syntactic) and some also have metaphorical overtones impossible to rephrase or paraphrase without considerable damage or complete loss of effect. Still, language-specificity and lack of paraphrasability are most dramatic in the category of:

VI. 2. 3. 2. Paradigmatic mechanisms involving ambiguity

This subcategory includes puns, as well as several other lexico-phonetically generated mechanisms of humour. As vehicles of ambiguity, at this level, puns function in a non-restrictive cotext where the link between sound and meaning can be made in at least two distinct ways. Should we consider the pun to be conditioned by an analogy in linking signifier to signified, the implication is that puns are bound to paradigmatic choice, made necessary by two types of possible confusions, which generate the above-mentioned analogy:

a) confusion of signifiers
b) confusion between meanings

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The two categories are practically inseparable; still, the fact that the written form is very often a disambiguator could operate a differentiation between two subtypes.

Consequently, *puns based on confusion of signifiers* will be those exhibiting similar or highly resembling words in a sequence which is incoherent or misleading when heard and is disambiguated when read (puns based on homophony). *Puns based on confusion of meanings* will be those in which the written form offers no decoding element (puns based on polysemy or on homonyms which are homographs as well).[18]

A short mention should be made of the status of alliteration in this context. At various points in this paper it has been argued that

a) alliteration is only a secondary mechanism, possibly enhancing the humorous effect, and

b) some mechanisms of humour are alliterative or assonant *in se*.

Alliteration should belong among lexico-phonetically based mechanisms, from a structural point of view. Still, since alliteration is highly versatile, on the one hand, and since our object is verse, on the other hand, it is a diffuse presence throughout our corpus of examples. A sample like:

Quince: Whereat with blade, with bloody blameful blade
He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.
(Shakespeare, *A Midsummernight's Dream*, V, 1)

could not only serve as an example of alliteration enhancing the humorous effect of the repetition, of epithet accumulation suggesting a mock-hendiadys but could also be interpreted as a sample of text-type analogy, in that there might be some subtle mockery at Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse-patterns intended by Shakespeare.

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[18] The discussion on the limit between homonymy/polysemy is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, we shall consider:
a) as homophonous any sequences alike in sound and spelling but radically different in meaning;
b) as homonymous any sequences alike in sound and spelling but radically different in meaning;
c) as polysemantic any sequence which has several kin-meanings obtained from one-another by radiation or concatenation.

The two major types of puns with their subvariants will be detailed in what follows, not without mentioning again that they can combine into practically infinite new instances.

1. Puns based on confusion of signifiers. Homophony

Is the basic mechanism of humour in puns based on confusion of signifiers, in many cases present only in the oral (heard) form of the text (as homophony only).

The simplest mechanism in this subgroup is what the French and the Romanians call *calembours (calambur);* the English term *pun* covers a much larger area, while the learned term *paronomasia* has been too vaguely defined (see *supra*, VI.2.1.). The mechanism is based on the lack of pause between words in speech, in other words, it is a game on open/close juncture.

Games on juncture can generate such verse as:

De vreme ce-am dezvăluit,
la spuma nopților, – în vălu-i
las puma nopților: învălui,
devreme, ce-am dezvăluit.
(Şerban Foarţă, *Holorime*, VII)

If this is the basic pattern of *calembours*, by combination with other elementary mechanisms of humour it can engender all the set of possible puns the language permits. An exquisite sample of what combinations between mechanisms of humour can lead to are the pseudonym-signatures in the Romanian paper „Academia Caţavencu", a unique phenomenon in our literature by their inventiveness and diversity. (All examples below are from „Academia Caţavencu" nrs.24, 27, 25, 44, 31/1996)

The basic pattern of *game on juncture* is present, for instance, in such mock-signatures as:

Geo Grafu (geograf = geographer; Geo = proper name; graf = medieval count)

Omisiune imposibilă (omisiune = omission; o misiune = a mission)

D'acia Felix (where accent is involved as well) *d'acia* is the popular expression for „from here-about", Dacia Felix = a bankrupt bank in Romania.

Budha-Pesta

The last example is a rarity in Romanian; since the language has a basically phonemical spelling, a foreign proper name is exploited to obtain the pun; another /+written/ mechanism appears in the mock-Arabian:

Ash-Hali-Yar-Salam-Darnam,

which is a full sentence in Romanian (I'd eat salami again, but I've none). An element of text-type analogy comes into play in this example; oral jokes circulating before 1989 were based upon such random assonances between Romanian syntagms and Arabic proper names. For instance:

Q: Who is the most hungry Arabian?

A: Ash-Hali-Salam-Darnam (I'd eat salami but I've none)

or: Q: Who is the poorest Arabian?

