UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

"Overpowered by Laughter"? Spanish Humor under Franco

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9tf0q68d

Author

Carr, William Foster

Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

“Overpowered by Laughter”? Spanish Humor under Franco

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish

By

William Foster Carr

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Gonzalo Navajas, Chair
Professor Jacobo Sefamí
Professor Santiago Morales-Rivera

2018

© 2018 William Foster Carr

DEDICATION

To Melissa, obviously. This belongs to her more than to me (but not as much as I). Without her kind diligence and sub-posterior incendiary prowess, this dissertation would not exist because its author would be dead.

To my older children, who have slogged through eight years of Grad Student Dad, holding onto the memories of Fun Dad and the faint hope of his prophesied return.

And to my younger children, who have heard the legend of Fun Dad, and together with their older siblings have suffered through Poor Dad.

"There is no more dangerous literary symptom than a temptation to write about wit and humor. It indicates the total loss of both."
George Bernard Shaw (in Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*)

"Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it."
—E.B. White (in John Morreall, *Comic Relief*)

"He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom."
—Gandalf the Grey, (in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

CURRICULUM VITAE vi

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION ix

Introduction: Laughter under Franco—What Is at Stake? 1

Chapter 1: The Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity Theories of Humor 10
  Superiority Theories 10
    Platonic Laughter: Ridicule and Scorn 12
    Plato's Legacy 20
  Relief Theories 24
    The third Earl of Shaftesbury, Sigmund Freud, and President Erdogan walk into a bar... 24
    Freedom or Functionalism? Bakhtin and the Carnivalesque 34
    Ajo y Agua: Preston Sturges and the "Hymn to the Common Man" 37
  Incongruity Theories 42
    Making (non)Sense of the World 45
    This Is Your Brain on Humor 49
    Codes and Communities 51

Chapter 2: *La Codorniz*—Popular Humor Playing for Keeps 57
  Poniendo el Huevo: From Spain's Avant-Garde to Postwar Absurdity 58
    Putting the ismo in Humorismo 61
    Acolytes of La Sagrada Cripta del Pombo 69
  Mihura's Hatchling *Codorniz* 79
    "El humor puro" in Mihura's *Codorniz* 85
    No tan puro 96
  Laiglesia's *Codorniz*, from Adolescence to Senescence 109
    Suegro vs. Yerno, o las Nubes vs. el Pimentón 111
    From Frogs and Butterflies to Ministers and Caudillos 116

Chapter 3: Gila and His Enemy 126
  "El maestro" 126
  Gila's Wars: A Compilation 131
  Descoyuntamientos: Language and Context 150
  Reception and Interpretations 157

Chapter 4: "Is this the enemy?" Translating Gila 167
  Humor and/in Translation: The Humorist as Translator 167
  Gila's Wars 178
    "¿Es el enemigo?" 179
    "Gila en la guerra" 185

Conclusion: Joking Truth to Power? 192

WORKS CITED 200

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: Gollum-Smeagol and Erdogan 25

Figure 2: Antonio de Lara, "Apaches" 72

Figure 3: Miguel Mihura, "La muerte del primer actor dramático..." 73

Figure 4: Antonio de Lara, "¡Caramba, don Jerónimo!" 87

Figure 5: José María Picó López, "Impaciencia" 98

Figure 6: Antonio de Lara, "Patatas" 100

Figure 7: Miguel Mihura, "Los Amantes" 101

Figure 8: Miguel Gila Cuesta, “El Caballo Roto” 117

Figure 9: Miguel Gila Cuesta, "He llenado mi uniforme de agujeros." 132

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Gonzalo Navajas, for his unstinting support, his enthusiasm, and his positivity. His guidance through this process was invaluable. His patience and his oft-expressed belief in my ability to actually write this dissertation flew in the face of the body of evidence collected until today. And his mentorship throughout my PhD coursework and candidacy was equally stupendous and fundamental to my success.

I must thank my committee members, Jacobo Sefamí and Santiago Morales-Rivera, for their patience throughout this process as well as their insightful and probing feedback during my defense. Just as important, Jacobo and Santiago have always exemplified collegiality and kindness in our many interactions at UCI.

I thank the many friends at UCI who have helped me along in this six-year journey. Armin Schwegler and Julio Torres have been wonderful friends and mentors in the seminars they have taught as well as the long, laugh-filled conversations everywhere else. Armin gets special mention for the parking spot and two of the best and most unexpected free meals ever. Jared White and Ben Cluff guided me through the freak-out months with wisdom and commiseration. Christina García and William Yankes, my cohort at UCI, became my fast friends over many a hot chocolate and during our frighteningly old infancy. (Together we form what must be the fastest-finishing cohort in department history, despite my dragging pace at the rear.)

For my friends Valerie Hegstrom, Dale Pratt, and Daryl Hague, this is the culmination of an eighteen-year effort to get me doctored, and the beginning of the era in which they no longer have to pay for lunch.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of the Humanities Commons Dissertation Fellowship, the GAANN Fellowship, and the School of Humanities' Regents' Fellowship.

CURRICULUM VITAE

William Foster Carr

EDUCATION

Ph.D.	Spanish Language and Literature, Emphasis in Translation Studies, University of California, Irvine, 2018.
M.A.	Hispanic Literatures, Brigham Young University, 2012
B.A.	Spanish Translation and Interpretation, Minor in Humanities, Brigham Young University, 2000

DISTINCTIONS

UCI Humanities Commons Dissertation Fellowship recipient, Winter 2018

GAANN Fellowship recipient, Winter-Spring 2016

Regents' Fellowship, School of Humanities, 2012-13

Premio Gonzalo Rojas, BYU Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 2011

PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

"Laughing at Power: Cela, Gila, and *La Codorniz* in Postwar Spain." Mid America Conference on Hispanic Literatures, Washington University in St. Louis; October 2017.

"Codes, Crimes, and Communities: Translating the Humor in Fernando López del Oso's *Asesino de políticos*." The 13th Annual Samuel G. Armistead Colloquium at the University of California, Davis; October 2017.

"Pop Quiz: Who Killed Federico García Lorca?" UCI Film Forum: *La novia*; November 2016.

"'Todo en orden, ¿no?' Testimony, Silence, and Un(re)solved Crimes in Transitional Spain." UCI Film Forum: *La Isla Mínima*; November 2015.

"Exotic Adventures in Government/Academic/Community/Commercial Translation." Guest lecture given at UC Irvine to Spanish 97 (Spanish for Reading Knowledge); March 2015.

"El 'relato dominado': Linguistic, Emotional, and 'Artificial' Distance in Jorge Semprún's *La escritura o la vida*." The University of Arizona's 25th Annual Graduate and

Professional Symposium on Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literature, Language and Culture; February 2015.

“Three Women, Three Places, Three Moments in History.” UCI Film Forum: *De tu ventana a la mía*; November 2014.

“From ‘Sneewitchen’ to *Mirror, Mirror*: Snow White Translations Through the Ages.” UCI Film Forum: *Blancannieves*; November 2013.

“Frankenstein, the Psycho Virus from Outer Space: An Overview of Horror in Film.” UCI Film Forum: *El espinazo del diablo*; February 2013.

