

«Humourism» in European Literature

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Abstract

What is Tradition? We usually (and wrongly) think it coincides with History. It would be better to think of *Traditions*, that is various experiences that co-exist in history and can be picked up to build on one's system of values to be passed on to future generations. Our knowledge is actually based on traditions, and literature makes no exception. In this paper the author shows how one tradition, i.e. the comic-humoristic one, has marked European culture and literature. Its extraordinary genealogy has been written down by Gerard de Nerval: from Apuleius through Petronius, Swift, Diderot, Voltaire, up to Lawrence Sterne. Nevertheless, in the course of time, the comic-humoristic tradition has been able to attract many other novelists, poets and artists who have brilliantly enriched our cultural experience. It is possible to go back to the nineteenth century and track down many lines of the comic-humoristic tradition acting in European cultures, in order to show their dynamics, their interactions and their influence even at the outset of children's literature.

Key words

Tradition, Humourism, History of Literature, Traditions, Carlo Collodi

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1. A Literary Tradition

In analogy with lexical models as «Romanticism» or «Neo-classicism», it is possible and necessary to create a new English term, that is «Humourism», in order to define a polymorphous literary and artistic movement born in the Nineteenth Century. This multifarious (as for genres, styles, themes etc.) movement was nourished of comic, satiric tradition and modern, wandering, irony, of boisterous laughter and witty smile: to be brief of Rabelais and Sterne, both considered as the exemplary representatives of a long, centuries old, chain of literary and artistic experiences. As we shall see, eminent European writers - Balzac, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Collodi etc. – gave an important contribution to Humourism thanks to an original interpretation of culture and of modern and ancient literature. The main aim of these authors was that to criticize Modernity and its social and cultural 'pathologies', by often working together with brilliant caricaturists such as Gavarni, Daumier, Philipon, Tricca and so forth.

The spontaneous question is why those authors wanted to join laughter and smile, irony and comic, grotesque and wit, humour and satire in a polyphonic and stratified formal system. There are two probable answers. The first one is advised by Sterne himself, who was deeply interested in Rabelais' work, as it is known, and quoted it very often. The second answer is suggested by Joseph Addison, whose writings were or had been very famous and authoritative at that time. For instance, Giacomo Leopardi owned the whole series of «The Spectator», and there are evident traces of Addison's thought in his observations on «ridicu-

lous).¹ In the number 35 of «The Spectator» (10 April 1711), Addison outlined the genealogy of Humour in a very interesting way by writing:

TRUTH was the Founder of the Family, and the Father of GOOD SENSE. GOOD SENSE was the Father of WIT, who married a Lady of a Collateral Line called MIRTH, by whom he had Issue HUMOUR. HUMOUR therefore being the youngest of this Illustrious Family, and descended from Parents of such different Dispositions, is very various and unequal in his Temper; sometimes you see him putting on grave Looks and a solemn Habit, sometimes airy in his Behaviour and fantastick in his Dress: Insomuch that at different times he appears as serious as a Judge, and as jocular as a Merry-Andrew. But as he has a great deal of the Mother in his Constitution, whatever Mood he is in, he never fails to make his Company laugh». In this way, by a complex relationship among serious(/Truth) and comic, Humour was authoritatively connected with wit, laughter and ridiculous or clownish (Merry Andrew).²

It is not mere chance that even M.me de Staël – in his important essay *De la Littérature, considérée dans ses rapports avec les Institutions Sociales*, published in Paris in 1800 – joined comic and satiric laughter to ironic smile by considering the style of Swift, Fielding and Smollet: «Il y a de la morosité, je dirais presque de la tristesse dans cette gaieté: celui qui vous fait rire n'éprouve pas le plaisir qu'il cause».³

2. An Idea of Tradition

First of all, we should ask ourselves what «Tradition» is. Tradition is something inherited from the past and it is a space where meanings collide. It may be a 'great tradition', as belonging to a urban, literate, rationalist, elitist culture; it may be also a 'small tradition', because it belongs to rural or popular culture.⁴ Tradition may also be invented – as Eric J. Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger demonstrate⁵ – by creating a fictitious relationship between past and present through repetitiveness, in order to build up a stronger social cohesion, useful nets of conventions and symbolic systems, to tighten social and political links. In literary 'rites', a tradition is what establishes or expresses a relationship with the past, and takes on the form of a representation, a whole of sometimes heterogeneous experiences, a system of knowledge, modes of communication, expression, aesthetics, genres, formal schemata, meanings, symbols, values coming to stay from an historical past that is more or less far. In this way a connection made up of vitality and continuity with the present is established, as a part of the intertwining between what is lasting and what is innovative that is never to be taken for granted in its ways.