A: Ali-men-tara („alimentara" means foodstore in Romanian; the joke circulated before 1989, when food was scarce in Romania)

Another mechanism involves *anagramation* of existing proper names in Romanian:

Dilie Umitrescu (<Ilie Dumitrescu, a famous football player; but *diliu* means, in slang, *crazy*)

or: Montele de Conte Traistă (from Contele de Monte-Cristo = The Count of Monte-Cristo, where *traistă* means bag, popular knapsack)

Mock folk-etymology underlies the proper name

Corado Cătană (<Corado Cattani, a character in an Italian TV-series; *cătană* is the regionalism for *soldier*)

Paronymy is widely used in combination with the basic mechanism of homophony; by changing one single letter, as in:

Lobby Ewing

Take, Ianke ș-un Catâr (<Take, Ianke și Cadâr, a play by. V. I. Popa; catâr = mule)

Sala Colivalentă (<Sala Polivalentă = the greatest sport-hall in Bucharest; Escherichia coli = bacillum provoking diarrhoea)

Secera și Ciolanul (<Secera și ciocanul = the hoe and the hammer; ciolan = bone)

Redacția șocuri și Concursuri (<Redacția Jocuri și Concursuri = the Games and Contests Department in TV; șocuri = shocks)

by adding a letter, as in:

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(D)ante portas (<Dante and Hannibal ante portas)

(H)albă ca zăpada (<halbă (=beer glass) and Albă-ca-zăpada (=Snow-White)

(P)alma mater (<palmă = slap)

(this mechanism is, meanwhile, one of generating mock-portmanteaux); or a group of letters:

Dura lex sed perplex

Sudalma Mater (sudalmă = oath)

Tata Bișnițu (<Tata Nițu = familiar name given by the press to gen.Nicolae Nițu, chief of the Bucharest Police Department, and bișniță = petty black market)

Fundulea Taichii (<Fundulea = village outside Bucharest; fund = backside; Budulea Taichii = novella by Ioan Slavici)

Eșantion Iliescu și Leonida Seculari (<Ion Iliescu, Romania's ex-president; eșantion = sample and Leonida Lari, a Bassarabian poetess of wavering political options; secular = century-long)

Mahabharata inflației (<rata inflației = the inflation rate)

The last case is a sample of what could be called *title-humour*; some examples above could also be treated as *quotation-humour* (*Dura lex sed perplex* < *Dura lex sed lex* or *Dante portas* < /Hannibal/ante portas); another signature, *Bulgară pentru doi* originates in the title of a film (*Gară pentru doi*); *Omisiune imposibilă*, quoted above, comes from *O misiune imposibilă*, the title of an adventure book and a film; quotation humour combined with homophony and mock-portmanteaux is also present in:

SAFI sau a nu fi (< *A fi sau a nu fi* – *To be or not to be*) SAFI is a Romanian mutual fund of investment, at a time threatened with bankruptcy.

or: Puradeus ex machina (where *puradeu* means gypsy kid)

or: Memento Fujimori (*Memento mori* is a poem by Eminescu)

Set phrases can also enter such homophonical games, as in:

Prefectura-Vura (tura-vura means approximately dilly-dally, in English).

Finally, an exquisite sample of play on juncture:

Baiazid, ba nu-i a zid (where the name of the Turkish sultan Bajazet is read as a Romanian absurd and untranslatable syntagm *ba-i a zid* whose negative counterpart continues the item).

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All these combination-types, which appear in the signatures above in a nutshell, can be placed in a non-restrictive cotext and appear in humorous verse.

An instance of plain homophony is that in:

Said the fair-haired Rebecca of Klondike:
„Of you I'm exceedingly fond, Ike.
To prove I adore you,
I'll dye, darling, for you,
And be a brunette, not a blonde, Ike."

The confusion between *to die* and *to dye* can only occur after line five, but it can be quickly disambiguated due to the receiver's linguistic competence (which is part of expectation). This, however, occurs only after a first instant of shock in which the incongruity (die = be a brunette) is discovered. Still, the mockery at the character's coquettishness (Rebecca's changing the colour of her hair is equivalent in gravity to death) is not the main catch-item of the limerick. The humorous clash is that between the cliché „I'll die for you" and the matter-of-fact sequel in verse five, which clears up the fact that only by mistake could it be understood that Rebecca is really capable of dying of love. This interpretation is induced by the cotext before verse five and is not inconsistent with the one the reader might give; therefore, the cotext is non-restrictive.

The author's mockery at the hearer is even more obvious when one of the possible readings is a taboo:

There was a young lady of Rye
With a shape like a capital 'I';
When they told her she had,
She learned how to pad,
Which shows you that figures can lie.

Like in the Romanian examples quoted above, *paronymy* can combine with homophony; the famous Nantucket limericks could prove this point:

There was an old man of Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket.

His daughter named Nan
Ran away with a man
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.

Pa followed the pair to Pawtucket
(The man and the girl with the bucket)
And he said to the man:
„You're welcome to Nan!"
But as for the bucket, Pawtucket.