“Cultural Translation in *Nublares*.” Ometeca Working Conference, Madrid; June 2012.

“Translators Swearing Badly: Exotic Adventures in Government Translation.” Presented to Spanish Translation and Interpretation program at Brigham Young University; January 2012 (also during Fall 2010, Fall 2009).

PUBLICATIONS

Carr, William F., and Dale J. Pratt. “Minds in the Cave: Translation and Early Human Subjectivities in Spanish Novels of Prehistory”: pp. 17-44. *Ometeca: Science and Humanities* 23 (2017).

“Cristóforo Quijote.” *La marca hispánica* 21 (2011): 20-25.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Brigham Young University:
Adjunct Faculty

Upper-Division Courses:

- Spanish 355: Spanish-American Culture and Civilization (Fall 2018)
- Spanish 428B: Intermediate Translation and Interpretation (Winter 2004)
- Spanish 441: Survey of Spanish Literature (Fall 2018)
- Spanish 528: Translation and Interpretation Project (Winter 2004)

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Beginning Spanish Courses:

- Spanish 101: Beginning Spanish, 1st Semester (Fall 2010, Winter 2011)
- Spanish 102: Beginning Spanish, 2nd Semester (Winter 2011)

Intermediate Spanish Courses:

- Spanish 206: 6th Semester Spanish (Fall 2011, Winter 2012, Spring 2012)

University of California, Irvine:
Graduate Teaching Assistant

Beginning Spanish Courses:
- Spanish 1A (Fall 2013)
- Spanish 1B (Winter 2014, Winter 2018)
- Spanish 1C (Spring 2014)

Intermediate Spanish Courses:
- Spanish 2A (Fall 2014)
- Spanish 2AB (Winter 2015, Summer Session I 2016)
- Spanish 2BC (Summer Session II 2017)
- Spanish 2C (Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Fall 2016)

Heritage Language Spanish Courses:
- Spanish 3H: Spanish for Heritage Speakers (Spring 2017)
- Spanish 3J: Research Paper for Heritage Speakers (Winter 2017)

Teaching Practicums:
- Spanish 3H (Fall 2015, Professor Julio Torres)
- Spanish 101A: Intro to Iberian Literature & Culture (Fall 2014, Professor Gonzalo Navajas)

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Overpowered by Laughter”? Spanish Humor under Franco

By

William Foster Carr

Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish, Translation Studies Emphasis

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Gonzalo Navajas, Chair

Humor and laughter are quintessentially human, yet they are often ignored in scholarly studies. The Humanities in particular tend to privilege “serious” literature, especially if the work in question was produced during an oppressive regime. In the case of Spain and Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, this academic tendency engenders a flawed outsider’s view of two generations of Spaniards—representing them as laughless and therefore less human—despite the fact that public expressions of humor persisted and evolved during the regime. This dissertation focuses on two of the foremost examples of popular Spanish humor under Franco: the magazine *La Codorniz* (1941-1978) and the comedian Miguel Gila (1919-2001), important cultural touchstones that are almost completely unknown outside of Spain. Gila’s famous war monologues and *La Codorniz*’s shift from abstract to politically-engaged humor exemplify the major polemics of humor studies, synthesizing many of the binaries posited by scholars over millennia. Is humor irrational or wise? Is it an antisocial weapon or a stress-relieving social lubricant? Does it undermine authority or perpetuate the status quo?

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the three historically dominant theories of humor: Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity. I present the major arguments of each theory and evaluate them primarily for their usefulness in understanding popular, public humor in Spain under Franco. Chapter two examines the intellectual underpinnings of the weekly humor magazine *La Codorniz*, beginning with Ramón Gómez de la Serna and his application of avant-garde ideals to *el humor nuevo español*. The bulk of the chapter considers the evolution of Spanish humor as demonstrated in *La Codorniz* under its two famous directors: Miguel Mihura (1941-1944) and Álvaro de Laiglesia (1944-1977), examining works by Tono, Mihura, Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, Édgar Neville, and Evaristo Acevedo, among others. Chapter 3 analyzes Gila's war monologues—their history and reception in postwar Spain and beyond. And Chapter 4 presents original transcriptions and translations of these classic performances based on the earliest recordings (1957 and 1959), with a brief introduction that draws connections between humor and translation in a sketch of the humorist as translator.

Introduction: Laughter under Franco—What Is at Stake?

In April 2010 Javier Marías published a piece titled “El país que perdió el humor” in his weekly column for *El País*. In the article, the celebrated novelist argues that the long and venerable history of Spanish humor has finally come to an ironic end. Spaniards never abandoned their characteristic sense of humor, writes Marías, even when they found themselves ruled by an ultra-conservative dictatorship: “el franquismo, régimen tan serio como ridículo y nada dado a la guasa. Pero no por eso la ciudadanía dejó de expresarse con zumba en privado y de hacer chistes sobre lo habido y por haber, empezando por el propio Franco y terminando por la severísima y privilegiada Iglesia Católica, tan afín a él y a su represión” (Marías). Given the survival of Spanish humor under an oppressive regime, Marías continues, it is surprising to find evidence “en esta época mucho más afortunada y menos sombría” of the rise of a new kind of Spaniard, “un tipo de español solemne, envarado, ceñudo, poseído de su rectitud, que no sólo no tolera una chanza ni una exageración, sino que parece incapaz de detectarlas” (*ibid.*). Marías goes on to list several recent examples of the press or the public attacking some public figure because they have refused to take the latter’s words in any but the most literal sense. Hence the lament that he has chosen for his title, “El País que Perdió el Humor.”

The contrast that Marías draws between dictatorship and democracy is indeed “sorprendente.” It inverts the assumed inequality between the quantities of laughter in each era. But his observation is also inaccurate, at least as far as humor under Franco is concerned. Spaniards no doubt told plenty of jokes in whispered tones behind closed doors, as military historian Gabriel Cardona documents in his historical jokebook *Cuando nos reíamos de miedo: Crónica desenfadada de un régimen que no tenía ni pizca de gracia* (2010). However, when Marías asserts that Spanish citizenry “[no] dejó de expresarse con zumba *en privado*” (emphasis mine), he ignores the abundance of humor that Spaniards expressed in the public sphere via print, radio, and eventually television.

Indeed, rather than shrinking into the shadows during the dictatorship, Spanish humor persisted and evolved in various public forms. Scholars and humorists alike hold up the shining example of the weekly magazine *La Codorniz*, "la revista más audaz para el lector más inteligente," whose 37-year run began in 1941 and outlasted Franco himself. And although they receive much less critical attention, various radio personalities gained nationwide audiences during the first decades of the dictatorship—humorists like Miguel Gila Cuesta, a *Codorniz* collaborator who in 1951 began performing absurd monologues in theaters and whose subsequent jump to radio made him a national celebrity. Given the notoriety of *La Codorniz* and the outright fame of Gila, one might wonder why Marías implicitly restricts Spanish humor during the Franco years within the bounds of private discourse.

