

JAN TRZYNADLOWSKI
WrocławAESTHETIC DETERMINANTS OF SATIRICAL CARTOON¹

Traditionally, satire is a literary fact realized in at least three forms: a concrete literary genre defined by historical poetics, univocally identifiable aesthetic and moral tone which in various degrees impregnates other genres possessing their own genological determinants (such as comedy, novel, poem, short story) it is, finally, a particular category surpassing conventional boundaries of a text and reaching out to a non-verbal area—mainly iconic. The same fact can be treated in a different way: the category of satiricism, i.e. critical viewing and evaluation of any phenomena, so characteristic of human mentality has been, since long ago, a subject of verbalization. Universality of language as a versatile means of social communication made it possible for literary satire to dominate in a considerable way other expressions of critical attitudes and what follows developed its own generic directives. Apart from it, the category of satiricism has easily outstepped and is still outstepping generic borderlines—a genre is a structural fact—satiricism a categorial one.²

In a classical and at the same time conventional sense satire is a critical but dynamic attitude towards reality ("attacking vices"). This fact has found its almost canonical expression in a well-known poem by Ignacy Krasicki: "Satyra prawdę mówi, względów się wyrzeka, / Wielbi urząd, czci króla, lecz sądzi człowieka" (Satire speaks the truth, renounces privileges, /

¹ The character of the present paper is that of a twofold scholarly exploration. First of all it aims at critical examination of a new structure of contemporary satire, secondly is an attempt to view literary the fusion of textual and pictorial satire. Such a formulation of the problem seems essential because, in the system of contemporary criticism, both arts have at their disposal their own organic criticism; while graphic satire is outside the reach of interest of both artistic and textual criticism. It was duly stressed by Polish satirists (mainly Eryk Lipiński) gathered at the biggest annual meeting of Polish satirists in Legnica („Satyrykon 1980”, Legnica, April 13—18, 1980).

² Essentially speaking, we could treat the above formulations as "indirect view of reality", view "through" substitute form, accepted in certain moral categories. Such analogies can be found in H. Kuprian's paper *Poesie als Parabolspiegel*. "Der Literat", 1980, 3, p. 3 ff.

worships office, honors a king, but judges a man).³ In other words: satire attacks vices of human nature either "universal" or conditioned by circumstances, historical and social situation, individual or national features.

That is why satire is interested not only in a man in his personal identity but also in his social roles and his institutional creations. "Worshipping office" is of principal character here — it means not so much accepting any office, but the office worthy of this acceptance. The clerks are treated in the same way—it is very difficult to separate a man from the functions he performs. That is why a simple but characteristic method helps to evade the problem: such characters as a bad judge, bad clerk, bad gentleman, bad lord, bad servant become heroes of satire.

With the word "bad" a very important problem appears: bad but according to which criterion? To decide it one should take into account indicators determined by morality of their times, times which gave birth to a given satire. Should thus satire be "a moral code with limited responsibility?" No, it should rather be treated as the historical necessity of satire, which always has its unquestioned subject—using Juvenal's classical expression "difficile est satiram non scribere" (it is difficult not to write satire).⁴

The structure of satire is based on a relationship not encountered in other literary forms: namely that of "reversely duplicate" heroes. It means that in the background of the presented negative model functions clearly realized, though not presented, positive hero. It seems to be the source of commonly known and traditionally respected didacticism of satire; satire functioned on the principle of "art with thesis," this was the aim of writing satire and that is why satire (as much as a fable) became a reading-list text of elevating functions. From literature for adults it became literature for young readers—certainly so according to their teachers' intentions.⁵

It seems important that this satirical way of education has been recently basically changed and refunctioned. We shall return to this point—as it is of fundamental value for our contemporary satire—and particularly for "satirical cartoon."

Satire has always used elements of humour and the comic, i.e. "good-humoured view of human follies" or "aggressive diminishing of the bearers' faults and shortcomings." It resulted from the tendencies characteristic of satire as a clearly parenetic genre—tendencies to ridicule its negative

³ Eminent poet and satirist of Polish Enlightenment of La Fontaine's trend thus tried to join supposedly obvious intellectual reasons. Interesting interpretation of such orderly reasoning was given by an outstanding "servant of greatness" J. Kleiner in his collection of studies *O Krasickim i Fredrze dziesięć rozpraw* (*On Krasicki and Fredro—Ten Dissertations*), Wrocław 1956.