Then the pair followed Pa to Manhasset,
Where he still held the cash as an asset;
And Nan and the man
Stole the money and ran,
And as for the bucket, Manhasset.

Mock-portmanteaux induced by the joint reading of separate words for reasons of rhythm are present in English as well:

The bottle of perfume that Willie sent
Was highly displeasing to Millicent.
Her thanks were so cold,
They quarelled, I'm told,
Though that silly scent Willie sent Millicent.

The components substituted for one-another rhyme: *silly/Willie/Milly*, so that Millicent could be interpreted as *Millie sent*, which makes the limerick unintelligible when heard. The analogical interpretation is also reinforced by rhythm (which, at least in English verse, rearranges normal junctures under the pressure of verse-stress). The same mechanism could be detected in:

There was a young lady of Ham
Who hastily jumped on a tram;
As she swiftly embarked
The conductor remarked:
„Your fare, Miss", she said „Yes, I am".

This sample combines the game on juncture with confusion between phrases (*your fare - you're fair*); a similar mechanism is present in:

> There was a young lady of station
> „I love men" was her sole exclamation.
> But when men cried „You flatter"
> she replied „Oh, no matter.
> Isle of Man is the true explanation.",

where a phrase is taken for a place-name.

2. Homonymy and polysemy

The two phenomena generate *puns based on confusion of meanings*; the written form is hardly a disambiguator, as with the previous subclass.

Edward Lear's odyssey of the two old bachelors who were looking for sage to make some stuffing and are advised to look for:

> ... an ancient Sage, -
> An earnest Man, who reads all day a most perplexing page.

whom they should

> ... mix /.../ with your Onion (cut up likewise into Scraps) -
> Then your Stuffin' will be ready – and very good: perhaps?
>
> (Edward Lear, *The Two Old Bachelors*)

Such cases of homonymy also generate incongruities in Romanian humorous verse:

> Prin lumina estompată
> De mătasa unui nor
> Visătoare trece-o fată
> C-un plutonier *major*.
> ...
> și-ntr-o fină discordanță
> Cu priveliștea sonoră
> Merg așa, cam la distanță,
> El *major* și ea *minoră*...
>
> (Topîrceanu, *Toamna în parc*)

or:

> Spunea, cînd baș-buzucii făcuse harcea-parcea
> și răvășise vița pe solul craiovean,

> Un podgorean de frunte cu vie la Segarcea
> Că banul din Craiova nu face nici un ban.
>
> (Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Ab irato*)

Since homonymy is a linguistic accident rather than an etymological consequence, it is language-specific; consequently, all the examples in this subchapter are /-paraphrase/; moreover, translation into another language is quasi-impossible.

When polysemy is involved in puns, although paraphrasability is out of question without the loss of humorous effect, a slight chance of translatability still appears, to the extent to which two languages can present to some extent a quasi-similar fragmentation of the surrounding reality into concepts. Morphologically formalizable universals such as agent, patient, name of action etc. can be found in parallel word-families in English and Romanian. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of conversion which is much more productive in English than in Romanian generates an entire layer of supplementary sources of ambiguity, giving rise to multiple and multifold puns which cannot be found in or transposed into Romanian.

A polysemantic word can combine with other members of its word-family, with items converted from its root, with homonyms and homophones; juncture is obliterated by verse-stress and the similarity of the roots generates alliteration; pun-chains come thus into being:

> A tutor who played on the flute
> Had to teach two young tooters to toot.
> Said the boys to the tutor:
> „Is it harder to toot or
> To tutor two tooters to toot?"

Since English is stress-timed, whatever comes between two stresses is reduced to /ə/ (a phenomenon present in normal speech, but so much the more in verse); consequently, *toot or* will be a homophone of *tooter* (derived from *to toot* by agentive suffixation with -*er*); similarly, *two tooters* will sound like *to tutor*, from which the semivowel (j) may be easily swept out by analogy and the pressure of rhythm, thus annulling the paronymy. The

verb *to tutor* (a denominal of the noun *tutor*) can also lead to confusion (in the oral form, at least).

The humorous effect is, in such cases, the result of a threefold dependence spelling - pronunciation - meaning. With such „tongue-twisters" (especially present among English limericks) homophony preferentially combines with polysemy and conversion, at times with paronymy, as well, in order to give sequences, extending over entire verses, of identical or very slightly different sonorities. The spelling disambiguates the confusion; yet, the source of humour in all these cases is the „dangerous" oscillation on the edge of acceptability and intelligibility.

The famous Romanian:

> S-a suit capra pe piatră, piatra crapă-n patru
> De s-ar crăpa capu caprii ca și piatra-n patru,

is perfectly intelligible, if pronounced correctly; with the Romanian tongue-twister no ambiguity or pun is involved. Here the humorous effect comes forth if some blabbering happens when the sequence is said at a high speed; the causes of laughter are different from the ones in the English sample (trap tongue-twisters which, if mistakenly uttered, lead to unwilling pronunciation of taboo-words, might prove this point).