In Marías's defense, his article addresses humor, or the lack thereof, amongst the general populace, and it is no doubt true that most humor during the Franco years was of the private variety. Of course, this is no different from any society: as Flamson and Bryant point out, the ratio of naturalistic humor (in everyday conversation) to professionally produced comedy is analogous to the ratio of naturalistic sexual behavior to pornography.[1] Still, by omitting all of the very public expressions of Spanish humor under Franco, Marías reinforces the prevailing narrative that surrounds dictatorships in general and Franco's regime in particular. The suggestion that humor hid itself behind closed doors fits the general perception that Francoist

---

[1] The humor-sex analogy comes from Flamson and Bryant (2013), in which they further develop the Encryption Theory of Humor that was first outlined in Flamson and Barrett (2008). We will discuss the (non-pornographic) implications of this fascinating and insightful theory in Chapter 1 and in the conclusion to this work.

Spain was a sober, brutally repressive, and morally bankrupt nation—the nation represented by Camilo José Cela's novel *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942).

Academia tends to perpetuate this perception. In university Spanish departments around the United States, undergraduate curricula and graduate reading lists consistently represent the cultural production of the Franco years with little more than *Pascual Duarte*, the flagship novel of *tremendismo* that is filled with the poverty, vice, and shocking violence that define that literary movement. Choosing *Pascual Duarte* makes sense. It is a complex, finely-crafted, and critically-acclaimed novel that was written by a Nobel laureate. And as a distinguished work set during the Civil War and published in the early postwar period, it also allows professors and students of Spanish literature and culture to address the dictatorship from the safe vantages of the moral high ground. But if it is the primary or sole representative of the period in which it is set—the Second Republic and the Civil War—and the period in which it was written and published—the dictatorship—then it creates a skewed vision of Spain. A laugh-less portrayal of Franco's Spain, while conveniently unambiguous, reproduces Marías's error of omission on a much more sweeping scale.

Because of its spontaneous and ephemeral nature, the "naturalistic" humor in everyday communication is almost impossible to study. It leaves no mark on history. Likewise, the humor conveyed in live performances by comedians and radio hosts, and by comedic actors as they interpret theatrical scripts, largely disappears without being recorded (an idea that can be difficult to understand for students who have grown up in the age of the smartphone). The scant percentage of humor that is actually preserved consists of professionally produced literature, film, and phonographic recordings. And even where the limits of the canon are more liberally drawn, the list of titles that are studied on university campuses tends to exclude works in film, poetry and prose that are primarily comedic in nature, to say nothing of periodicals like *La Codorniz* or albums like those produced by Gila. The few comedic works that do make it into the canon—e.g., those of Cervantes, Quevedo, and Larra—are rarely studied through the lens of humor, and eventually academia transforms even the most hilarious works of literature into cultural monuments made heavy by the accumulated weight of criticism.[2] The end result is that students in traditional, literature-centric Spanish departments are unlikely to study comedic works from any period with the purpose of approaching the people and culture of that period via humor. And when the period in question is Franco's dictatorship, the likelihood of such a study drops to zero.

The inevitable question at this point is: what does it matter? So what if we don't care to know about the things that people laughed at under Franco? What's so wrong with giving the impression that life in a fascist dictatorship is dark, depressing, and generally short on hysterical laughter? The answer to these questions has less to do with the quality of life in Franco's dictatorship and more to do with the fundamental significance of laughter and humor for humanity.

Laughter is a defining characteristic of humankind. In *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2001), Robert Provine draws a connection between laughter, speech, and bipedalism (83-91). Provine argues convincingly that bipedalism was a necessary condition for the evolutionary leap in the human neuromuscular system that produced both laughter and speech. He reasons that the same cognitive advancement that allows us to "chop an exhalation into the discrete ‘ha-ha-ha’s of [...] laughter” grants us the power of speech, as both require “the virtuosic modulation of sounds produced by an outward breath” (85).[3] Laughter is thus an inextricable component of humanity.

---

[2] Peter Russell's 1969 article "*Don Quixote* as a Funny Book" is perhaps the best-known attempt to restore the pre-Romanticism reception of Cervantes's master work. And often the historical data surrounding a humorous work have the same sobering effect as several heavy volumes of literary criticism. In a recent course on Humor in Spanish Literature, my students explained that they were unable to enjoy the ironies of *Día de Difuntos de 1836* with a light heart because I had already told them (perhaps unwisely) that Larra wrote it only a few months before he committed suicide.

It turns out that humor, the collection of mental and verbal mechanisms that most often elicit laughter, is also quintessentially human. Anthropologists have established that “[t]here are few phenomena in the human repertoire as consistently and reliably universal as humor.”[4] And researchers from fields as diverse as philosophy, artificial intelligence, and cognitive science have demonstrated the evolutionary benefits of,[5] and even the cognitive necessity for,[6] a sense of humor.

Given the fact that humanity is defined by humor and laughter, if we ignore the humor during any period, are we not suggesting that inhuman conditions during such times made the victims somehow *less* human? Indeed, if we strip them of their laughter, we take from them what Victor Frankl considers one of humanity’s most important tools for surviving suffering. In *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl tells of being roused “from the deep sleep of exhaustion” on his second night in Auschwitz by the sound of drunken voices that were in turn silenced by a violinist playing “a desperately sad tango” (62). He continues:

---

[3] Chimpanzees, our closest genetic cousins, cannot travel efficiently on two feet; they cannot produce spoken language—even the ones “raised as a human child” cannot say more than a handful of words; and they cannot separate voiced exhalation into multiple syllables. Provine hypothesizes that chimps, like other animals that use four limbs to run, have a neuromuscular system in which the respiratory cycle is hard-wired to movement and therefore exhalations cannot be modulated without a fundamental change in the brain. Bipedalism largely frees the muscles of the thorax from the need to be synchronized with movement, which means that the apparatus that controls and modulates breathing is now available for operations that have nothing to do with fight-or-flight.

[4] Flamson and Barrett’s words, and they cite Mahadev Apte’s 1985 monograph *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach.* The overall premise of the book is enough to corroborate Flamson and Barrett’s statement. But a search for more specific evidence yields results as early as Apte’s first chapter, which reviews the anthropological literature on “the joking relationship” and explains that this type of interaction is present in every type of society (“preliterate” as well as “large-scale, complex industrial societies”) (31).

[5] See Flamson and Bryant, Morreall’s *Comic Relief*, and Hurley et al.

[6] See Minsky, Miller, Hurley et al., and *Comic Relief*.

> To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider, but he may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. (63)

In searching for and bringing to light humor under oppression, I hope to find and champion evidence that a basic tenet of human intellect—a fundamental spark of humanity and "[one] of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation"—survived and resisted and even flourished in postwar Spain.

Some might argue that foregrounding the humor during Franco's dictatorship diminishes the evils of the dictatorship. If we turn up the laugh track we might drown out the oppression, fear, hatred, malice, poverty, and hunger that abounded during the long postwar period. This of course is not my intention. I do not wish to give the same kind of false impression of Franco's regime that, according to Jorge Semprún, a naive nurse had of life in Buchenwald when she visited the Nazi work camp in the weeks after the war ended. Upon seeing the barracks painted in bright colors and the flowerbed in front of the cantina, the nurse remarks "¡Pero si no parece estar nada mal!" and then, pointing to the chimney of the crematorium, asks, "Y eso, ¿es la cocina?" (136). I acknowledge the concern that, on the surface, cartoons and comedians might have the same masking effect as brightly-painted walls and flowerbeds. However, as this study of humor under Franco will demonstrate, laughter is often directly proportional to the discontent felt by the Spanish humorists and audiences alike; humorous discourse is often the only viable means of communicating criticism; and humor serves as both a means of survival and a weapon against the powerful.