¹ Cfr. Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi e la linea sterniana nella nostra letteratura*, in *Carlo Collodi, Opere*, Mondadori, Milano, 1995; Idem, *Leopardi e l'Umorismo*, «Il Lettore di Provincia», XXXIX, n. 130 (January-June 2008), pp. 111-127.

² Joseph Addison, «The Spectator», London, n. 35, 10th April 1711.

³ Mme. De Staël, *Oeuvres Complètes de Mme De Staël (1766-1817) Avec les Oeuvres Posthumes et une Notice sur son Caractère et ses Écrits*, Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1871, Première Partie I, 262-264.

⁴ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

Tradition may be an oral or a written one; this was very clear to Vincenzo Gioberti,⁶ who was very influential in Italy and Europe in the Nineteenth Century. Tradition can belong to lower social classes (that is how Ernesto De Martino came to study the culture and anthropological 'geography' of Southern Italy); it may be a system of rules passed on by previous generations, with whom the new generation wants to confront, in order to revive or enrich them, or rather to change them.

Actually the word «tradition» - from Latin *traditio* which is connected to the word *trado* - also has the meaning of «*relinquish sb. in form of betrayals*». The Romantic attack to Mythology, to the immutability of some expressive codes, to the idea of 'Classic', that the Neoclassics had made up, is just the right example. We know the way Giacomo Leopardi, the great poet and thinker, reacted to that, and Leopardi was a very important satiric poet and writer too!

The Latin *trado* also means «*to transmit, to hand down*». So *traditio* indicates the handing down of cultural heritage or of works/texts from the past to the new generations. That implies a clear notion and perception of the future: «tradition» is a whole of chances for the future,⁷ just the same way as it happens with genes that reproduce and differentiate on the basis of a previous corpus.

Renaissance - as it took inspiration from Classical culture, and it was contemporary to the political and social crisis of Italy in the Sixteenth Century - interpreted the word «tradition» as heritage becoming a model or *Canon*: a system of rules handed down in exemplary texts that are to be strictly followed. The Canon is about the essence of literature, the basic principle of writing. Out of the Canon there cannot be true, authentic, literature nor true, authentic, art. This peculiar interpretation, kept alive by Italian literary and artistic practice through ages, is actually just one among the possible meanings: the bases of the word *trado* are the same as in *trudo*, which means «*to carry out, to lift, to push*».⁸ (The idea of «tradition» implies a deep vision and judgement in space and time, the capacity of putting together pieces and acting in a historic and literary framework. This means that any author can reinterpret, hierarchize, establish new foundations rebuild, *to carry out*, in his own way and right so leaving his own mark (cf. Marcheschi 1997, 2001). In order to identify and study a tradition you need to perform a historic and critical work, to bring to light the complex processes of formal construction and selection, in a word the organization of experiences that incessantly enrich a tradition, and the never ending work of re-interpretation that lay under it.⁹

3. Time and History of Literature

Some concepts of «time» and «space» - by which we organize our everyday intellectual life - have been considered as *a priori* categories. They are instead the result of cultural traditions, visions of the world that have their own history, so that they should rather be

⁶ Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del Primato morale e civile degli Italiani*, Del Vaglio - Botta, Napoli - Torino, 1862. See also Amedeo Anelli, *Studiamo Gioberti*, «Kamen'. Rivista di Poesia e Filosofia», n. 30 (January 2007), pp. 121-124; *Idem*, *Studiamo Gioberti II*, «Kamen'. Rivista di Poesia e Filosofia», n. 31 (June 2007), pp. 7-8.

⁷ Also in Rodolfo Quadrelli, *Il Linguaggio della poesia*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1969.

⁸ Giovanni Semerano, *Le Origini della Cultura europea*, Olschki, Firenze, 1984, vol. II, n. 2, pp. 592 and 595.