English multiple-punning limericks can also combine with /+written/ mechanisms, as in:

> A right-handed fellow named Wright
> In writing „write" always wrote „rite",
> When he meant to write right;
> If he'd written „write" right,
> Wright could not have wrought rot writing „rite".

or:

> A canny young fisher named Fisher
> Once fished from the edge of a fissure.
> A fish with a grin
> Pulled the fisherman in;
> Now the're fishing the fissure for Fisher.

*

Mechanisms of humour based on paradigmatic choice identified in the corpus, could fall, consequently into two basic categories:

a) *paradigmatic mechanisms which do not involve ambiguity*, with two subclasses which do not exclude one-another:

	– based on synonyms
– based on cumulation	– based on co-hyponyms
	– pleonasm
	– antonymy
– based on opposition	– antinomy
	– oxymoron

b) *paradigmatic mechanisms involving ambiguity*, including, beside the extremely versatile category of *alliteration*, *puns* of two basic types (inseparable in practice)

	– based on juncture
	– based on anagramation
– puns based on confusion of signifiers	– based on mock-folk etymology
(puns by homophony)	– based on mock-portmanteaux
	– based on mock-set-phrases, titles, quotations.
	– based on homonymy
	– based on polysemy
– puns based on confusion of meanings	– based on paronymy
	– based on conversion

All the elementary mechanisms identified can virtually combine among themselves creating complex instances of humorous incongruity; they can, meanwhile, present features of text-type analogy or /+written/ features. All of them are basically /-paraphrase/, i. e. they are language-specific and, therefore, their translation into another language is problematic.

CHAPTER VII.
Conclusions

The term *linguistic mechanisms of humour* covers the two principal areas in which humour appears, including:

a) predominantly logical mechanisms of humour, where language appears as the vehicle of an incongruity of the logical type - mechanisms which are universal;

b) predominantly linguistic mechanisms of humour, where the logical categories appear as disambiguators of an incongruity of the linguistic type - mechanisms which are language-specific.

A corpus of humorous verse has been selected from two non-cognate Indo-European languages (English and Romanian) in order to obviate the relative universality of predominantly logical mechanisms as against the language-specificity of predominantly linguistic mechanisms. Verse has been preferred because it contains the widest range of possible mechanisms of humour among the literary genres.

The term *mechanism* has been preferred in order to stress the relative repeatability of a formalizable sequence which triggers off a certain response (in our case, the steps between the perception and disambiguation of a humorous incongruity, triggering off the expected reaction of laughter).

The term *incongruity* has been discussed with a stress on its nature as a fracture or disruption; a possible typology of incongruities has been offered within which humorous incongruities were defined. Since the analysis of humorous incongruities can only be valid within a theory of humour strong enough to account not only for existing mechanisms of humour but also for potential ones, the possible bases of such a theory were discussed. The basic assumption was that a theory of humour should analyse humour diachronically only insofar as a humorous effect has survived down to the contemporary level; these mechanisms of humour are likely to preserve their illocutionary value in the future, as well, thus providing the predictive aspect of the theory proposed. Such an approach could also admit of the probability of unpredicted future

developments which could be partially accounted for by the history of human mentalities as well. Limitations of such a theory were also postulated.

Several types of theories of humour were discussed, with their purport to the description of the problem; some conclusions were drawn, in order to ascertain more clearly the purpose of the present attempt. (I)

In this light, the analysis presented here was meant to:

a) give a working definition of humour,

b) analyse some constraints on this definition and thus delineate a possible corpus of examples,

c) see to what extent the corpus confirms the definition, by

d) formalising mechanisms of humour found in the corpus and taxonomizing them according to some logical-linguistic criteria

e) state (or predict) the relative liability of these mechanisms to create further potential humorous effects.

The purpose of this paper was, consequently, to identify mechanisms of humour in the corpus under analysis, to ascertain to what extent they are identical (universal) and/or different (language-specific), to taxonomize them according to some relatively consistent criteria into groups and sub-groups, with a view to their potentiality of generating humorous acts in the future (i. e., to their productivity within and outside the boundaries of humorous verse:

a) In order to define humour, its double hypostasis as disruption and as state of system was analysed (II.1.). The Aristotelic notion of *catasthasis* was discussed in the context of the *degree of aggressiveness* of different comical species. Types of incongruities were obviated according to degree of acceptability and degree of ambiguity thus delineating the categories of *pure humour* and *hybrid humour*, the background of the notion of *sense of humour* (II.2.). *Ambiguity* was described as a function of non-restrictive cotext; in this light, *linguistic mechanisms of humour* were discussed as script-ambiguators, i. e., as cotext-organizing strategies whose function is to downtone the initially aggressive utterance.

