

Landy-Houillon, Isabelle and Maurice Ménard, eds.
Burlesque et Formes Parodiques. Actes du colloque du
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This collection of essays offers an intermittent chronology of the burlesque, mainly but not exclusively in French literature, tracing the development of different forms of parodic satire from the middle ages to the 20th century. Besides prose and poetry, other essays address manifestations of the burlesque in the theatre, music and painting.

Of overall interest to the reader is the evolution of such divergent forms, styles, genres, and sensibilities, all with the common intention to parody an antecedent text or subject through the ages. As Maurice Ménard concludes in the *Bilan du Colloque*, the burlesque adamantly refuses any generic boundaries, unity or formal limitations by intentionally blurring traditional textual boundaries through its own transtextuality and refusal of closure or generic unity. Besides the introduction by Isabelle Landy-Houillon, the forty-three papers that comprise the *Actes* (too numerous to be represented completely in the space of this review) include three on medieval and one on a 16th-century topic, fifteen on the 17th-century apogee of the form, fourteen on the pervasive continuation of the problematics of parody and satire in the 18th century (like Henri Coulet's study of the relation between fantasy and burlesque in the *conte*), five on 19th-century topics, including the reception of ironic parodies of Romanticism by Flaubert and Viennet, the socio-comic value of Spanish *costumbrismo*, dark strains of the grotesque and black humor in Hugo's *Han d'Islande*, and five essays on the modern period.

Collectively, all of the essays attempt to answer the overarching question, "What is the burlesque?" by providing multiple responses, approaches, and definitions. Alain Niderst's "Scarron, les Scudéry et le burlesque" traces the change in meaning of the term "burlesque" that occurs in the 17th century. The great talent of Jean-Baptiste

Coulom, described by Michèle Ménard in "Les illustrations du *Roman Comique* de Scarron par J. B. Coulom," is to have visualized in the 18th century a certain comic character of the 17th which was alternately burlesque and mock-heroic. Both qualities are prevalent in the paintings of Botero as described by Danielle Bourerot in "Burlesque et parodie chez le peintre Botero."

Dissonance and the laughter it generates lie at the heart of the baroque. In the theater, Scarron's techniques that lend form and movement to dissonance on stage are explored by Thérèse Bouché in "Paul Scarron ou le Burlesque au théâtre." The use of the quotidian by Scarron to provoke laughter is studied by Névéna Dikranian and Dimitri Bankov in "Ragotin ou le personnage burlesque dans le *Roman Comique*." Jacqueline Picoche's "Le Champ Semantique du Verbe 'Rire'," proffers a richer, more complete definition of the verb and composes an inventory of words (including *burlesque* and *parodie*) that constitute its semantic field.

The epic is the subject of burlesque parody throughout the centuries. Claude Lachet in "Les procédés dans la *Prise d'Orange*" reveals the mechanisms by which the poet both parodies and renews the epic genre through a playful handling of courtly traditions and topoi. Bernard Bray's "Un poème héroï-comique entre parodie et satire: *Le Palladion* de Frédéric II de Prusse" demonstrates how the author both parodies the epic and satirizes the vices of 18th-century society, resulting in a philosophy more engagé than the model he parodies.

The influence of Spanish and Italian models in creating a new genre, the "caprice," is traced by Jacques Bailbé's "Aux origines du burlesque: l'oeuvre parodique de Saint-Amant" while Andrée Comparot's "Le burlesque dans les *Propos Rustiques* de Noël du Fail" illustrates how the Spanish model of la Célestine is transformed and surpassed in du Fail's novel.

The combination of the serious and the comic in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, expressed in the formula of "spoudogeloion," is explored by Jean Lafond in "Burlesque et Spoudogeloion dans les *Etats et Empires de la Lune*." In his "Satire, parodie et philosophie chez Béroalde de Verville," Neil Kenny explains how Béroalde de Verville uses the burlesque both to poke fun at his previous works through self-parody while maintaining the seriousness of his satire.