⁹ As for the word «*tradizione*» see *Dizionario di Antropologia*, a cura di Ugo Fabietti e Francesco Remotti, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1997, pp. 761-763.

seen as the result of cultural negotiations to be continuously pondered over, enriched or changed, if needed. The word *tempus* (= time) has its origin in the ancient Roman rite of nailing a *temo* (a big iron nail) in the right wall of the main Jupiter's temple.¹⁰ Time was perceived as the accumulation of those 'nails', one after another. That explains the linear, accumulative, progressive vision of Time and History that is typical of the Roman culture, and has been taken on by Romantic Idealism. In Hegel's progressive vision of reality, History is the perceptible manifestation of the progress of Spirit, which incessantly and inexorably aims to its perfection through the dialectic process. Positivism, which was mainly influenced by Charles Darwin's theories, made the rest: History came to be identified with the process of evolution itself, seen as an ascending flow, a cumulative route to progress and civilization. Yet, if time is relentlessly running ahead, a progressive accumulation of more and more «time amounts», and of more and more intellectually rich and complete synthesis, today can only be more perfect and richer than yesterday, tomorrow will be more perfect and richer than today is. That is why to be *in the time* means to follow its incessant flow, to be careful not to lose any 'train' of what is supposed to be History, yet more and more often coinciding with the news or novelty. In such a process past is doomed to be lost and forgotten, or to be passed on just in form of ornament, quotation, museum item, because it has been 'got over'. It should be kept as a system of signs that is rich in meaning, a heritage of experiences; instead it is reduced to something elementary and after all superfluous or predictable: a *signal*.

Such an attitude contrasts with the results of nowadays researches in Human Sciences; literature belongs to culture, where values are incessantly negotiated. In the whole of events and experiences there is a multitude of formal choices that can be discussed, accepted or refused. Nothing is 'got over', instead each and every experience can be replaced: there is no inner, noumenal necessity that livens the History of Literature. It goes on by discussions and solutions, by more or less suitable proposals that, in a given historical moment, can get over others thanks to rhetoric reasons that may be especially appreciated by some cultural or social groups, or by some power groups.

The case of Carlo Collodi – who has been long taken for a minor writer because his celebrated humoristic masterpiece *The Adventures of Pinocchio* was apparently addressed to children – is highly meaningful. Round 1880 literary critics (such as Felice Cameroni) did not appreciate his writing anymore, because it was inspired to absurd and digressive Humourism, while Naturalism was fashionable. Collodi was accused by an anonymous reviewer of «doing no objectivation» and exceeding with his «incessant wit».¹¹ All that put an end to his remarkable literary success among his contemporaries: as writer and journalist, Collodi was at that moment considered the representative of a dead and buried cultural past. Nevertheless, as he was used to freedom of imagination, of language, of forms and styles, he *did not want* to adopt a Naturalistic point of view in his narrative: Collodi was and wanted to remain a comic, paradoxical writer, the main interpreter and heir at law of the Comic-Humoristic Tradition that in Tuscany and elsewhere since 1848

¹⁰ Daniela Marcheschi, *L'invenzione del 'primitivo' e l'idea di tempo nell'arte contemporanea*, in *Storia della Lingua e Filologia. Per Alfredo Stussi nel suo sessantacinquesimo compleanno*, a cura di Michelangelo Zaccarello e Lorenzo Tomasin, Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, Firenze, 2004, pp. 321-335.

¹¹ In «Fanfulla della Domenica», Roma, 22nd February 1880.

had found a fertile ground thanks to journalism, and to political, artistic and literary satire.¹²

Italian literary geography was then richer and better identifiable, but in nowadays Italy critics are still reading the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries according to Francesco De Sanctis' and Giacomo Debenedetti's interpretation. Although Debenedetti had an open mind and gave great contributions, he never criticized the categories of judgement and evaluation that De Sanctis derived from Hegel. That is why Debenedetti assigns great importance to the Naturalistic novel, that in his view embodies idealistically the 'Spirit' of modern times. He studies Verga, the character and the voice that he considers the most typical (Thesis), together with the different modes (Antithesis) that can be seen as alternatives to it or destructive elements against that literary genre, which can be found in the works by Pirandello, Svevo etc.¹³

