

Satirical Thinking Between the wisdom of philosophers and the imagination of writers



Rezak Karima

University of Mohamed Ben Ahmed - Oran 2,

Research Unit in Human Sciences: Philosophical, Social, and Human Studies -

University of Mohamed Ben Ahmed – Oran2

karima.rezak@univ-oran2.dz

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Abstract:

Laughter represents a vital intersection between philosophy and literature it is thus more than a mere emotional reaction devoid of meaning. It transcends its conventional functions to become an instrument of thought and analysis. In philosophy, laughter is viewed as a means of deconstructing intellectual traditions and a tool for questioning established certainties, exposing the inherent contradictions within social and moral beliefs, and re-evaluating prevailing values. In literature laughter serves as a vehicle for surpassing the familiar, shedding light on the internal tensions of the human condition and the paradoxes of life.

If laughter were to be considered a marginal subject, then philosophy remains indebted to literature for having paved the way toward engaging with the margins and addressing its issues, issues which, through a curious paradox, have become central to philosophical thought. Ultimately, laughter blends with both literature and philosophy as a shared horizon that enables the creation of a form of intellectual dialogue, one that bridges seriousness and playfulness, revealing the hidden depths of human reality and contributing to its reconfiguration.

Keywords: Laughter, Philosophy, Literature, Margins, Resistance, Punishment, Social Critique, Irony, Satire, Sardonic Thinking, Hatred

*Corresponding Author: Rezak Karima, University of Oran 2

Introduction:

Philosophy and literature intertwine within a shared fabric, together forming an expansive map for exploring the human being and the world at large. They are united by their use of language as a tool for expression and analysis, and by their common quest to grasp the nature of existence. Yet, they differ in the modalities through which they apprehend this understanding. When laughter is added to this duo, a new dimension of the human experience emerges, one that reaches into its hidden depths.

Have we ever truly asked ourselves what life would be like without a sense of humour or wit? The question of laughter, despite its apparent simplicity and self-evidence, is both intriguing and astonishing. Nevertheless, it has long been considered a marginal topic within the field of philosophy, especially when compared to more 'serious' subjects such as existence, knowledge, and values. Philosophy has traditionally focused on the grand questions, leaving matters of laughter to the arts and social sciences.

However, in recent decades, we have witnessed a noticeable shift in philosophical concerns. Topics once relegated to the periphery are now entering philosophical discourse. In many ways, literature has served as the locomotive pulling philosophy toward the margins. But how did the margin itself become a center for philosophical reflection? Does philosophical thought require a literary medium to approach the concept of laughter? How does laughter perform a dual function of deconstruction in philosophy and critical expression in literature? How is the seriousness of laughter shaped as an interpretive horizon that enables us to rethink concepts such as hatred, punishment, and resistance?

Philosophy, at its core, has been – since Socrates – intrinsically linked to the art of deconstruction and questioning. However, this skill has never been devoid of a mocking tone, one that ridicules assumptions and strips them of their rigid veneer. Yet, laughter itself has not always been welcomed in the history of philosophy. While Plato condemned it in *The Republic* as a disturbance of the soul and a disruption of discipline, Bergson, in his book *Laughter*, celebrated it as a social mechanism for penalizing the rigidity and mechanical nature of life. Between these two stances emerges the need to reread the concept of irony as a bridge between reflective thought and literary imagination, in an approach that reaffirms laughter and absurdity as a form of thinking, a cognitive tool, and a weapon of resistance. This article is based on the following fundamental hypotheses:

1. There is a hidden structural relationship between philosophy and literature, which reveals itself when philosophy opens up to marginalized topics. Literature has enabled philosophy to delve into what remains unsaid or excluded from official meaning, and laughter is one of these topics.

2. Irony is not merely a linguistic or aesthetic practice; it is a form of critique that destabilizes fixed connotations and meanings, both in philosophy and literature.
3. Laughter is not only irony; it is a critical consciousness that combines both social corrective adaptation and internal rejection, or existential irony, as expressed by Nietzsche.
4. Laughter does not reveal the fragility of the self but rather explores its strength, which is why laughter, philosophically speaking, represents a form of mature assimilation of existence.