Before we examine Spanish humor under Franco, we have to approach an understanding of humor itself. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for this study by reviewing and analyzing philosophical treatments of humor from antiquity to the present day. Humor by itself presents philosophical and moral problems. Great philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant, and Schopenhauer, to name but a few—have addressed the concept directly or indirectly through the years, and invariably their definitions are found wanting. Such difficulties, combined with the negative view of the subject established by Plato's pejorative treatment, have led many scholars to shy away from humor. Characterized for thousands of years as irrational, antisocial, and malicious, laughter and humor acquired a bad reputation that no intellectual seriously contested until the eighteenth century. The baggage that humor carries today—in academia and religion—is a result of its philosophical history.

In our review of that history, we will look at each of the three major theories of humor—Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity—paying particular attention to what they say or imply about the intersection between humor and politics. As we will see, no single theory provides a perfect description for every instance of humor, but each theory explores facets of humor—power, social hierarchy, safety, malice, censorship, taboo, nonsense, play, subversion, inclusion and exclusion—that will inform our understanding of the most influential "texts" of public humor in Spain's long postwar period.

Chapter 2 shifts from general philosophies to Spanish views on humor in the decades preceding the Civil War, particularly as they pertain to the postwar publication of *La Codorniz.* We will trace the intellectual history of the magazine's founder, Miguel Mihura, and its principal contributors, beginning with the recognized prophet of that generation of humorists, Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Ramón's "humor nuevo español," articulated in his 1928 manifesto "Gravedad e importancia del humorismo," exercises a strong influence over several generations of humorists during the rest of the twentieth century, even those who chafe at the purist ideals of his star pupil, Mihura. We will pay close attention to the philosophical debate between Mihura and his successor at the helm of *La Codorniz*, Álvaro de Laiglesia, and we will examine various manifestations of those clashing brands of humor in the magazine's articles and cartoons. As we will see, the publication's roots in the historical avant-garde initially gave it a surrealist, escapist tone that seems almost tailor-made for the strict censorship of the time, but after changing directors in 1944 it became increasingly audacious in its criticisms of Spanish society and politics. The study of *La Codorniz* focuses mainly on the period of 1941 to the mid -1950s but does analyze some samples from the final years of the self-proclaimed "decana de la prensa humorística," when its increasingly explicit political satire earned it various fines and government-imposed closures.

Chapter 3 studies the famous humorist Miguel Gila Cuesta, a cartoonist who leapt to stardom in 1951 performing a unique brand of humor that seems to synthesize the strongest points of both sides of the Mihura-Laiglesia debate. We will center our treatment of Gila around the monologues that made him perhaps the most sought-after Spanish comedian in the 1950s: his debut monologue about his supposed experiences in the war, and the iconic telephone conversation that sprang from it. We will trace the evolution of the two war monologues, which Gila would continue to perform for nearly 50 years, and attempt to reconstruct them as they were known to his theater and radio audiences during the 1950s. We will also examine the structure and language of these classic "texts" in order to understand their lasting impact on Spanish humor, situating them within the tradition of *el humor nuevo español* as practiced by Ramón and *La Codorniz*. Finally, we will consider Spain's reception and interpretation of Gila's war monologues throughout his long career as well as after his death in 2001, and we will revisit our argument for adding Gila's work to the texts that we use to define Franco's dictatorship.

Chapter 4 attempts to rectify Gila's anonymity outside of Spain with a side-by-side transcription and translation of his two famous soldier monologues. The contents are taken from two late-1950s albums, the earliest known recordings of his most significant work. The transcripts and translations are preceded by a brief introduction that explores the problems of humor and/in translation, and offers the Ramonian humorist as a model for the translator's subjectivity.

In the conclusion we will briefly synthesize the major arguments of this work, re-examining the strengths and weaknesses of the major theories of humor as they apply to public humor in Franco's dictatorship. We will finish by employing Hannah Arendt's arguments regarding thoughtlessness and evil to consider this question: is it possible to speak truth to totalitarian power via the medium of humor?

Chapter 1: The Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity Theories of Humor

As a staple of the human experience, humor has amassed quite the body of literature over the millennia. Though it began as an almost tangential topic for philosophers such as Plato, Kant, Hobbes, and Schopenhauer, it has in the last century become the focus of thinkers from fields as diverse as the cognitive sciences, evolutionary biology, linguistics, and artificial intelligence. With such a broad corpus, a comprehensive survey of humor studies is impossible as well as impractical within the scope of this project. To lay the theoretical foundation of this study of humor during Franco's dictatorship, I will pull mainly from Western philosophy while including important points from cognitive and linguistic studies of humor, all with the goal of understanding better the intersection of humor and politics. Each of the main theories of humor, when applied to politics, posits a different dynamic: humor can attack, subvert, or strengthen a political system.

Superiority Theories

People find it hard to believe this, but unless we're talking about puns and wordplay, all *humor is essentially critical. So, to eliminate jokes that are at the expense of other people is to eliminate most jokes.*

—John Cleese

[1]

---

[1] From a Vulture.com interview by David Marchese, emphasis in original.

The Superiority Theory is the earliest theory of humor in Western philosophy, and it established antagonistic perspectives of laughter that lasted millennia. Plato initially connected laughter with ignorance, foolishness, stupidity, vice, and evil in the butt of the joke, and envy (or malice) in the observer of these failings. Subsequent philosophers rounded out the butt's attributes with badness, ugliness, unseemliness,[2] and deformity.[3] They also identified pusillanimity, greed, self-satisfaction, insecure mediocrity,[4] hatred, and indignation[5] in the laughing observer. With such an introduction, it is no wonder that laughter was long neglected as a subject of serious philosophical and scientific study. John Morreall, a prominent scholar of the philosophy of laughter and humor, attributes the relative lack of philosophical engagement with humor to this initial pejorative and reductive view that connected all laughter with ridicule or scorn directed at the weak. Morreall argues that if Plato and Aristotle had considered the power of laughter to resolve incongruities or relieve stress and overcome trauma, perhaps subsequent thinkers would have dedicated more study to one of the most common occurrences in human experience (*Philosophy*: 3).

This negative view of laughter springs from focusing too narrowly on one possible cause—ridicule and scorn. As early as 1750, philosophers like Francis Hutcheson began to point out that people laugh at word-play, situations, images, and a host of other things whose humorous effect could never tap into a supposed desire to feel superior to the words, images, or situations. As a result of this egregious blind-spot, contemporary thinking on humor tends to center on the Incongruity Theory and downplay or ignore the Superiority Theory, although there are philosophers and comedians who continue to support it, as John Cleese's words in the epigraph demonstrate. We study it here in part because it defined so much of the early scholarship on humor, but more importantly because it is clear that humor has long been employed to undermine adversaries and, in the political sphere, wielded as a political weapon against those in power. In twentieth-century Spain, as in twenty-first century America, when political losers perceived ugliness, ignorance, and evil in the winners, they tended to react with malice and indignation. And, more often than one might suspect in a dictatorship, Spaniards expressed that malice and indignation in humor and laughter. For this reason, the Superiority Theory is essential to understanding comedy today, and indispensable to our study of Spanish humor under—and especially against—Franco.