The purport of the participants in the humorous act was discussed in the context of *intentionality*; the notion *humour as artefact* was introduced to account for all instances of intentional humour. (II.3.)

Since the categories of *rhetoric* and *irony* needed to be clearly set apart from humour, a discussion in parallel of the three was attempted at, on the basis of the interplay between *co-perception, consensus* and *bona-fide communication.* (II.4.)

Humour was also discussed as a communicational act, as process and product, an approach justified by its underlying illocutionary potential. Processually, humour was defined *as a function* involving some *constants* (the three persons involved in the humorous act – author, object, receiver –, and the incongruity forming the essence of the humorous act), as well as some *variables* (the physical presence/non-presence of the persons involved, the coincidence/non-coincidence of the three, their self-perception and reciprocal perception, their /± Human/ feature, as well as the linguistic mechanisms generating the incongruity). On this basis, a possible classification of humorous acts was offered. The product involved in a humorous process was defined as a twofold function of co-perception and consensus of the participants, the effect of which is presumed to be laughter (either cathartic or non-cathartic) (II.5.)

Humour was, thus, defined as *an intentional/non-intentional human act manifest as a function depending on two constants: 1. a human author, a human/non human object and a human receiver; and 2. an incongruity. In this act the co-perception of the incongruity with its given illocutionary force (co-perception made possible by the state of normality and presence of the sense of humour in at least one of the participants) generates consensus by laughter in one or more of the participants.*

b) Several constraints on this definition have been analysed, such as: the type of fictionality involved in humorous literature, the illocutionary potential of the humorous script with a view to the social-historical determination of the humorous act and the history of the language(s).

Some characteristics of literary humour were pinpointed, as well as some observations on genre (III.1.), in order to discuss the type of fictionality involved in humour.

The notion of *fictionality* was discussed with a view to the category of *humour as artefact,* in the light of two concepts: *credibility* and *conceivability.* These seem to be functions of *coherence* and *cohesion.* If a possible world is a construct implying (if it is described by a verbal text), at least to a certain point, the conventions of coherence and cohesion, which (with the exception of self-voiding texts and self-disclosing meta-fiction) work throughout the text in a bona-fide manner, a possible world could be viewed as the output of a *generative system* acting on the basis of a *syntactic strategy. If any marked syntactic strategy could be the output of a strong generative system, possible fictional worlds could be depicted by possible syntaxes,* deviant in the system of reference of „normal norm" (that of a real language becoming language of reference, W_0) but not so in the system of reference of a „possible norm" (defined for W_1, W_2...) *Style could then be defined as the linguistic norm of a possible world.*

Since humour is excluded in this definition (a systematically deviant syntax, for instance, would not be humorous but absurd), it seems that incongruities become humorous, in such cases, only when judged against the expectation induced by our world. If all fictional worlds are allegories of the existing one (since constant reference is and should be made to the real world, in the case of fiction), degrees of mimetism can be observed. *Manifestly mimetical,* and *manifestly non-mimetical* worlds can be described. Among the latter, *fictitious* and *fake-fictional (absurd)* worlds could be quoted. In its hybrid form, humour can appear in any type of possible world as a collateral marker of fictionality.

If nevertheless, a humorous incongruity is one of the rules describing a fictional world, that world is *mock-fictional.* Such a world is inconsistent; it can take shape only if the incongruous element is replaced by some other rule in the world of reference after a process of inference oriented either logically or linguistically. As such, a fake-fictional world destroys a would-be ontological status, in order to drive the receiver back into the real world. It is, ultimately, non-fictional, because it elicits a real-world factual reaction (laughter).

If, then, with hybrid humour, humour is collateral to the fictional and functions as a marker of fictionality, with pure humour the fictional becomes collateral to humour; it comes to life (as mock-fictionality), in order to form the cotext of a humorous incongruity which, in its turn, by feedback into the normal system of expectation, gives rise to laughter. (III.2.)

The problem of the illocutionary potential of humour was another set of constraints on its definition; the extent to which style markers can convey

illocutionary potential in humorous verse, in a diachronical perspective, is capital for both the range of the corpus and of the analysis performed. Conjectural hypotheses on the possible illocutionary force of a script in previous epochs have a high degree of imprecision; the empirical character of any statistically-based investigation at the present moment is also a shortcoming. Illocutionary force depends, among other things upon the interplay between the generally-humorous and the occasional.