Based on this, we will attempt, through this study, to elucidate the symbolic position of laughter within the intersection of philosophy and literature, by tracing its manifestations in certain texts and intellectual approaches that present laughter not as a mere side effect, but as a semantic act that questions assumptions and grants the self a deeper space for thought. As for the methodology, we have relied on a dual analytical-interpretive approach, starting with a philosophical analysis of concepts such as laughter, irony, and hatred, moving toward interpreting the symbolic and social contexts in which laughter appears. We view this methodological integration as a complementary approach that allows for deconstructing the underlying meaning behind representations of laughter as a form of critical consciousness, rather than just a fleeting emotion. Based on this, we have divided the work into five main

1. The Margin as a Subject of Thought:

As a philosophical concept, the margin has succeeded in opening a new horizon for thought, one that transcends the confines of traditional centralities that have dominated the history of philosophy, whether those centralities be reason, absolute truth, or authority. Thanks to critical philosophies, the margin is no longer synonymous with exclusion, oblivion, meaninglessness, or weakness. Instead, it has become a structural counterpart to the center, one that bears within it a force capable of rethinking systems of power, knowledge, and history by deconstructing dominant centralities and giving voice to the silenced and the marginalized.

But have we ever asked ourselves what it would mean to erase the boundary between center and margin, and to regard both sides with equal consideration, even if they do not operate according to the same scale?

The first image that comes to mind when we evoke the idea of the "margin" is the notebook, through which we come to understand the margin in its simplest, and perhaps also most precise, sense. The margin is the footnote of the book, the space adjacent to the main text, left for secondary remarks. From this understanding, we construct a conception of the margin as a frame that surrounds the whole.

In the Hachette dictionary, we find the following definition: "The margin is the white space around the text, the engraving, or the drawing... the marginal is that which lies on the margin of the text, that which is not important, or that which exists on the periphery of society" (Hachette, 1993, p. 984).

Accordingly, the margin refers to all that is produced outside the institution, with all the cultural, social, political, and even academic significance this term carries, rendering it excluded and rejected as something external and rebellious against traditional frameworks and official discourses.

The history of philosophy reveals a persistent effort to impose the logic of the center as an epistemic authority, presenting it as the sole bearer of truth, while relegating anything that does not conform to this classification beyond the bounds of rationality in one way or another. Philosophical texts make it clear how Plato, for instance, devoted much of his dialogues to combating Sophistic thought. A reader of *The Republic* will readily observe how rhetoric and sophistry were sidelined and classified as enemies of truth.

Greek philosophy thus came to represent the center as a domain of fixed truth, whereas the Sophists were cast as marginal figures, outsiders who sought to distort truth. "Yet it is worth noting that the Sophists were in fact committed to teaching virtue. Importantly, the term "virtue" at the time did not carry the strictly moral connotation it has today. For the Greeks, it denoted a person's capacity to fulfill their role in the state efficiently and successfully. Besides, since the Sophists trained young people to become effective citizens under the political conditions surrounding them, they were, in essence, teachers of virtue." (Zaki Nadjib Mahmoud & Ahmed Amin, 2001, p. 28)

The essential question for the Sophists was not: Where is truth located? but rather: How can we establish what may be regarded as truth for others?

In debate, for instance, it is not the one who is right who prevails, but the one with the stronger argument. In war, it is not justice that triumphs, but the side that possesses the tools of victory. The Sophists were not concerned with the external world; rather, they focused on the internal world, what lies within the soul. They believed that the true battlefield is not in ontology or being, but in the psyche.

To influence the crowds that surround me, it is not essential to know what really exists, but rather to understand how to affect what truly exists within them. The Sophists were not deceivers or manipulators; rather, they were thinkers who embraced humility and said: instead of wagering on what lies beyond our grasp, let us focus on what is within our power.

Thus, rather than founding an ontological language concerned with being, they sought to establish a rhetorical language, one accessible to all, and this became the art of rhetoric.

The Sophist, as a marginal figure, succeeded in offering an alternative mode of thought, and thus a different style of writing. In truth, the margin has become a subject of philosophical inquiry as a result of major epistemological,

intellectual, and even social transformations. Chief among these are the critique of traditional intellectual centralities and the rise of critical and deconstructive philosophies.

With Jacques Derrida, for example, the margin became a fundamental part of the deconstructive methodology, not as a means of destroying the center, but as a way of revealing the tensions within the text or discourse, where the margin plays a central role in destabilizing the authority of the center.