---

[2] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a.

[3] Cicero (De Oratore II Ch. 58) and Hobbes (in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* 19).

[4] Hobbes (in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* 20).

[5] Descartes (in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* 23).

Platonic Laughter: Ridicule and Scorn

Plato plots out the basic points of the Superiority Theory of Humor in a brief passage of *Philebus*. In only a few pages of dialogue with Protarchus (and with Philebus as an intermittent third party), Socrates touches on ideas that will be central to this study: ignorance, evil, malice, safety, and power. For this reason, and for its long influence on humor theory, we will consider Plato's reasoning in greater depth before surveying other philosophers' contributions to and variations on the Superiority Theory.

Although Socrates never uses the word 'superiority' during his short dialogue on humor, the word captures the gist of his argument. We laugh, says Socrates, when we perceive "ignorance, or ... stupidity" in others (10). No run-of-the-mill ignorance will do the trick, though. Ridiculous ignorance requires a lack of self-awareness—as Socrates points out, the opposite of the inscription at Delphi: "Know thyself." This kind of ignorance constitutes "a certain kind of evil, specifically a vice"[6] (11). It is a "false conceit of [oneself]" (12), a self-delusion regarding one's wealth, physical strength, or wisdom. Thus, if we see someone acting as though he were stronger, wealthier, or wiser than he actually is, his behavior strikes us as ridiculous. Plato states that such ignorance is an evil (10) and implies that it becomes a vice as "men are always claiming [wisdom], disputing endlessly and lying about how wise they are" (11). Comic stupidity, then, is a kind of willful ignorance of the inferiority of one's virtues.

If evil creates the opportunity for laughter, it is envy (or malice in Morreall's translation) that spurs us to take advantage of it. The envious or malicious nature of scornful laughter springs from the relationship between the ignorant and the laugher. Plato divides the ignorant, or "all who are foolish enough to hold this false conceit of themselves," into two preliminary categories or "classes": the weak and the powerful (12). We only laugh at ignorance in the weak, because the powerful, when laughed at, are "formidable and hateful. For ignorance in the strong is hateful, because it is hurtful to everyone both in real life and on the stage,[7] but powerless ignorance may be considered ridiculous" (12). Strangely, Plato then divides the ignorant weak into friends and enemies, titles normally bestowed on one's equals (we will address this in our discussion of superiority). Socrates and his interlocutors see nothing wrong or envious in "delighting in our enemies' misfortunes" (12). The envy enters when we "feel delight instead of pain when we see our friends in misfortune"—as Socrates says, "that is wrong, isn't it?" (12). Laughing at friends in their weakness seems a most unfriendly behavior that makes little sense, unless attributed to a desire to establish or demonstrate superiority.

---

[6] "Evil" feels too strong here but makes sense within the context of *Philebus*'s overarching argument. Socrates' opponent Philebus has stated that pleasure (pleasure, enjoyment, and delight) is good for humans and makes them happy. Socrates contends that wisdom—and intelligence, memory, "and their kindred, right and true reasoning"—is better for humankind (11b). And it is important to remember that when he says "pleasure and delight ... are a good to every living being" he is hinting at The Good. So his categorization of ignorance as "evil" seems less exaggerated if we keep in mind that he is arguing that its opposite, wisdom, is Good.

[7] This claim—that ignorance in the powerful does us harm even when merely portrayed on stage—comes from the same argument that Plato makes regarding mentions of uncontrollable laughter in literature (advocating the removal of all records of Gods or great men laughing). Other translations, however, do not so explicitly refer to literature and the arts: "ignorance in the powerful is hateful and infamous—since whether real or feigned it injures their neighbors" (49c of Harold N. Fowler's 1925 translation [Harvard UP]).

It is easy to characterize laughter as an expression of superiority if we accept Plato's premise that we laugh mainly at the powerless. We could assume that the weak and powerless are those below our station (however we define our station in society), implying that we laugh most at those who have no power over *us*. But Plato makes no mention of masters laughing at slaves, rulers at peasants, teachers at students, or any such relationship where the hierarchy is understood. He instead divides the ridiculously ignorant into enemies and friends, people with whom we share an implied equality, status-wise. When our supposed equals demonstrate ignorance of their own shortcomings, we laugh. Though Plato does not explicitly say as much, later proponents of his treatment of humor argue that laughter springs from a sudden realization that we must be superior to them.

Plato does not extend his examination of laughter beyond this narrow focus on laughter at ridiculously deluded friends. It should be noted again that Plato's discussion of humor is merely a means to an end in his argument with Philebus, who contends that "all pleasant things are good" (*Philebus* 13a). From the beginning of this dialogue Socrates complicates the argument by asserting that some of the things in which men take pleasure differ so greatly from each other as to be opposites.[8] He examines laughter only as an example of conditions which are not "true pleasures" but instead, like sorrow (in viewing tragedies), anger, and envy, are a mixture of pleasure and pain (50b-c). This is likely the reason why Plato's treatment of humor is so specific, ignoring all laughter that is not elicited by harmless self-delusions in friends. He mentions and then immediately excludes laughter at enemies because it does not serve his argument; both interlocutors agree—somewhat precipitously, it seems to me—that we do not laugh at enemies out of envy, and therefore we do not experience a mixture of pleasure and pain as we do when laughing at friends.

---

[8] "For instance," Socrates argues, "we say that the man who lives without restraint has pleasure, and that the self-restrained man takes pleasure in his very self-restraint; and again that the fool who is full of foolish opinions and hopes is pleased, and also that the wise man takes pleasure in his very wisdom. And would not any person who said these two kinds of pleasure were like each other be rightly regarded as a fool?" (*Philebus* 12c-d in Fowler).

Plato's treatment of humor in *Philebus* has many problems and limitations. As we have discussed above, he does not actually make an argument for or against humor,[9] much less a true attempt at defining humor. Instead, he uses a specific and artificial subset of laughter—laughing at our friends' misfortunes or ignorance—as a support to his argument for reason versus pleasure. Despite its limitations, his discussion is one of the earliest and probably the most well-known in early Western philosophy because of brand recognition. Subsequent treatises on humor and laughter took their cues from Plato's tangential treatment of laughter, expanding on the explicit and implicit themes in his discussion of laughter: safety, power, hierarchy, and nonsense.

Safety, for example, can be found in all three of the major theories of humor. We laugh at "imaginary wisdom, beauty and wealth [...] if we find these in a harmless form in our friends" (*The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* 12). Aristotle continues this idea, defining "the ridiculous" as "a mistake or unseemliness that is *not painful or destructive*" (*The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* 14; emphasis mine). And much later René Descartes argued, in a more physiologically-minded version of the Superiority Theory, that we laugh out of indignation "from the joy that we have in observing the fact that *we cannot be hurt* by the evil at which we are indignant" (23; emphasis mine). In order for someone to laugh at the shortcomings or the ignorance of a friend, the ignorance cannot be something that can potentially harm her or him. The laugher must be safe from repercussions and from the effects of that ignorance or the effects of that mistake.