⁴ This general rule, though related to personal attitudes, can be applied to social field, to the sphere of human communities. Thus satire is not only a phenomenon of ethical but also sociological nature. Cf. W. Strauss, *Vorfragen einer Soziologie der literarischen Wirkung*, Köln 1934.

⁵ This phenomenon is pointed out by the scholars of children's literature—from Polish scholars mainly J. Cieślowski in his introduction to *Antologia poezji dziecięcej* (*Anthology of Children's Poetry*), Wrocław 1980, pp. 3—68, Biblioteka Narodowa I 233.

heroes and to view in a particular way forms and conditions of their social existence. As a result satire blended with humour and the comic became an interesting, philosophically saturated construct in such structures as maxims, sentences, moralistic and reflexive remarks as e.g. "We all have strength enough to endure the misfortunes of others" (La Rochefoucauld), "Whenever people agree with me I always feel I must be wrong," and "When the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers" (Wilde).⁶

The sentences quoted above have depth of many aspects. (Wilde's sayings have been, purposely, classed as moralistic as they can be translated in a peculiar manner. We shall do it with all reservations as follows: "People uncritically always agree with me, even when I know I am wrong—so when they agree there is a chance I must be wrong," and "Not knowing our real needs we always pray for wrong things so answering our prayers is the best way to punish us.") We shall not dwell on those aspects but concentrate on something closely connected with our reasoning. The reader arrives at the primary sense of the above verbalizations through such reshaping of the examined object, which fulfils the conditions of comical structure. As a result the object undergoes "satirical degradation," the comic has become the basic vector of satire. The same vector will find evident application also in satirical cartoons, as we shall try to show, with certain characteristic modifications and adaptations.⁷

The fusion of a literary text and iconic structure brings about considerable consequences. A verbal structure is an analytical construct, while a picture is a peculiar synthesis; the analytic quality of a text brings the desired univocal meaning while a picture shows tendencies of ambiguity. The point is that a text aims at univocal intellectual meaning, while iconic ambiguity of meaning has emotional aspects; text informs drawing encourages reflexion in which an important part is played by clearly directed emotion.⁸

The fusion of picture and text in satire aims at autonomization of picture and at obtaining texts which are also synthesized. A drawing which is a satirical illustration of a text or its accompanying element, lies *de facto* in the margin of the described phenomenon and does not break autonomy of "textual" (or literary) satire. What we consider to be essentially important is

⁶ In Polish literature such formulas can be found in a perfect form and analogical functions in the prose works of B. Prus. The wider aspects of these and similar problems can be found in K. Stierle's *Text als Handlung. Zur systematischen Literaturwissenschaft*, München 1975. From newer books devoted to the comic, humour and joke (we mean here Polish books) one should mention B. Dziemidok's studies (mainly *O komizmie—On the Comic*, Warszawa 1965), J. Ziomek's and J. Trzynałowski's. The linguistic aspect of the problem was carefully analyzed by D. Buttler in her book *Polski dowcip językowy (Polish Linguistic Joke)*, Warszawa 1975.

⁷ Interesting comments on many-signs systems are included in J. Trabant's paper *Elemente der Semiotik*, München 1976, and in his article *Literatur als Zeichen und Engagement*, "Sprache im technischen Zeitalter", 47. (1973), pp. 225—247.

⁸ Cf. F. V. Vodička, *The History of the Echo of Literary Works*, [in:] P.L. Garvin, *A Prague Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style*, Washington D.C. 1964, pp. 71 ff.

autonomous cartoon. Here, however, an essential question appears: does the autonomy of satirical cartoon spring from the very substance of a drawing or from the fact that its author is not a writer but a drawer. There can be only one correct answer: the important thing is that a drawing itself in opposition to text creates a unity that interprets and can be interpreted. Film, as B. Balazs said almost 60 years ago, enabled man to see himself, and a satirical cartoon enabled him to notice and understand his own comicality, littleness, and grotesque character. It should be once again stressed that what we mean here is not an illustrative drawing but clearly an interpretative one.⁹