For Derrida, language itself is marked by marginality. Western thought since Plato prioritized presence, that is, speech, over absence, meaning writing. This distinction relegated writing to the margins as a secondary tool subordinated to spoken language. However, Derrida rehabilitated writing, showing that every linguistic meaning inherently involves absence, and that the margin becomes essential to understanding language and meaning.

With Michel Foucault, thinking from the margin becomes a space for reconstructing knowledge outside the framework of power. Foucault argued that power operates by establishing norms that define what is natural and what is abnormal. Those classified as abnormal are pushed to the margins, such as the mentally ill in *Madness and Civilization*, where they were isolated and designated as part of the irrational margin in contrast to the rational center. He further demonstrated how educational institutions produce marginality by establishing criteria for success and failure, positioning all those who do not conform to these criteria on the periphery.

To this must be added the role played by philosophies of difference, which recognized the margin as a space for creativity and diversity. Nor can we ignore the 20th century's emergence of emancipatory and social movements that enshrined the margin as a vital force in struggle and resistance, asserting its importance as a component of collective identity.

As Richard Rorty aptly put it: "We must accept that all philosophers and writers are valuable, but within two different and separate vocabularies... Whoever wishes to step outside the language of the tribe must discover their own terms, but this does not absolve them of their responsibility toward the academic community to which they belong. Both sides are right, yet there is no way to make them speak the same language." (**Richard Rorty, 2022, p. 25**)

The margin has managed to move beyond the stereotypical boundaries assigned to it, gradually freeing itself from the main text. It is no longer subordinate to it or governed by it. The margin is no longer a mere branch; it has come to stand as a synonym for the origin. Perhaps the best gateway to reading margins is literature, which has historically been the most effective in reading the margin.

In his book *The liberal ironist*, Rorty states that: "The Romantic movement marks the beginning of an attempt to substitute for the story told by the Greek philosophers a better story... The old story was about something that stood firm and separate from the ephemeral human things. The new story is about how

human beings constantly strive to transcend their own past in order to create a better future.” (R. Rorty, Volume 4, p. 117)

Consequently, contemporary philosophy no longer retains the same traditional rigor, what we might call the rigor of origins, due to the collapse of grand philosophical systems and the growing attention of philosophers to the everyday, the ordinary, and perhaps even the banal. This is what brings philosophy into closer connection with life itself. Such an entanglement with the human and the lived is precisely what characterizes authentic literature. As Richard Rorty notes: “The reader of literature does not regard books as corresponding to any essence beyond the human horizon. They are merely human attempts to satisfy human needs.” (Richard Rorty, 2022, p. 19)

Thus, philosophy had to train itself for this role, and the way forward was to push philosophy toward the margins of culture and literature. In this sense, the margin becomes a space for questioning, for doubt, and for re-evaluation, which makes it a central concern in any contemporary philosophical project.

Today, philosophy concerns itself with the everyday, the lived, the shared, and the marginal, thanks to literature. Philosophical discourse, for instance, cannot meaningfully engage with the concept of friendship without returning to works such as *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin* and *Rasa'il* by al-Jahidh, *al-Imta wa al-Mu'anasa* and *al-Sadaka wa al-Sadik* by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, or without drawing from the poetry of Abu Tammam and al-Mutanabbi. Similarly, one cannot discuss the notion of hospitality and mutual hosting in light of Derrida without revisiting *al-Boukhala* (The Misers) by al-Jahidh, the cultural rituals of hospitality as exemplified by Hatim al-Tai as a symbol of generosity, or the works of Ahmad Chawki, Mikhail Naimy, and Gibran Khalil Gibran, who addressed hospitality as a deeply human value.

It would also be impossible to discuss power, order, and the problem of punishment without engaging with prison literature, reading *The Road to Prison* by Faradj Foda, *The Long Road* by Nadjib al-Kilani, or the poetry of Adonis. One must also consider *Just Five Minutes* by Hiba al-Dabbagh, a novel that cost her nine years of imprisonment.

Likewise, the relationship between philosophy and laughter, as a point of convergence between critical thought and literary practice, must be acknowledged. Laughter has garnered the attention of philosophers and writers alike, who have linked it to irony, both self-directed and outwardly focused. Added to this is the contribution of contemporary psychologists, who have developed catharsis theory, arguing that laughter enables the release of psychic energy and repressed emotions, ranging from gentle humour to biting satire, and even to crude mockery, replete with suggestive jokes and obscene gestures.