If by *occasionality* we mean a set of real-world propositions which substitute themselves to propositions descriptive of a fictional world (one such substitution is sufficient), *actuality* could be defined as the operationa-lity of the above-mentioned propositions at the epoch when the text is received. *Effectiveness* (which is the materialisation of illocutionary potential) would mean, in this light, a statistically-proved level of acceptance of these propositions, sufficient to include them into the system of expectation of the group in question (i. e., into the systems of expectation of the statistical majority of the members in the group the text is meant for). Propositions included into the system of expectation of a group at an epoch are part of its *mentality*. Knowledge of mentality may be a necessary condition, but at times it is not sufficient to identify all instances with humorous illocutionary potential in history. It results that, in point of content, non-occasional humour is fairly likely to survive because of its relative autonomy from extra-textual decoding conditions. One aspect of mentality, the national specific, is also discussed in this context, as well as the relation authorial intention - receiver's expectation, with a view to the successfulness of the speech act in diachrony.

The conclusion of this discussion is that *those humorous acts which are successful (have preserved their illocutionary potential) in our epoch, are likely to preserve their successfulness in the future as well*. The bases for this statement are the linguistic mechanisms of humour underlying these acts, which are the same, still produce new humorous acts nowadays and are likely to do so in the future, too. (III. 3.)

Linguistic mechanisms of humour are dependent on linguistic type, which forms another set of constraints upon the definition of humour. *A higher or a lower degree of analytism will induce, respectively, more possibilities of ambiguity and/or redundancy in a language*. English and

Romanian are analysed in this respect as to the typologically-conditioned configuration of their linguistic mechanisms of humour (III. 4.).

c) A possible approach to the corpus is outlined on the basis of several levels of analysis.

In this respect, *expectation* is defined as consisting *of several more or less continuous (certainly continuous and at least contiguous, in different areas) layers of text (of various origins, types and degrees of completeness depending on social and historical conditions) out of which a humorous incongruity can activate one or several to become its system of reference.*

Expectation is not only an omnipresent intertext to any new text a receiver is confronted with, but also has a *self-reflexive function*, activated whenever the convention of fictionality is accepted and consisting of a readiness to abolish or change some rules in the real world. Among these, the rule of bona-fide communication is capital to the subject in discussion. Confronting an incongruity, the receiver instinctively triggers off the self-reflexive function of expectation, selecting a system of reference in which the incongruity should be decoded. If this process of inference yields results, the issue is humour. If not, it is either the absurd or lack of understanding. The criterion of *inference* will, consequently operate the distinction between *humour* and *absurd humour*. Once the gap created by incongruity is bridged, expectation shifts from *general* to *text-oriented*. Text-oriented expectation can manifest itself at three levels: *intertext, general context, cotext and text*. Since all mechanisms of humour act on the basis of analogies, they can be accordingly grouped into:

– *intertextual mechanisms* (by analogy to other texts);
– *contextual mechanisms* (by analogy to the rules of the syllogism)
– *cotextual and textual mechanisms* (by analogy in attributing meanings to signifiers) – (IV. 1.)

The *criteria* for grouping mechanisms of humour can be defined on the basis of this *first level of analysis* as follows:

1. *the criterion of form* – differentiating between graphical/graphetic devices (/+written/) and other mechanisms of humour which do not involve the difference oral/written, marked /-written/.
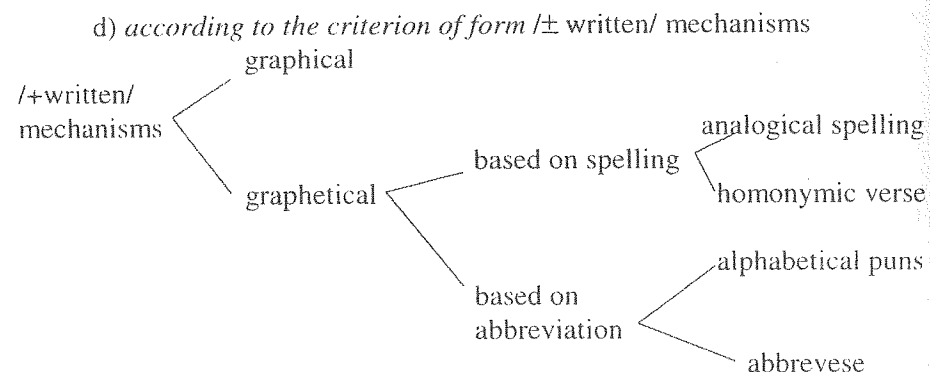
2. *the criterion of immediate inference* – marking off /-inferrable/ mechanisms of humour involving the absurd, as well, from /+inferrable/ mechanisms of plain humour.
3. *the criterion of text-type analogy* – differentiating mechanisms based upon intertext /+text type/ from those which do not have this feature /-text type/.
4. *the criterion of paraphrasability* – differentiating between mechanisms of humour of language /-paraphrase/ and other mechanisms of humour /+paraphrase/.

At a further (second) level of analysis sub-categories are obtained by grouping the levels at which incongruities appear according to the way in which they appear. This analysis ultimately yielded the elementary mechanisms of humour.