4. Traditions, *not* Tradition

Many authors and critics adopt a single tradition as an interpretative category. This concept has often been confused with that of History at all. Not only that: it has also been seen as a two-dimensional reality, where only the present time and its immediate convenience are relevant. Yet, if we consider the topic under the light of Einstein's theories, we have to set human beings in a space-and-time dimension where past, present and future change according to the change of setting. In the same way, a human being lives in a complicated synchrony of 'Histories' and 'geographies': the multiplicity of traditions. It's us that make 'present' the cultural traditions with our choices. We make them live and operate in our own print; we make them 'past' when we judge them unsuitable to our priorities *here and now*; we make them 'future' when we pass them on to next generations.¹⁴

Vincenzo Gioberti had noticed the limits of a monological vision of tradition. His political and philosophical work aimed not just to act in politics.¹⁵ He also aimed to a re-definition of our views on Italian literature and proposed a deep change of Italian culture through Philosophy. That is why he remarked the connection between the «repubblica delle lettere» (republic of men of letters) and the «repubblica civile» (republic of statesmen); that is why he paid most attention to the «scrittori ideali» (theoretic writers), who mainly dealt with «pensiero e speculazione» (thought and speculation).¹⁶ That explains why he stressed on the need of studying «the peculiarities of Italian territories», to draw their «moral geography [...], where ideas are supported both by present and past events», and his love for Leopardi «a wonderful and innovative poet». ¹⁷ Gioberti encouraged compounding a geography and history of culture – including oral traditions – and of literature, to establish the basis of «the future destiny of our common fatherland».

¹² Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi sterniano. Da 'Un romanzo in vapore' alle 'Avventure di Pinocchio'*, in «Marvels & Tales», Special Issue on the Italian Tale, vol. VII, n. 1 (May 1993), pp. 51-68; *Idem, Collodi e la linea sterniana nella nostra letteratura*, in Carlo Collodi, *Opere*, Mondadori, Milano, 1995.

¹³ Giacomo Debenedetti, *Il romanzo del Novecento*, Garzanti, Milano, 1971; *Idem, Verga e il Naturalismo*, Garzanti, Milano, 1976.

¹⁴ Daniela Marcheschi, *Scritti di Critica e Storia dell'Arte*, Loggia de' Lanzi, Firenze, 2002.

¹⁵ Armando Saitta, Introduzione a Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del Rinnovamento civile d'Italia. Pagine scelte*, G. Barbèra, Firenze, 1925.

¹⁶ Vincenzo Gioberti, *Scritti letterari*, a cura di Ernesto Travi, Marzorati, Milano, 1971, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 48 and 179.

When he hoped for a new Italy, Gioberti understood that there can and should exist and coexist different traditions. Just a few years later, the idea itself of one «Tradition» as a unique and ancestral entity would be questioned by the rising of Anthropology. This shows how various an 'animal' the human being is, how rich and complex the events and situations in space and time that make up his existence are. The word *culture* itself indicates traditions that are socially learned and the ways of life of a given society and of its members. That includes their structured and usual way of thinking, feeling and acting (that is behaving).¹⁸ Literary critics cannot ignore such achievements. It is actually Anthropology, as it studies the multiplicity of human existence that shows how we should not see human cultures and their literatures as isolated, self-contained items. It invites us to consider the plurality of experiences, the complexity of traditions and of their coexistence. This should make us understand their heritage of time that became thought, materials, shapes, techniques, words, ideas etc., and help us to make them react with one another as in a chemical process. The traditions are not The Tradition, as there is a multi-faceted whole of literary or artistic systems that continuously change and settle, including the presently acting traditions, the past ones (classic art or literature and not only those) and the ever changing ways of perceiving and working them out. That is why it is not possible to have traditions without interpretation, and it is not possible to interpret without an authentic critic of traditions, which means a multidisciplinary critic of culture. Each author - and each critic, though in different ways - should be an interpreter of traditions and of reality, which are to be reworked in a new shape.