2 – The Laughing Philosopher

The philosophical inquiry does not only aim to destabilize our certainties regarding the truth of things, but also extends to questioning what seems self-evident. Even the most ordinary or familiar phenomena cannot be accepted as

unquestionable axioms. Both philosophy and comedy share the endeavour to perceive the world from an alternative, often disruptive perspective. Consequently, the philosopher and the comedian both possess a unique courage, allowing them to see and articulate what others tend to avoid, whether due to modesty or fear, and to express it as a potentially unsettling or even terrifying truth.

Laughter, as triggered by a joke, undoubtedly captures attention, yet it is the good joke that liberates both the will and desire; it has the potential to bring about change. This capacity for transformation lies at the very core of philosophical activity, a domain in which philosophers have continually engaged with audacity. Thus, any philosophical examination of laughter must aim to understand it not simply as an emotional or behavioural response, but as a complex interplay of motivations and actions, aiming not just to comprehend it, but to make us worthy of its pleasures. For, in the end, the objective is not the mere perpetuation of laughter, but to engage in a reflective, thoughtful moment before laughter occurs, so that laughter itself becomes an act that harmonizes tranquility with heightened awareness.

No one has ever been immune to the pleasure of laughter or a smile. However, our understanding of laughter cannot be reduced to mere playful gestures or moments of joy, for the causes and forms of laughter are varied and diverse, influenced by social contexts with which people have become accustomed to associating the act of laughing. Therefore, we do not seek to confine laughter within rigid definitions, as we perceive it first and foremost as something alive. The laughing philosopher does not view laughter as mere amusement; rather, it is a deconstruction of concepts and an unveiling of social and psychological contradictions. Laughter becomes a philosophical tool, a means of resisting the absurdity of life. And since, as Bergson argues, humour addresses the pure intellect, laughter remains, even in its most unrestrained and irrational moments, governed by a hidden rationality and a method that justifies its existence (Bergson, 1964, pp. 5-8).

At the outset, it is essential to understand humour as a general framework. Laughter, comedy, sarcasm, and folly are its manifestations, serving as expressions of this broader concept. Humour is a charming and enjoyable way of expressing thoughts or emotions to provoke laughter and bring joy. In literature and criticism, humour is recognized as a linguistic or literary style that conveys the contradictions of life or human behaviours in a witty and satirical manner, often carrying social or critical messages. Humour is an integral part of Arabic heritage, deeply connected to social, political, and literary criticism, and has appeared in various forms such as anecdotes, tales, and maqamat (or literary discourses).

In *Lisan al-Arab*, Ibn Mandhour explains: "He amused them with witty remarks: he made them laugh... Humour, when pronounced with a 'damma' (fukahah), refers to the act of making jokes; whereas, pronounced with a 'fatha'

(fakahah), it denotes the state of being cheerful and inclined to banter." (**Ibn Mandhour, undated, vol. 13, p. 524**)

Humour, then, serves as a means of relaxation and an expression of human emotions. Although it has garnered significant attention in Arabic literature, this did not prevent writers from engaging with it cautiously. While the writer may take pride in understanding and recounting humorous tales, it is not praised for immersing oneself too deeply in it or making it the sole subject or material. Mouhammad Ibn Ishak al-Washa, in his introduction to the Book of Wit and the Witty, states: "Excessive jesting humiliates a person, lowers their status, and diminishes their dignity..." Similarly, there is a near consensus between wisdom and religion on the rejection of excessive laughter. Imam Al-Mawardi clarified that moderate laughter is acceptable, provided it is neither excessive nor lacking. He explained, "As for laughter, its habitual practice distracts from important matters and causes one to forget to reflect on pressing concerns. One who indulges excessively in laughter loses their dignity and reverence, and they are left without honour or measure." (**Al-Mawardi, 2006, p. 344**)

Books of literature are replete with forms of humour, though writers have discarded what is dull and tasteless, preserving only that which carries meaning and flavour according to the refined taste of the literary mind. For instance, in the Nawadir (anecdotes), one does not find anything resembling the compositions of children, the naïve, or the ignorant... only that which bears genuine literary value according to the standards of the discerning and intelligent reader. (**Al-Aqqad, 2014, p. 115**)