---

[9] It was not until the nineteenth century that the word "humor" was used to refer to the capacity to make or recognize a joke, which is in part why Plato and others spoke of—or are translated as speaking of—laughter, comedy, the comic, etc.

We will address the importance of safety in the Relief and Incongruity theories as we examine each in turn. For now we can simply say that we do not laugh to release pent-up stress or emotion if these are a response to something that really does threaten us in some way; nor will we laugh at an incongruity if whatever it is that violates our expectations is a threat to our safety or happiness. As Morreall observes, “If I opened my bathroom door to find a pumpkin in the bathtub, for example, I would probably laugh. But if I found a cougar in the tub, I would not laugh” (“A New Theory” 130). The “non-bona-fide” or playful nature of humor requires—for the audience at least—that the stakes not be real.[10]

The themes of power and hierarchy are directly related to safety in Plato’s argument, though he does not explicitly consider their importance to laughter. As Socrates says to Protarchus, “those who are strong and able to revenge themselves you will define most correctly to yourself by calling them powerful, terrible, and hateful, for ignorance in the powerful is hateful and infamous” (49b-c). Plato thus connects laughter with power and hierarchy even as he discards the possibility of laughing at those who have power over us—though, as we have seen, he dismisses or ignores laughter at power because it does not serve the purposes of his over-arching argument. But this dismissal may simply be the product of the political realities not only of Plato’s day but also of the majority of human history. Would he perhaps have expanded his analysis of humor had he been able to conceive of a society that protected the weak, granted them freedom of speech, and allowed them to ridicule the powerful without fear of reprisals? Consider the abundant examples of high-ranking US politicians. When such men misspell or misspeak—“September 7, 1941”; “potatoe”; “strategery”; “57 states”; “covfefe”[11]—they are roundly mocked and the jokers survive unscathed.

---

[10] Humor as “non-bona-fide” communication is a concept that was first articulated by Victor Raskin and that he and Salvatore Attardo have continued to develop (see *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* 101).

Certainly, modern thinkers who have had the benefit of living in or observing such societies (ones that at least purport to uphold the rule of law) have remarked on the efficacy of humor and laughter as weapons against the powerful. Hannah Arendt, for instance, observed that “[t]o remain in authority requires respect for the person or the office. The greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter” (“Communicative Power,” 65). Interestingly, her connection of “contempt” with laughter invokes Plato and the Superiority Theory of Humor.

Arendt bases her analysis of authority, violence, and power on various modern states. Her comment on authority and laughter bears an endnote that discusses the Berkeley student rebellion of 1964, where the non-violent student protest was answered with violence (a tear gas attack by the National Guard), despite the supposed reverence for the rule of law and freedom of speech in the United States.[12] Walter Benjamin, similarly, saw humor as one manifestation of the

---

[11] Mistakes made, respectively, by George H.W. Bush, Dan Quayle, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. The elder President Bush named the wrong month during a speech commemorating the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Vice President Dan Quayle famously told an elementary school student who had correctly spelled ‘potato’ that he had left the ‘e’ off of the end, then turned and smiled at the press like a proud teacher. George W. Bush never actually said the word ‘strategery,’ but he mangled multi-syllabic words so often that this apocryphal utterance became the signature moment of Saturday Night Live’s representation of the Bush-Gore presidential debates, with Will Ferrell portraying Bush. Barack Obama was widely mocked (and once again called a closet Muslim) after he boasted during an exhausting 2008 campaign tour that he had visited “fifty... seven states. I think one left to go.” A theory soon made the rounds on the forwarded emails circuit insinuating that, in a Freudian slip, Obama had given the number of Muslim states. And for seemingly the thousandth time during Trump’s first year, Twitter nearly exploded with mocking speculation when the tweet-happy president ended a missive with “Despite the constant negative press covfefe” (no period).

[12] By Arendt’s reckoning, authority entails “unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey” and requires respect. “A father can lose his authority either by beating his child or by starting to argue with him, that is, either by behaving to him like a tyrant or by treating him as an equal” (65).

"refined and spiritual things" that are the ultimate objective of the class struggle. Together with "courage ..., cunning, and fortitude," humor has "retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers" (*Illuminations*, 254-55).

Benjamin's estimation of humor acknowledges the dangers inherent in questioning rulers, coming as it does as part of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, but it also reflects the experiences of a philosopher who, like Arendt, was well-acquainted with the variety of governments—fascist, democratic, totalitarian—that have risen to and fallen from power since the Industrial Revolution. In many modern states humorists have ridiculed men and women in power and survived, though examples abound of those who either have been killed or have been forced to flee.[13] Clearly, the sample size of those who have "joked truth to power" has grown dramatically since Plato's day (when, depending on your reading, Socrates was the obvious cautionary tale of what happens to those who make jokes at the expense of the powerful).

Historical context might therefore lead us to assume that Plato categorized laughter so narrowly because of the realities of his society. But that cannot be the sole reason for his negative characterization of laughter. If it were, he would not have included laughter—specifically depictions of gods and heroes laughing—in the list of behaviors that should be redacted from the texts used to educate the Guardians of the Republic. These Guardians, says the dialoguing Socrates, "must not be prone to laughter. For ordinarily when one abandons himself to violent laughter his condition provokes a violent reaction," going on to recommend the censorship of any account that “represents men of worth” or gods “as overpowered by laughter” (388e-389a).[14]

---

[13] Two cautionary tales from the 1990s and the 2010s: Bāsim Yūsuf, the "Egyptian Jon Stewart," who chronicles his escape from Egypt after satirizing the powerful in *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing through the Arab Spring* (2017); and Jaime Garzón, the creator of the Colombian political satire show "¡Cuac! El Noticiero" (1995-97) and then a peace activist until his assassination in 1999, whose story can be read in Germán Izquierdo's *Jaime Garzón, el genial impertinente* (2009).

Plato’s aversion to laughter in the Republic points to another part of his legacy in the philosophy of humor, one that he merely hints at in *Philebus* within the context of his argument against pleasure in favor of reason. Plato writes in *Republic* of “abandoning oneself” to laughter and being “overpowered” by laughter, and his treatment of humor in *Philebus* introduces the idea of an opposition between humor and reason. This opposition is implied by Plato’s over-arching argument between pleasure and reason or wisdom as “a good” for humanity. The idea, then, is that pleasure cannot be reason, though Plato does state that the reasonable or wise man can take pleasure in wisdom. However, at no point does Plato allow for laughter to be compatible with reason. In other words, humor is nonsense, and laughter entails the loss of reason, the loss of control over one’s body or soul.