The targets of parody may or may not be explicit. The parody of the tragic genre born at the close of the seventeenth century is defined by Hans Mattauch in "La parodie du genre tragique à ses débuts" as an attack not on specific works, but on conventions incompatible with the classical ideal. On the other hand, the dramatic parody in vaudeville in Corinne Pré's "La parodie dramatique en Vaudevilles de 1715 à 1789" reveals the parody of particular operas or tragedies, destroying dramatic illusion and creating a demythification which approaches the burlesque techniques of the films of Monty Python and the cartoons of Tex Avery.

This colloquium draws parallels between seemingly unlikely partners as in Georges Jean's "Du 'burlesque' à 'l'ubuesque': Scarron et Jarry," the two authors linked by a shared "lexical savor." It heralds paradoxical reversals as in André Tournon's "La parodie de l'ésotérisme dans *Le Moyen de Parvenir* de Béroalde de Verville" wherein the dynamics of esoteric language are likened to those of erotic language: displaying under the pretense of concealing. Claude Julien's "Un rire à l'odeur de soufre: le burlesque dans la fiction noire américaine" recounts the history of Afro-American fiction in which Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, born as a literary extension of the Blues, is seen as the spark setting off a period of rich literary creation. Georges Perec, in his pastiche of the scientific article, reveals himself a virtuoso of the literary trompe l'oeil in Bernard Magné's "La cantatrice et le papillon." Magné proposes the christening of a new genre to accommodate the writing of Perec: the "scientifi-comique."

By asking "Who or what is being mocked as the necessary target of parody?," Bernard Gicquel's "Pour une sociopsychanalyse de la réception burlesque" indicates that the burlesque author always has the receiver's degree of awareness in mind. Several of the essays emphasize the importance of the *contrat de lecture* between reader and writer. Annie Rivara's "Des parodies de *La Vie de Marianne* à la transformation des modèles de l'héroïne de roman" explores the effect of the parodic impression on the ideal 18th-century reader in terms of the literary evolution of the novel. She ends with conjectures on the cultural function of the parodic genre and its role in the transformation of the status of literary heroines in more serious narrative.

Nicholas Cronk's "La défense du dialogisme: vers une poétique du burlesque" provides a good theoretical introduction to the burlesque defined more as differentiated styles or modalities of writing rather than a genre. Stressing the disjuncture of form and content, or *énoncé/énonciation* which underpins the comic value of the burlesque as entertaining yet contestatory writing, Cronk emphasizes the polyphonous doubles of the Bakhtinian "bivocality" of parody. After the festive atmosphere of the Régence, the mazarinades and other textual efforts following the revolts of La Fronde indicate attempts to use an already debilitated burlesque for aggressive social and political reform. The spontaneity of burlesque laughter is on its way to becoming the more restrained smile of the 18th-century intellectualized or erotic parodies of epic or myth, the novel or the fairy tale (which, according to Jean-Paul Sermain, invite us to play the naïve and critical reader simultaneously). Cronk concurs with Jean Rohou's conclusion in "Burlesque et avatars de l'écriture discordante" that Richelieu's and Descartes' campaigns of rationalism, theocentrism, "honnêteté," and classicism, including the foundation of the *Académie française*, are efforts to quell and suppress the "discours à deux voix" that threatened to compromise the victories of an absolutist and monologic régime. Even Scarron's playful *embourgeoisement* of the image of the moral and divine nobility of the gods, asserted by Jean-Yves Boriaud in "L'Image des dieux

dans le *Virgil travesti*," implies that there is "trouble in paradise": methodical creation of moral and social disorder among the epic gods and men of antiquity implies corruption not only among the ancients but also in the 17th-century world of classicism.

The acts of this broad-based international colloquium on the burlesque collectively prove that, with its stereophonic notes and intentional instability as a genre, the burlesque could not exist without the serio-ludic element of playfulness that essentially purveys the pleasures of parody to its readers.

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