Among the witty anecdotes in Arabic literature is that of Al-Ḥamdouni, who, when reproached for feigning foolishness, replied: "A foolishness that supports me is better than a wisdom I must support." Another humorous tale tells of Al-Mouzbid, who heard of a day of fasting said to be equal in reward to fasting an entire year. He fasted until noon, then broke his fast, saying, "Six months of reward is enough for me, let's count Ramadan among them." In his book *Juḥa* the Laughing Philosopher, Al-Aqqad points out that laughter has many forms and shades, from the laughter of joy, to that of scorn, jest, delight, wonder, mockery, surprise, stupidity, and naïveté. Some of these forms may be simply linked to humour, while others may not. Indeed, laughter can at times be a sign of high morale, rather than mere enjoyment.

Among the Greeks, Greek theatre marked the point of origin for what came to be known as comedy or "al-malhat", as illustrated in the works of Aristophanes. This theatrical art emerged from religious festivals shared by all segments of society and aimed at highlighting societal flaws, turning them into a collective source of laughter. Comedy, as a form of expressing discontent, mockery, satire, and irony, would later acquire a distinctly political character as comic poets gained a significant degree of freedom. "Their plays," as Abd al-Aziz Charaf notes, "were filled with suggestive allusions, offensive symbols, and biting satire" (**Charaf, 1992, p. 16**). Thus, comedy became a kind of safety valve for the Athenian

aristocracy, and before long, it evolved into a whip against vice and folly (Dikos Achille, trans., p. 23).

Democritus was known as "the laughing philosopher", not because he laughed out of foolishness or ignorance, but because laughter served as a mechanism for releasing his frustration and anger toward human folly and ignorance. This was acknowledged by the physician Hippocrates, who affirmed that Democritus was the wisest and most rational among us, for he used laughter as a means to achieve two essential aims: endurance and confrontation. Similarly, Plato, especially in *The Republic* and his discussions of the virtues of society, concluded that laughter provides a crucial starting point for understanding many human and psychological emotions. However, he also warned that laughter could be destructive to the moral and social order, as it weakens reason, rationality, and structure. For this reason, he excluded jest and comic amusement from his ideal republic. Socrates did not deviate from this path. With his focus on virtue, he did not see laughter as a tool for entertainment but rather as a pedagogical method, a means to disarm his interlocutor, rid them of intellectual arrogance, and invite them into a continuous pursuit of truth and virtue.

With Aristotle, the view of laughter became more open and nuanced. In his work *Poetics*, Aristotle dedicated a section to comedy, a genre that provokes laughter through the imitation and portrayal of human flaws and errors in a harmless and non-destructive manner. For Aristotle, comedy is not a mockery of virtue, but rather a critique of human weakness. According to him, laughter is not merely an emotional or spontaneous philosophical reaction; rather, it is a cognitive process imbued with deep philosophical significance. What is striking is that we do not laugh solely at people's flaws, we may also laugh at their virtues. However, what amuses us is not the virtuous behaviour itself, but the manner in which that behaviour is expressed. As Henri Bergson notes, "It is more difficult to make flexible vice appear comical than to do the same with rigid virtue; for what society fears most is rigidity" (Bergson, 1964, p. 114).

The farce begins when we grow rigid against social life, when others cease to matter and our connection with them dissolves. Anyone who embodies this equation becomes laughable. Laughter requires resonance; this is what gives it its social character and makes it a fertile ground for human and interpersonal relationships. It accompanies most conversations and dialogues, and friendships in particular nourish a kind of intimate laughter within the context of shared moments, reinforcing bonds and enhancing interaction. As a result, relationships often gain resilience through humour. Consequently, it becomes almost impossible to genuinely laugh with someone we despise or resent.

Laughter, moreover, knows no fixed boundaries, it is ever-changing and non-repetitive. It carries within it the mark of transformation, and its cessation would imply a break with life itself, for humour animates human existence. Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment*, speaks of laughter through his Incongruity Theory, arguing that it is a mental response to something perceived

as unexpectedly incongruent. The mind, always seeking to rationalize, reacts when a given expectation collapses into absurdity, this collapse generates laughter. For Kant, laughter is not a product of ridicule or pain, but the result of what he terms mental play.