Humourism and its varieties - comic, grotesque writing etc. - is one among the traditions modern and contemporary literary culture is made of. And as *one* tradition, and according to the various choices of a culture, Humourism can be fashionable, very fashionable, less fashionable, not fashionable at all... No doubt that, on the contrary, the Humouristic Tradition was fashionable for a long period in the Nineteenth Century. Nowadays, Nobel Prize Dario Fo wants to be a «minstrel» (giullare): he is one of the most representative and intelligent interpreters of the Humouristic Tradition and of its deep roots in Roman and Medieval culture. All or most of the texts of this famous Author are based on the comic category of «heteroclite» - on the accumulation and mixing of different languages: ancient and contemporary Italian, Latin, dialects, onomatopoeic forms and so on. This verbal invention aims to create the «grammelot», that is a confuse, pure vocal flow, made of undistinguished onomatopoeic sounds and of true or recognizable words. In spite of the funny, comic, nonsensical confusion caused by «grammelot», the meaning is always clear: a ferocious satire of the power - a still dangerous activity!¹⁹

5. The Humoristic Tradition

The ancestry of the Humoristic Tradition has been well traced back by Gerard de Nerval in his novel *Les filles du feu* (1854): Lucianus, Petronius, Merlin Cocai, Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, Diderot, Sterne. Italian author Ferdinando Martini (1866) was even more precise in his definition of the most meaningful experiences belonging to this international

¹⁸ Marvin Harris, *Cultural Anthropology*, Harper & Low, New York, 1987, pp. 6 and 44.

¹⁹ Dario Fo, *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, Einaudi, Torino, 1987; Idem, *Il mondo secondo Fo. Conversazione con Giuseppina Manin*, Ugo Guanda Editore, Parma, 2007.

tradition. In his essay-review to *Histoire de la caricature antique* (1865) by Champfleury he indicates many more writers and artists: Pulci, Cervantes, Berni, Ariosto, Hogarth, Cailot, Casti etc.²⁰

Themes and features of the Humoristic Tradition are very peculiar and identifiable through centuries and in its different varieties, genres (comic, grotesque etc.), lines, sub-lines and sub-genres. Free mixing of literary genres, multiplicity of styles, creativity in language (polysemy, calembours, accumulations etc.), different registers – from parody of high languages to mimesis of popular talk –, caricature, absurd and paradoxical situations and characters: these are the most typical aspects.

Thanks to Lawrence Sterne this tradition enriches with the deconstruction of literary genres (specifically, the novel) by digression; with visual expression by typographical setting (e.g. white pages, reproduction of hand writing or simple drawings and graphics in the written text); with an expressive use of punctuation; with the developing of absurd to surreal climax. Lawrence Sterne is nowadays unanimously considered one among the main models for European Humoristic writers. In the Nineteenth Century his work had resonance all over Europe, both directly and as it reflected in the work of other great writers who became canon themselves in the circle of the Humoristic Tradition.

Because of its mocking character, Humourism becomes a main expression of artists and writers who supported the political movements and ideologies aiming to a deep liberal change in European society in the Nineteenth Century. In that period, a typical shape of the Humoristic literature is journalistic writing.²¹ This writing was then meant as a literary genre in its own right, because information journalism, as we know it today, is a later creation.

The short form of the journalistic article helped the writer to keep under control his virtuosity and to take the best out of it. Periodicals and newspapers made easier to reach the potential reader. Everyday chronicles offered the elements of reality that were the starting point for pieces where the main interest was the writing itself. Digression, parody, paradox, ironic antithesis, many linguistic registers, quotation (including self-quotation), sketch as the only possible way of description, enumeration, punctuation – these were only some of the tools of Humourism.

The stress on the forms of literature, that are turned in their opposite by showing them as just forms, and filling them with an incongruous content, opens the way to the destruction of literary genres that is a feature of the Nineteenth Century (and not only) Humourism in Italian and European literature. As a consequence, it is not possible to identify a specific Humoristic genre or writing. That is why it is more correct to speak of Humoristic writings and to consider that writers of different orientation engaged themselves with Humoristic writings.

For example, the Sternian influence is remarkable in Italo Svevo's works.²² Svevo made the linear forms and structures of traditional novel to explode, and he used comic and humourism in order to satirize not only the modern society, but also the typical liter-

²⁰ See also Giovanni Rabizzani, *Giovanni Sterne in Italia. Riflessi nostrani dell'umorismo sentimentale*, A. F. Formiggini, Roma, 1920; and *Idem, Lorenzo Sterne*, A. F. Formiggini, Genova, 1914.

²¹ Cf. Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, ETS, Pisa, 1990; Giuseppe Rondoni, *I giornali umoristici fiorentini del triennio glorioso (1859-1861)*, G. C. Sansoni, Firenze, 1914; Alessandro D'Ancona, *Ricordi storici del Risorgimento italiano*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1913; Guido Biagi, *Passatisti*, La Voce, Firenze, 1923.