It happens like that even when a drawing is so-called „realization of a metaphor” or literal representation of synthetic or analitical expression (“to go with the spirit of the times” or “one and three tenth of a woman per one man”—in satirical cartoons of A. Mleczko). Here the literal representation is not only a playful game making use of an element of contrastive surprise which is *conditio sine qua non* of comic situation. A drawing gives much more: reveals the brutal character of reality, ambiguity of human thinking, quibblings of morality. The above possibility springs from the fact that a verbal text provides possibilities for the use of clear substitutes—a drawing on the other hand is an outcome of almost Kantian *Ding an Sich*.

Satirical drawings, or differently: contemporary satirical cartoon enriches the concepts and formulations of traditional textual satire with new values. These are:

- a) symbolism or universalization exceeding literal representation,
- b) realism blended with individualization,
- c) the comic generating structure enriching characterological interpretation,
- d) revealing of the horror of reality which at the same time shapes ideological (philosophical) interpretation,
- e) showing new, unexpected connections among things, relations, events which produces an additional interpretation—artistic and axiological.

On the basis of the above remarks the following conclusion can be formulated: contemporary pictorial satire is not a polemic with qualities considered to be negative, but a structure able to generate a situation which is critical from a humanistic point of view. Thus a drawing seems to be the same as climax in drama.¹⁰

⁹ The search for the most essential functions of the arts making use of specific material, creating new viewpoint of reality and man, opened fresh perspectives of learning about relations between art, philosophy and ideology. Cf. F. Rossi-Landi, *Semiotik, Aesthetic und Ideologie*, München 1976. Scientific aspects of this problem are dealt with by G. Bachelard in introductory remarks to his book *Le Nouvel esprit scientifique*, Paris 1978.

¹⁰ This dramatic quality of satire depends also on its dynamics, activity, aggressiveness—because of direct action but also because of very vast, almost universal allusion. Cf. J. R. Searle, *Sprachakte. Ein sprachphilosophischer Essay*, Frankfurt a.M. 1971; C. F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357—1900*, Cambridge 1925.

ESTETYCZNE UWARUNKOWANIA RYSUNKU SATYRYCZNEGO

STRESZCZENIE

Jakkolwiek artykuł zwraca szczególną uwagę na ikonyczną konstrukcję satyryczną, w istocie rzeczy bierze on pod uwagę i analizuje podstawowe przesłanki strukturalne satyry werbalnej i obrazowej.

Autor stwierdza, że satyra to fakt literacki zasadniczo w trzech postaciach realizacyjnych. Po pierwsze to ściśle określony przez poetykę historyczną konkretny gatunek literacki, po wtóre to dająca się jednoznacznie zidentyfikować tonacja estetyczno-moralna nasycająca i inne gatunki o własnych determinantach genologicznych (takich jak komedia, powieść, poemat, opowiadanie), to po trzecie wynikająca z układu tekstowego, lecz sięgająca w obszar pozawerbalny szczególna kategoria. Tu rozciąga się sfera ogromnie zróżnicowanego rysunku satyrycznego o własnej artystycznej i semantycznej autonomii.

Satyra werbalna z racji swego lingwistycznego sposobu istnienia ma charakter analityczny, satyryczna ikonika natomiast — syntetyczny. W następstwie tego stanu rzeczy satyra obrazowa w stosunku do werbalnej wnosi kilka dodatkowych wartości. Są nimi: symbolizm albo uniwersalizacja wykraczające poza dosłowność przedstawienia, realizm połączony z indywidualizacją, komizujące ujęcie wnoszące interpretację charakterologiczną, ujawnianie grozy rzeczywistości kształtujące interpretację filozoficzną, wreszcie ukazywanie nowych, nieoczekiwanych związków między rzeczami, zdarzeniami i relacjami, co prowadzi do nowej, aksjologicznej interpretacji.

W konkluzji autor stwierdza, iż pole satyrycznej aktywności jest ogromne, praktycznie jest nim uniwersum ludzkiej działalności, a satyra jawi się jako kategoria uniwersalna.

Jan Trzynadłowski