Schopenhauer goes deeper still, linking laughter to his broader philosophy of life as driven by will. According to him, laughter arises from the disparity between concept and empirical reality, a contradiction that manifests in humour and irony, offering the individual a brief liberation from the tyranny of the will. Through laughter, the absurdity of existence and its superficial coherence are exposed. Henri Bergson, in a similar vein, emphasizes that our laughter is collective. It reflects the customs, traditions, and even the implicit assumptions of a given society. “However spontaneous laughter may seem,” he writes, “it hides a tacit understanding, indeed, a kind of conspiracy, with other laughers, real or imagined” (Bergson, 1964, p. 9). This realization compels us to stop viewing laughter in isolation from human activity. Hence, the comic cannot be reduced to mere entertainment for the mind.

Definitions that frame the comic as a product of logical contradiction or perceptual incongruity fall short when applied to the full range of laughter experiences. They cannot answer the fundamental question: Why does the comic make us laugh? To approach an answer, Bergson proposes a return to the comic’s original environment, society. Laughter, he argues, is a response to a lack of flexibility in social behaviour, particularly when individuals fail to adapt to circumstances or context. Thus, laughter functions as a corrective mechanism, a way of reintegrating deviant or overly mechanical behaviour into its proper form. According to Bergson, laughter resurrects fluidity in the social body. Beyond this, it serves as a moral corrector, restraining social deviance and softening rigid personalities and behaviours. In doing so, it fosters psychological flexibility.

The one who laughs requires a distinct psychological disposition, one that reveals a significant degree of intelligence and sensitivity, qualities that allow them to embody the “truth of human experience in joy and satisfaction, in irony and sarcasm, in subjective temperament, in gloating, astonishment, and wonder” (Houssein Kharyouch, 1986, p. 7). This is precisely what makes laughter a matter of intelligence rather than a mere emotional or affective response, as Bergson asserted. Laughter is a rational phenomenon, for it requires a certain degree of emotional distance in order to laugh with others. This rationality ties laughter more closely to thought and analysis than to automatic reaction. We do not laugh simply because something is funny; we laugh because we intellectually grasp how and why it is so. Laughter is not a muscular twitch or a fleeting psychological state; it is the result of a cognitive operation, of recognizing the incongruity between intention and expression, between the apparent and the implicit.

In this way, laughter, through a curious paradox, becomes a mental exercise that transcends instinct and moves toward intellect. Yet, for all its depth, this perspective still remains within the bounds of moral seriousness that Nietzsche

famously criticized. While Bergson viewed laughter as a mechanism of social correction and conformity, Nietzsche declared that society itself, with its values and beliefs, had become raw material for ridicule. It is as if Nietzsche redirects laughter away from others and toward the self, framing it as an existential act, a rebellion against obsolete values, and a form of irony aimed even at reason itself, making laughter a mark of maturity and human superiority, sees it as an achievement realized only when one becomes capable of laughing at oneself and at the weight of one's own existence. (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 286)

3. Laughter and Hatred

“If hatred were not bitter, then what of the hatred of injustice?” This is the compelling question posed by Terry Eagleton in his book *The Philosophy of Humour*. Hatred, he argues, is a natural and human response to oppression and suffering. It is a cold, deliberate, and sorrowful affect, a manifestation of our desire to annihilate a presence or compensate for its existence. As such, it functions as a stable emotional disposition for those who bear it. Hatred, however, is not merely an impulsive outburst, it is a cultural affect, one that cannot be understood apart from its historical and symbolic content. As El-Meskini explains, “we hate within an imaginary construct, within a moral space, and according to pre-given cultural codes” (El-Meskini, 2016, p. 34). Often, hatred carries cultural or national signatures, functioning as a shared sentiment within specific communities.

Thus, hatred may appear as a form of moral entitlement for those who have been wronged, those labelled as victims. Within the moral economy of suffering, the victim is perceived as being in positive relation to a culture of hatred, needing no further justification before the tribunal of human conscience. But this raises a profound ethical question: Do we, as individuals, communities, and nations, have the right to hate?

In many cases, laughter becomes a proxy for unspoken negative emotions, such as contempt, resentment, or hatred. This manifests in what scholars term aggressive humour, a form of comedic expression that masks hostility beneath laughter. One of the most vivid modern examples is the 2005 publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*. These cartoons were widely perceived by Muslims as a profound offense to their religion and sacred symbols, triggering global protests. To many, they represented not satire but a deliberate act of hate and derision, targeting Islam as a faith and Muslims as the "Other."