²² Giancarlo Mazzacurati, *Il fantasma di Yorick: Laurence Sterne e il romanzo sentimentale*, a cura di Matteo Palumbo, Liguori, Napoli, 2006.

ary figures of the hero and the anti-hero. Moreover, Svevo intended to criticize Psychoanalysis and its 'reasonable' pretensions to know the contemporary world in a perfect or absolute way.

6. Humourism in Europe

Models for European writers are to be obviously found in Great Britain, where the Humorous tradition had deep roots. As an illustration Swift and «The Punch» represented irony and comic, Sterne a light and effective, creative humourism.

Other models are to be sought in France: «La Caricature», «Le Charivari» as to periodicals; Balzac, with his *Physiologies*, his stern criticism of middle class ideology with its dullness, falsity and pathological obsessions for wealth, or the satirical Alphonse Carr with his *Les guêpes*, as to writers. Since 1830 Humourism in France, in a society that was changing and should have changed faster in the opinion of many people of culture, had its best expression in the *petits journaux* such as the above mentioned, and in the journalistic writing of writers such as Balzac again, or the young Baudelaire (*La Fanfarlo*, *Le Salon Caricatural*, 1846). At stake there was freedom from both late sentimental Romanticism and academic Classicism.²³

In his home country, Sterne and caricature were surely a main model to Charles Dickens, who used humour and grotesque as an instrument of social criticism (*Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* etc). For instance, in Spain the Humorous Tradition influenced Gomez de la Serna's literary works. In Northern Europe, H. C. Andersen had his début into literature with prose works in Sternian style. In Sweden, Albert Engström (1869-1940) was a comic-satiric author and started the humorous journal «Strix». Both Sterne and his French followers became a model for some of the most important writers in Russia. A. S. Puskin wrote an anti-novel such as *Evgenij Onegin*. After Puskin, main examples of the Humorous Tradition, with wide resonance abroad until the Twentieth Century, are Gogol' or Saltykov-Scedrin. Gogol' (as Carlo Collodi did later on) even took and made his own a main, typical humorous theme from *Tristram Shandy*: that of the big nose. Writer and journalist Saltykov-Scedrin ferociously satirized Russian aristocracy and society in his humorous sketches and sarcastic novel *The Golovlioff Family*.²⁴

In Portugal – as Luisa Marinho Antunes shows²⁵ – Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro became famous thanks to his caricatural works; but also Eça de Queiroz and Brazilian writer José de Alencar wrote important humorous novels full of ironic inventions.

7. Humourism in Italy

In XIXth Century Italy, the Sterne model encouraged the development of two currents, not always so clearly split in humorous works: an approach symbolized by a melancholic smile – as the spirit of *A Sentimental Journey* was understood in the translation by Ugo Foscolo²⁶ –, or non melancholic Humourism to ferocious satire, which marks the end of

²³ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.

²⁴ Federico Verdinois, Introduzione a Mihail E. Saltykov-Scedrin, *La Famiglia Golovlioff*, Carabba, Lanciano, I-VIII 1919).

²⁵ Luisa Marinho Antunes Paolinelli, *O Romance histórico e José de Alencar*, Ph. D. dissertation, Funchal, Universidade da Madeira, 2004.

²⁶ Luca Toschi, *Foscolo lettore di Sterne e altri 'Sentimental Travellers'*, «Modern Language Notes», vol. 97, n. 1 (1982), pp. 19-40; Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.

the Romantic concept of Humourism. Carlo Collodi is one of the most eminent representatives of this new dry Humourism.

Humourism in writing reveals itself as a powerful weapon to criticize and demolish obsolete systems of thought, social and artistic conventions, formalisms of any kind – and of doing that in an enjoyable, popular way. In Italian Risorgimento, Humourism was a useful instrument for those who wanted to criticize dominant culture and politics without being censored *ipso facto*. Periodicals had a very good moment as a mean of dissemination of humoristic writings when they blossomed in the momentarily increased freedom in 1848-49. Their inspiration came from French *petits journaux* where Humourism took also the shape of graphic caricature. Satirical vignettes were typical of such publications, and the international trade of humoristic engravings and lithographies was particularly flourishing in that time.