The opposition of humor versus sense, wisdom, and reason permeates western thought and language. One need look no further than the court jester, also known as the Fool or *el bufón*, which in turn is translated as ‘buffoon.’[15] Joking thus equates with foolishness or the opposite of wisdom. In academics, a common criticism is that someone else’s work is not “serious” scholarship, implying that the topic of research is unworthy of the time, energy, and (presumably) grant money that it has required or would require. In the entertainment industry, awards such as the Golden Globes judge comedies and comedic performances separately from

---

[14] Paul Shorey points out that violent laughter was generally considered undignified by the ancients, listing several examples including Isocrates, Epictetus, and Diogenes (see 388e, note 1 in his translation of the *Republic* for *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Harvard UP: 1969, vols. 4-5). Morreall mentions strictures against “irrepressible mirth” and “loud, frequent, or unrestrained” laughter, by Protagoras and Epictetus respectively (*Comic Relief*, 4).

[15] Aristotle examines the differences between the wit, the boor, and the buffoon in *Nichomachean Ethics*

"serious" dramas and dramatic roles. And if we wish to imply that someone is so inadequate as to be useless, we refer to them as "a joke."

Despite the seriousness that renowned philosophers have lent to the *study* of humor, many since Plato have continued to view humor itself as inherently nonsensical, irrational, and even useless. As we have seen, Plato considered laughter to be harmful rather than helpful to a healthy society. And as we will see in our study of the Incongruity Theory, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant argue that we laugh at a contradictory thought that "at bottom represents nothing" (*Critique of Judgment* 49).

Plato's Legacy

As stated above, Plato's view of laughter set the tone for the discussion of the subject over time. That is not to say, however, that no one explored other facets of laughter. Both Aristotle and Cicero acknowledge that humor has its benefits in moderation and under control, and in that sense they do argue against Plato's negative treatment. Aristotle addresses humor from three different angles in *Poetics, Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Rhetoric*. In the latter two especially his treatment is more than a tangential means to an end. Cicero dedicates six chapters (58-63) of the second book of *De Oratore* to the use of humor in oration. Both focus on examples of laughter that are not out-of-control, irrational instances. Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* that wit and humor are better in moderation; no one wants to be a boor who laughs at nothing, just as no one wants to be a buffoon who will stop at nothing to get a laugh and for whom the only thing that matters is the laugh. Cicero essentially agrees in a longer discussion on ridicule, stressing the same moderation that will "distinguish the orator from the buffoon" (Ch. 60, 292). That said, many of Aristotle's and Cicero's statements align with Plato's ideas of laughter as hostile. For these reasons, they are considered proponents of the Superiority Theory, though, as we will see below, Aristotle (in *Rhetoric*) hints at and Cicero (in *De Oratore*) approaches a kind of Incongruity Theory.

The heyday of the Superiority Theory arrived with Thomas Hobbes and his treatment of laughter in *Leviathan.* Despite all the other famous philosophers who had weighed in on the subject, Hobbes provides the most famous sound bite for the Superiority Theory. (This is likely because of his historical situation, living as he did in the ramp-up to the age of philosophy.) In *Leviathan* he writes: "Sudden glory, is the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleases them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves" (19). Hobbes's "deformations" recall Aristotle's idea of comedy as ugliness that does no harm. Hobbes revisits "sudden glory" in *Human Nature*: "the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly.... It is no wonder therefore that men take heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumphed over..." (20). Like Plato, Hobbes sees the triumphant, scornful laugh as the prototypical laugh. Seeing mankind as a collection of individual wolves no doubt predisposed him to focus on scornful laughter. He thus ignores the nuances of Aristotle and Cicero in his embracing and amplification of Plato's reasoning on humor. The idea of "sudden glory," a surprise connected with selfishness, that we glory in the deformity, the idiocy, the ignorance or failure of another—that continues all of the negative or pejorative perspectives on humor that were first established in Plato's side-argument instrumentalization of laughter in *Philebus*.

When we consider the Superiority Theory of laughter, as with most treatises from the last two thousand years that equate humor with scorn, we should keep in mind Robert Provine's point regarding the evolution of propriety and decorum among all classes.

> [I]t is helpful to remember that we are looking back to times when 'good taste,' 'good manners' and 'good form' were based on standards that were very different from today's—to times when the rich and powerful employed fools, physical deformity was a legitimate source of amusement, and the social elite might entertain themselves by visiting insane asylums to taunt the inmates. Even torture and executions were public events often conducted in a carnival atmosphere complete with snacks and refreshments. Upper and lower classes alike could revel in the knowledge that there were always those pathetic few who were less fortunate than themselves. (Provine 14-15)

Despite the dated and incomplete nature of the Superiority Theory, ridicule has by no means gone extinct. Contemporary comedians have demonstrated in various statements that ridicule and scorn are a major ingredient of comedy, and anyone who has watched late-night talk shows can tell you that laughter is most often directed against those in power.

In a 2017 interview, British comedian Eddie Izzard told *Late Night* host Stephen Colbert of his plans to run for a seat in Parliament in 2020, prompting Colbert to ask if Izzard planned to use comedy in his political career. Izzard's response hints that he espouses Cleese's (and Plato's) view of comedy: "Comedy is interesting, because it's not a building tool, it is an attacking tool. It tears down pomposity and stupidity...."[16] Izzard then proceeded to explain that he prefers to build rather than to attack, connecting this idea to the fact that he has been out as transgender for several decades. Izzard's comments on comedy and building versus attacking beg the question: how has Eddie Izzard built bridges as a transgender comedian if not with comedy? Is it not because of his celebrity that he is able to break down barriers, and is not his celebrity based on his comedy performances? The point that Izzard may be trying to make is that the individual joke often tears down idiocy and pomposity; however, the rapport established through humor allows the joker and the audience to establish a connection, a compatibility that facilitates bridge-building. (For more on this idea, see the discussion of the Relief Theory below and of the Encryption Theory of Humor in the conclusion of this chapter.)

---

[16] Interestingly, during the exchange between Colbert and Izzard regarding comedy and politics, Colbert referenced Al Franken, the former Saturday Night Live head writer who was at the time serving his second term in Congress but would soon resign (in January 2018) after multiple allegations of sexual misconduct. Colbert noted that Franken had "dropped the comedy in the Senate for a long time" and had "just recently started making jokes again."

Colbert: Will you use comedy [in Izzard's campaign for a seat in Parliament]? Because Al [Franken] pretty much dropped the comedy in the Senate for a long [time]. He just recently started making jokes again."

Izzard: "Comedy is interesting, because it's not a building tool, it is an attacking tool. It tears down pomposity and stupidity..."

Colbert: "Yes. Thank God."

Izzard: "...in certain presidents. I like building."

The tag "in certain presidents" was an obvious reference to Donald Trump. But in hindsight, the more interesting point is whether a comedian can survive in politics without "dropp[ing] the comedy." Humor so often employs hyperbole and irony, which are dangerous rhetorical devices in highly fraught communication contexts. No statements are parsed and rehashed more than political statements, most often by unsympathetic (partisan) audiences. This, in fact, was the main point of Javier Marías's piece "El país que perdió el humor," the bulk of which he dedicates to political sound bites uttered ironically that were subsequently decried by those who refused to read them in the same mode. This is not to say that Franken's behavior (posing for photos in which he mimes groping a sleeping woman's breasts, for example) has a legitimate message if read ironically. Such buffoonery plays to the basest of sensibilities and fishes for the cheapest laughs. But the case of the comedian-cum-politician illustrates the problems when the two kinds of communication mix. And while most of the actions for which Franken was censured took place before he ran for office—while he was primarily known as a comedian—the fact that he "dropped the comedy" for his first several years in public office suggests that Izzard has a point: it is much more likely that a politician's jokes will attack rather than build.