Moreover, humour frequently plays a complicit role in perpetuating negative stereotypes. This occurs when jokes are consistently linked to certain ethnic, cultural, or regional groups, reinforcing social bias and entrenching systemic divisions within the social fabric. Such humour does not merely amuse, it normalizes prejudice. In this context, mass media and digital platforms often amplify the circulation of hate speech under the guise of humour, thereby

trivializing serious forms of discrimination and alienation through irresponsible and uncritical comedic dissemination.

Societal discourses have long called for confronting hate speech and dismantling its foundations, under the premise that humanity is always nobler than those who wrong it. However, as El-Meskini asserts, "it is not easy for humanity to forgo certain doses of hatred in order to invent a certain measure of happiness." Can we truly imagine a world in which no one is capable of hating anyone, where each of us is condemned to love those who have destroyed our dreams and mocked our very existence? As peoples, we need hatred, not as a moral ideal, but as a psychic necessity. We cannot continue, as El-Meskini warns, "the naïve evangelism of preaching love-based societies free of hatred." And since reason remains the final wall in our battle for human dignity, "humanity," in El-Meskini's words, "means nothing more than training the self to forget the strangeness of others, and learning to grow familiar with them and at ease in their presence" (El-Meskini, 2016, p. 78). Nietzsche was right when he claimed that humanity needs someone to teach it how to laugh.

4. Laughter and Punishment:

Correction and reform are among the most significant aims of humour. The rectification of behaviour does not necessarily rely on the direct promotion of virtuous values among individuals; rather, it can be achieved through humour and satire. However, laughter is not always innocent, within it lies a measure of malice, a blend of pride and selfishness. Voltaire was not mistaken when he described laughter as diabolical in nature and human at the same time, suggesting that it embodies both good and evil.

Laughter can thus function as a punitive instrument that reinforces social norms, particularly when used to humiliate. When society laughs at an individual for a transgression, such laughter serves as an indirect form of social condemnation, a symbolic punishment that hinges on public embarrassment. According to Bergson, laughter is a social sanction intended to reintegrate the individual into the framework of the group. As he writes: "Even if society does not threaten the wrongdoer with punishment, it still brandishes humiliation, a mild yet feared form of retribution. This, indeed, is the function of laughter: to bring a touch of shame to its target. It is, in essence, a form of social restraint" (Bergson, 1964, p. 111).

This disciplinary function of laughter is evident in two key incidents: the first being the moment when Iraqi journalist hurled his shoe at U.S. President George W. Bush, and the second being the viral satirical depictions of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad following the collapse of his regime's grip on power. Both instances were met with laughter and mockery saturated with symbolic humiliation, thus illustrating what Bergson meant when he wrote: "The pleasure of laughter is tinged with a hidden notion that society bears on our behalf, if we do not bear it ourselves, a notion we do not explicitly admit: the intent to humiliate" (Bergson, 1964, p. 112).

Contrary to its punitive function, laughter also bears a liberatory dimension in that it transcends the seriousness that governs human situations. With Friedrich Nietzsche, laughter becomes an expression of strength, a manifestation of the will to confront and challenge life. It signals a refusal to surrender or submit to the authority of the other, thus transforming laughter into an act of rebellion, a technique for reframing punishment into something less threatening, or even absurd. Laughter during punishment redefines the relationship between the punisher and the punished; it is a rejection of the seriousness of punishment. A compelling illustration of this is the image of Saddam Houssein in court, his face marked with ironic expressions, a public defiance of authority, an affirmation of an inner freedom that cannot be subdued. Albert Camus asserts that laughter is a means of reconciling with the absurdity of life or with punishment that appears meaningless or ridiculous. This is epitomized in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where Sisyphus is condemned to eternally push a boulder uphill only for it to roll back down. Yet he remains laughing in the face of his absurd punishment. While laughter does not negate pain, it renders pain susceptible to revolt.

Punishment is also a means of enforcing order and discipline, intended to correct behaviour. It often carries a symbolic or material form of violence that reveals the power of the authority enacting it. With Foucault, punishment is not merely a tool of reform but a theatrical display of power, wherein the human being, both body and soul, becomes the site upon which authority is imposed and made visible. In this sense, punishment is serious and absolute, aiming to subjugate the punished and reinforce a deep sense of guilt. In response to such a regime of punishment, laughter may emerge as a rebellious force, one that disrupts the severity of punishment and exposes the fragility of the authority it represents. In this way, the relationship between laughter and punishment reveals a tense dialectic between the serious and the comic, the rational and the absurd, order and chaos. When punishment becomes overly rigid and devoid of logic, it turns into an object of ridicule.