Carlo Collodi was a contributor, editor, or even editor in chief and owner of many such periodicals: «L'Arte», «Lo Scaramuccia», «Il Lampione», the famous «Fanfulla» etc. As for his inimitable Humoristic style, the Sternian model reached him and many of his fellow-writers not only through Foscolo's translation, but also through the work of Filippo Pananti,²⁷ who led an eventful life. As Pananti lived in London at the turn of the Century, he had a direct reception of Fielding's and Sterne's works. Besides Pananti had a more radical comic-parodical attitude than Foscolo, and such an attitude can be found in Collodi's style too.²⁸

Collodi was deeply committed both in politics and in literature. He sincerely aimed at social and artistic renewal. The Humoristic writing served him perfectly. He was part of a meaningful movement that has representatives all over Italy, especially in Lombardy and Tuscany, two Italian regions that had a specific, deeply rooted Humoristic Tradition.

In Collodi's work we find a deep influence of Balzac as to the capacity of choosing different registers, from the parodical use of high languages to the mimesis of popular talk. The references here are also the Italian comical tradition from Renaissance, the chronologically nearer Giuseppe Giusti or Carlo Bini, who translated and wrote commentaries to parts of *Tristram Shandy* and was a refined writer in his own right. Thanks to his writing on different periodicals, the value of Collodi's work was acknowledged and took into consideration in different Italian literary groups, and his influence extended. «Smile» or «laugh» are the keywords of this style, as opposed to «sentimentalism».²⁹

Ferdinando Martini, who practised the Humoristic journalism as a young writer, later on took the parts of Naturalism, and tried to diminish the movement represented by the many periodicals that were popular in Florence and Italy in the 1850's: «Il Lampione», «L'Arte», «La Lente», «Lo Scaramuccia», «L'Arlecchino», «Il Pasquino», «Lo Spirito Folletto», «Il Passatempo», «La Lanterna di Diogene», «La Chiacchiera», «La Torre di Babele».³⁰ Yet they are to be considered the only place where a free and progressive lit-

²⁷ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.; Lucio Felici, *La satira e il Giusti*, in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, VII, L'Ottocento, a cura di Emilio Cecchi e Natalino Sapegno, Garzanti, Milano, 1969, pp. 1069-1108.

²⁸ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.; Roberto Randaccio, *Lessico collodiano*, Editrice Taphros, Olbia, 2006.

²⁹ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.; Paola Luciani, *Collodi tra scrittura d'umore e satira*, in *Carlo Collodi. Lo spazio delle meraviglie*, a cura di Roberto Fedi, Amilcare Pizzi - Banca Toscana, Milano, 1990, pp. 209-223.

³⁰ Ferdinando Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi (Firenze granducale)*, R. Bemporad & Figlio, Firenze, 1922; For articles, political opinions and battles, see Giuseppe Rondoni, *I giornali umoristici fiorentini del triennio glo-*

erature could be at home in a repressive age (1848-1860), and could strengthen and spread from 1860 on, when Tuscany was united to Italy. Anyway, Martini recognized Carlo Collodi, together with Celestino Bianchi, as the valuable artists who survived the end of that literary season with the overcoming of Naturalism in Italy in the last twenty years of the Nineteenth Century.

Carlo Lorenzini/Collodi was born as a writer on the pages of periodicals. His first job as journalist was on a musical publication «L'Italia Musicale». In this field he developed his rich and various culture, which took materials and inspiration from different forms of art. There he also developed his peculiar views about tradition and innovation. This can be seen in his approach to opera: Verdi and later on Wagner (or rather, the Wagnerians) are considered the representatives of a style that aims to success by arousing as much as possible emotions in the public. Collodi's preference goes to Rossini, who uses a greater variety of musical registers and is able to handle texts in a non-Naturalistic way, in sometimes paradoxical contrast with both the musical expression they go together with and common sense. This tells much about the choices Collodi did as a writer himself.³¹ His way of playing with language in order to reach absurd and surreal effects has been taken again in the Twentieth Century by such artists as Ettore Petrolini and Totò and such writers as Achille Campanile, Alberto Savinio or Giovanni Guareschi.³² Please notice that Savinio is the only Italian writer André Breton included in his *Anthologie de l'Humour noir* (1939).