The four criteria at the first level act synergically; none is prior to another and can be applied to either subgroup previously differentiated by another criterion. Two features of the groups and subgroups of mechanisms should be obviated:

– elementary mechanisms almost never act in isolation
– they are recurrent and formalizable; the combinations among them are virtually infinite. (IV.2.)

The mechanisms of humour were discussed upon corpus, at the two levels of analysis according to the four criteria. The following classes and subclasses of mechanisms were identified:

d) *according to the criterion of form* /± written/ mechanisms

```
                        graphical
/+written/
mechanisms                                           analogical spelling
                                based on spelling
            graphetical                              homonymic verse

                                                  alphabetical puns
                                based on
                                abbreviation
                                                     abbrevese
```

Graphical mechanisms are those which imply page-arrangement, text linearity etc., as elements of expectation contradicted by some incongruity. (IV.3.1.)

Graphetical mechanisms rely on the difference between spelling and pronunciation to create humorous incongruities. Two further subspecies were identified: one in which the oral form disambiguates the written form, and conversely, one in which the written form disambiguates the oral form. The mechanisms in the first subgroup exploit anomalous spellings to forge, by analogy, mock-spelling of rhyming words; if these words are pronounced similarly to the first rhyme, there is no incongruity in the oral form (cases called *analogical spelling*). The second subgroup of mechanisms is that of *homonymic verse*, where words are replaced by their homophones which are not homographs as well.

The second subspecies of graphetical mechanisms contains mechanisms based on abbreviation (functioning in Romanian as well). Two further subclasses were identified: *alphabetical puns* (based on the alphabetical reading of abbreviations), respectively *abbrevese* (based on abbreviations which can only be read out in full). (IV.3.2.)

/-written/ mechanisms do not present spelling as a source of humour.

2. *according to the criterion of text-type analogy* – /± text-type/ mechanisms

For the purpose of this paper the notion of text-type has been defined in two areas:

– non-artefactual text-type
– authorial style.

Non-artefactual text-type has been defined in relation to five major co-ordinates:

– functional styles
– dialect, sociolect, idiolect
– register (frozen down to informal)
– historical strata in the language (archaisms to neologisms)
– shift into a foreign language.

It has been proved that any text can become the cotext of incongruities brought about by another text-type, consequently elements of

the above categories are liable to become sources of humour whenever they create an incongruity in any other text. (IV.4.1.)

Authorial style as a source of incongruity acts as intertext generating mechanisms of humour based upon:
– quotation
– mock-species
– mock-style
– mock-work.

The label „authorial style" has, consequently, not been taken *ad litteram*, but as a sign that, unlike the mechanisms in the previous category, the ones under discussion originate in the sphere of artefact. The four mechanisms function on the basis of a *decontextualization* of the original text-type and then a *re-contextualization* as incongruity.
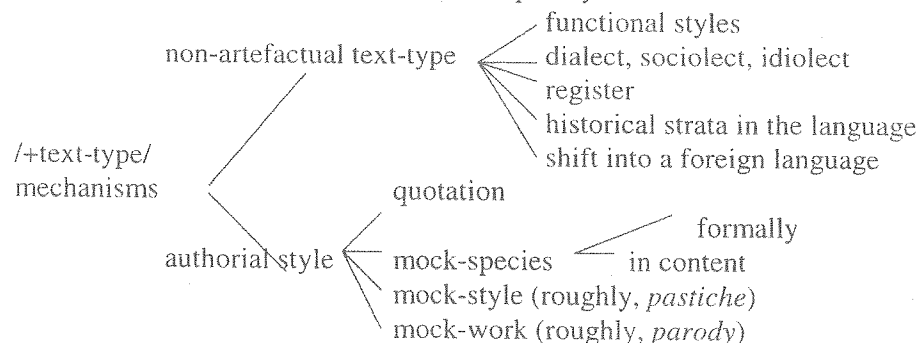
Quotations can create humorous incongruities either taken *as such* or *humorously modified*. (IV.2.1.)

Mock-species function on the basis of a *formal factor* (the incongruity lies in some traditionally attributed formal constraint on the species, which is not taken into account) and a *content-factor* (the incongruity lies in the clash between the humorous content of a normally non-humorous species and the observance of the formal constraints of the latter). (IV.2.2.)

Mock-style is a general label for a humorous poem in *the vein (spirit) of an author*, while *mock-work* characterises a humorous poem *by the letter* of another poem. (IV.2.3.–IV.2.4.)

The categories can and do overlap in many cases.

/+text-type/ mechanisms are, consequently:

non-artefactual text-type
– functional styles
– dialect, sociolect, idiolect
– register
– historical strata in the language
– shift into a foreign language

/+text-type/ mechanisms

authorial style
– quotation
  – formally
  – in content
– mock-species
– mock-style (roughly, *pastiche*)
– mock-work (roughly, *parody*)

/-text-type/ mechanisms do not present these sources of incongruity.