5. The Defiant Smile as a Mode of Resistance

Humour has evolved across the ages to become more refined and investigative than it once was. Humour is candour, boldness, dissent, and courage, a means of exposing what is hidden. As Eagleton notes, “the true comedian is the bold individual... one who dares to see what embarrasses his audience, what they fear to express; and what he sees is a kind of truth, about people, about their condition, about what pains and terrifies them, and above all, about what they desire” (Eagleton, 2019, p. 167). Throughout the course of history, laughter has played a central role in preserving the cultural identity of oppressed communities. Satirical tales and forms of humour have served as powerful tools for documenting suffering, challenging both individuals and groups, and resisting cultural erasure. Popular poetry, satirical theatre, and humorous songs, all of these forms highlight laughter’s capacity to reshape resistance, transforming it from a

violent reaction into a creative act. It is said that the tyrant Tamerlane once asked the folk character Juha, “Where do you think my resting place will be in the afterlife?” Without hesitation, Juha replied, “And where would you wish to be, if not alongside Genghis Khan, Alexander, Pharaoh, and Nimrod?” (Al-Aqqad, p. 94).

Laughter in times of war and crisis functions as a defensive mechanism; it reflects a form of psychological and social resistance, becoming a crucial factor in survival and in overcoming the sense of despair. The Palestinians, for instance, have achieved a heroic form of victory that lies simply in endurance, in persisting despite oppressive policies aimed at breaking collective will and undermining the desire to live. This endurance is embodied in their bitter, defiant smiles, which not only alleviate internal tension, fear, and anxiety, but also serve to unify their ranks and reaffirm a shared purpose. It is a way of asserting the self and rejecting the logic of surrender. Indeed, Gilles Deleuze regarded laughter as a form of revolution, one that breaks through the oppressive seriousness encircling life. Laughter possesses a peculiar power to strip serious and difficult situations of their sanctity, thereby weakening the authority, prestige, and dominance of power. It becomes a tool for dismantling oppressive structures. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish*, particularly his insights into disciplinary mechanisms and the docility of bodies, we can interpret certain behaviours, such as laughter or apparent indifference in disciplined spaces, as forms of symbolic resistance and transgression of the established order. What is typically perceived as a breach of protocol does not always amount to physical rebellion; rather, it may manifest in seemingly frivolous acts, such as laughing in the face of authority. Individuals may also resort to mocking political figures or the narratives that a given regime seeks to impose, through jokes or satirical works of art aimed at symbolically dismantling the aura of power and fostering a collective awareness that challenges the status quo. Nietzsche articulated this idea in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, particularly in chapter seven, where he states: “who laughs in the face of suffering refuses to remain a slave to old values and challenges traditional forces that seek to dominate the will to life.” Thus, laughter is not merely a reaction, it is a philosophy of life and liberation, an affirmation of our humanity and our capacity to mock both ourselves and the world around us in a reality burdened with excessive seriousness.

Conclusion:

Tracing the concept of laughter at the intersection of literature and philosophy reveals it as a rich and multifaceted semiotic tool that transcends the bounds of mere emotional expression to become a profoundly critical act. Our exploration of the various representations in which laughter appears has shown that it cannot be reduced to wit or fleeting amusement. Rather, it constitutes an intense moment of symbolic interrogation, where irony becomes critique, satire becomes resistance, and humour transforms into thought.

In this sense, laughter closely parallels the philosophical act itself, insofar as it unveils and deconstructs stabilized meanings, gives voice to the unspoken, and unsettles the axiological foundations upon which social and political structures are built. At the same time, it functions as a symbolic instrument of punishment when deployed as a means of social exclusion or cultural stigmatization. Yet, it may equally serve as a liberatory act that disrupts established order and destabilizes symbolic authority in its political, religious, or moral manifestations.

In conclusion, our aim was not to arrive at a definitive definition of laughter, but rather to affirm its conceptual richness as a complex semiotic apparatus that operates between absurdity and meaning, rebellion and reform, jest and seriousness, thus occupying a central position in our understanding of the human condition, of discourse, and of society.

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