When Carlo Lorenzini starts writing longer texts (only in the year 1856 he adopts the pen-name Collodi while contributing to the journal «La Lente»), he keeps to this paradoxical style. His novels are anti-novels, where story and plot dissolve in a myriad of digressions, quotations, puns. Literary genres that were most popular are gaily demolished: the journey tale and the travel guide with *Da Firenze a Livorno: Un romanzo in vapore* (*Florence to Leghorn: a Novel by train*, pub. 1856); the social and suspense novel in Eugene Sue's style with *I Misteri di Firenze* (*Mysteries in Florence*, pub. 1857). In all Carlo Collodi's works from this period, as well as in the later ones both for children and adults, parody and quotations that he hardly restyled not only from other writers' work or opera librettos, but also from his own journalistic articles, can be found in almost every page.³³ We should not wonder at this, as it is typical of Humourism in writing to use the widest variety of *topoi*, as well as to identify some specific ones that may become the brand of that specific writer. A fashion that we can find in Ippolito Nievo among Collodi's contemporaries, and in Luigi Pirandello in the Twentieth Century.³⁴

rioso (1859-1861), cit. As for journals, writers, artists, and caricatures see *Angiolo Tricca e la caricatura toscana dell'Ottocento*, a cura di Martina Alessio, Valentino Baldacci, Silvestra Bietoletti e Andrea Rauch, Giunti, Firenze, 1993.

³¹ Daniela Marcheschi, *Carlo Collodi critico musicale. Gioacchino Rossini e il Risorgimento*, «Bollettino del Centro Rossiniano di Studi», vol. XLVII (2007), pp. 5-28.

³² Guido Conti, *Giovannino Guareschi. Biografia di uno scrittore*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2008; Achille Campanile, *Collodi*, «Gazzetta del Popolo», 20th December 1940; Roberto Randaccio, *Lessico collodiano*, cit.

³³ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi ritrovato*, cit.; *Idem, Collodi e la linea sterniana nella nostra letteratura*, cit.

³⁴ Giancarlo Mazzacurati, *Pirandello nel romanzo europeo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1987; *Idem, L'arte del titolo, da Sterne a Pirandello*, in *Effetto Sterne. La narrazione umoristica in Italia da Foscolo a Pirandello*, a cura di Giancarlo Mazzacurati, Nistri - Lischi, Pisa, pp. 294-332; Giovanni Maffei, *Nievo e il romanzo di transizione*, Liguori, Napoli, 1990; Ugo M. Olivieri, *Narrare avanti il reale. «Le confessioni di un italiano» e la forma-romanzo nell'Ottocento*, Angeli, Milano, 1990.

These features went on developing through the whole Century, up to the first decades of the Twentieth Century, when Luigi Pirandello theorized and practised Humouristic writing as a way to show that there is no revealed truth in human facts, and that truth itself is an always-changing, never-to-be-seized entity. Pirandello's Humourism was especially tinged with bitter paradox and became more and more surreal thanks to the author's detailed analysis of sensations and deep psychological processes.³⁵

8. Annotation

Carlo Collodi is one of the fathers of world children's literature. He became an author of children's books because the Humouristic literature came to a decline in the late Nineteenth Century. Naturalism took over with his authoritarian cult of reality and facts. Instead, a large conception of sensible world and literary or artistic form and freedom of inventiveness are basic in Humourism. From the mix of Humourism with Pedagogics the main tradition in children's literature is born. We trace this in Collodi's work first, then in the works of such writers as Sergio Tofano (STO), Gianni Rodari or Astrid Lindgren.³⁶

³⁵ Daniela Marcheschi, *Collodi e la linea sterniana nella nostra letteratura*, cit.

³⁶ *Idem*, *La Letteratura per l'Infanzia*, in *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Il Novecento. Sperimentalismo e tradizione del nuovo, a cura di Nino Borsellino e Walter Pedullà, Federico Motta, Milano, vol. XII, pp. 516-551; *Idem*, *Per una idea di infanzia*, in Luísa Marinho Antunes and Daniela Marcheschi (eds.), *Os anos de Pinoquio. Actas do Colóquio Internacional de Estudos, Universidade da Madeira - Fondazione Nazionale Carlo Collodi, Funchal, 28 October-2 November 2005*, Universidade da Madeira.