3. *according to the criterion of immediate inference and the criterion of paraphrasability*

For reasons of organisation of this discussion the criteria were analysed jointly, yielding the following classes:
– /-inference/ /+paraphrase/ – logical mechanisms of absurd humour
– /-inference/ /-paraphrase/ – linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour (grouped in Chapter V.)
– /+inference/ /+paraphrase/ – logical mechanisms of humour
– /+inference/ /-paraphrase/ – linguistic mechanisms of humour (grouped in Chapter VI.)

Logical mechanisms of absurd humour in the corpus under analysis can be reduced to two basic ones:
– completion of non-postulated constitutive rules of a possible world with real-world propositions (generally the world is of an impossible possible type)
– mock-syllogisms on the basis of absurd propositions (V.1.)

Linguistic mechanisms of absurd humour fall into two subclasses:

– morpho-syntactically based
  – by violation of set-phrases
  – by absurd morpheme-attachment
  – by unacceptable splits in compounds
  – by shifts in word-order (V.2.1.)

– lexico-phonetically based
  – based on absurd distribution (V.2.2.1.)
  – based on lexical invention (V.2.2.2.)
    a) nonce-combinations of already existing morphemes
    b) combinations between invented and existing morphemes
    c) entirely new combinations

All lexico-phonetically based mechanisms can be
– alliterative
– non-alliterative

Logical mechanisms of humour were discussed after defining the category of humour of character as a mixture of /+/ and /-paraphrase/ mechanisms. They were defined as sophisms which do not fringe upon a possible world; plain humour was defined as against absurd humour to be a matter of permutations *within* or *among* layers of normal expectation, whereas absurd humour extends and/or creates expectation.

Logical mechanisms of humour fall into two subcategories:

a) /+contradictory/, based upon an apparent conjunction of sentences which are, in fact, contradictory (VI.1.1.)

b) /-contradictory/, based upon apparently sophistical items of reasoning which actually function as correct syllogisms (VI.1.2.)

Linguistic mechanisms of humour were analysed after a redefinition of humorous puns as being *the types of pun which function in a non-restrictive cotext.* (VI.2.1.)

They were grouped into two basic subclasses:

a) *Mechanisms of humour based on syntagmatic arrangement* with three subgroups:

– unacceptable split inside set phrases

– enumeration patterns (and hendiadys), combined or not with

– repetitive patterns (repetitive words, refrains, interrogative or exclamatory repetitive patterns, syntactically analogous patterns – parallel and symmetrical) (VI.2.2.)

b) *Mechanisms of humour based on paradigmatic choice*, falling into two basic categories:

– *paradigmatic mechanisms which do not involve ambiguity*, with two further subclasses

– based on cumulation
  - synonyms
  - co-hyponyms
  - pleonasm

– based on opposition
  - antonymy
  - antinomy
  - oxymoron (VI.2.3.1.)

– *paradigmatic mechanisms involving ambiguity*, including, beside the extremely versatile category of *alliteration, puns* of two basic types:

– based on confusion of signifiers (puns by homophony)
  - juncture
  - anagramation
  - mock-folk etymology
  - mock-portmanteaux
  - mock-set phrases, titles, quotations

– based on confusion of meanings
  - puns by homonymy
  - puns by polysemy
  - puns by paronymy
  - puns by conversion (VI.2.3.2.)

e) The relative liability of these mechanisms to create further potential humorous effects is a direct consequence of their logical-linguistic conditioning. Their dependence upon the basically logical and linguistic nature of expectation has been discussed all through the present analysis.

The productivity of the linguistic mechanisms of humour listed above is in a direct ratio with the degree of universality of such logical categories as: analogy, presupposition, entailment, syllogistic judgement and of such linguistic categories as synonymy, paronymy agreement, etc.

Two statements demonstrated in this work should be taken into account:

a) that those mechanisms are likely to be productive in the future which have preserved their effect nowadays, although the product of past ages;

b) that all mechanisms present in humorous prose and drama can appear in humorous verse, while not all the mechanisms identified in our corpus can appear in prose or drama;

It ensues that the inventory of elementary logical and linguistic mechanisms of humour and absurd humour listed above can be applied to any text, not only humorous poetry.

The *repeatability, formalizability* and *combinatory valence* of the mechanisms described opens virtually infinite further possibilities of creating humorous incongruities on condition that their cotext be *non-restrictive*. If non-restrictivity rules for cotext were formalised, perhaps humour-creating strategies would reduce to the algorithm of a computer-programme.

Our intention was, nevertheless, only to demonstrate that such an analysis of humour can be made regardless of the type of text the mechanisms appear in, that mechanisms of humour do not depend on genre or species, that they are universalia of humour and pertain to the human set of strategies of poetisation of the existing universe.

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