Relief Theories

The third Earl of Shaftesbury, Sigmund Freud, and President Erdogan walk into a bar...

On the December 9, 2015 broadcast of the *Late Show*, Stephen Colbert highlighted reports of a bizarre case being tried in Turkish court at that time. Bilgin Ciftci, a Turkish citizen, stood accused of publicly denigrating a state official, namely President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ciftci, a doctor and a recently-fired public health official, had shared a meme that juxtaposed photos of Erdogan with screenshots of the character Gollum from Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In the side-by-side comparisons, Erdogan and Gollum wear similar expressions and the connection between the powerful politician and the pathetic anti-villain elicits laughter for reasons that are best addressed by the Incongruity Theory (below). However, even if we accept the legality of prosecuting someone for passing on a joke, the question that I would ask is, why did the Turkish government bother to prosecute someone for making a visual joke at their president's expense? Can such a joke actually harm the government or alter the status quo? While Eddie Izzard and Stephen Colbert might argue (and hope) that turning the powerful into the butt of the joke can contribute to reducing the power that the butt wields, others have contended that humor, rather than tear down power, actually helps to prop it up.

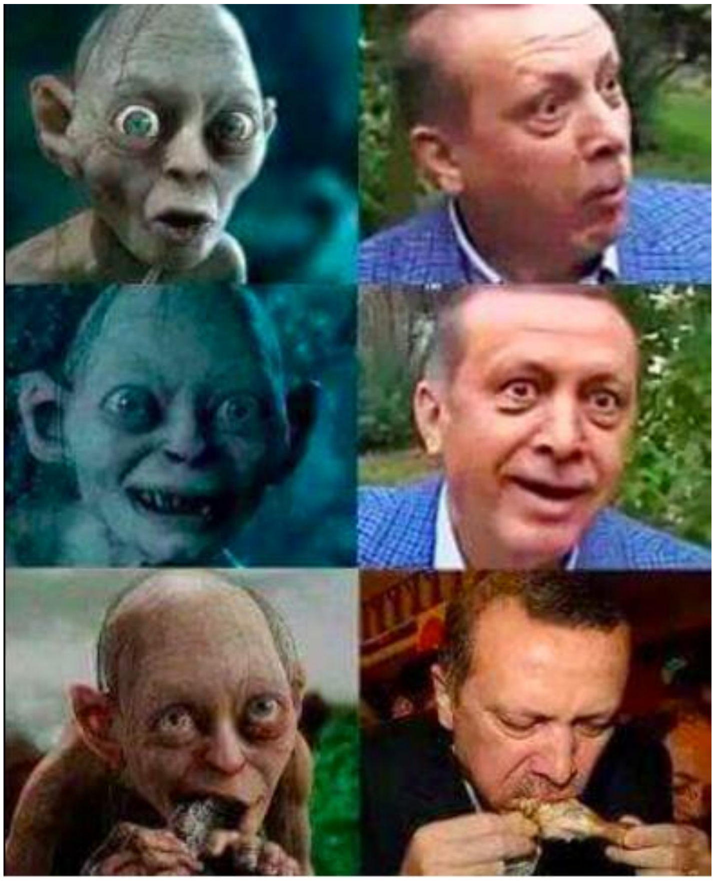


Figure 1: Gollum-Smeagol and Erdogan

The idea that humor is conducive to maintaining the socio-political status quo is an extension of the Relief Theory of Humor. This view of humor was first articulated in 1709 by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, though it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that heavyweights like Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Sigmund Freud fleshed it out. The central idea of the Relief Theory is that humor provides a necessary release from social pressures, which by itself is useful in studying humor during a dictatorship. But its various proponents draw from that idea principles that are essential to this project: that humor can both reveal the truth and make the false seem true; that using humor we can address topics that otherwise are forbidden; that even as humor can attack others, it allows society to function; and that humor establishes and confirms community. And so, despite the fact that many humor scholars discount the Relief Theory as outdated and ill-founded,[17] its conclusions make it required reading.

Unlike Plato's tangential creation of the Superiority Theory, the genesis of the Relief Theory comes from a work that actually focuses on humor. Lord Shaftesbury's broad-ranging treatise, Sensus Communis: *An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, responds to Hobbes's characterization of laughter as sudden glory in a wolf-eat-wolf world. Shaftesbury instead argues for using "raillery" or good-humored teasing in polite conversation. The essay primarily advocates relaxing the stodgy rhetoric of discourse in Britain to allow for measured, gentlemanly ridicule and mockery. Shaftesbury argues that "the natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprisoned and controlled, will find out other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint: and whether it be in burlesque, mimicry or buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be revenged on their constrainers" (17-18). He points to a correlation that he sees between the freedom of discourse within a given society and the humorous expressions typical of that society. In countries like eighteenth-century Italy where "spiritual tyranny is highest," buffoonery and burlesque are "the only manner in which the poor cramped wretches can discharge a free thought" (20). Thus, two centuries before Dewey, Spencer, or Freud would address laughter, Lord Shaftesbury characterized it in terms of discharge, venting, and relief.

Though Shaftesbury essentially inaugurated the Relief Theory, he barely mentions the physiological forces and effects that came to define it. His argument centers around rhetoric but employs early on the term "animal spirits" (*Sensus Communis*, 17), alluding to what Morreall describes as the "hydraulic" model of the nervous system. In the early eighteenth century, biologists believed that nerves carried “animal spirits” (fluids and gases, sometimes called *humors*) between muscles, sense organs, and the brain. “So, in the first versions of the Relief Theory, the nervous system was represented as a network of tubes inside which the animal spirits sometimes build up pressure, as in emotional excitement, that calls for release,” making laugher a sort of train whistle or steam valve for venting our pent-up emotions (*Comic Relief*, 15-16). Spencer and Freud continued the idea of the release valve but updated the physiology and complicated the theory with their own restrictions on the types of mental and emotional pressures that provoke laughter.

---

[17] See, for example, John Morreall's assessment of the philosophical merits of the Relief Theory (*Comic Relief* 22-23).

Spencer holds closely to the hydraulic model in his 1860 essay, “The Physiology of Laughter.” His argument turns on the idea that all feeling or “liberated nerve force [...] *must* expend itself in some direction” (102). When a feeling passes “a certain pitch (it) habitually vents itself in bodily action” (104). Some situations, actions, or images initially cause us to summon strong emotions—positive or negative—and provoke “great expectation with respect to the further evolution of the scene—a quantity of vague, nascent thought and emotion, into which the existing quantity of thought and emotion was about to pass” (107). If that scene is then interrupted by a humorous turn of events, that “large amount of nervous energy [...] is suddenly checked in its flow. The channels along which the discharge was about to take place, are closed” and the new channel—the resolution of the joke—“is a small one; the ideas and feelings suggested are not numerous and massive enough to carry off the nervous energy to be expended” (107). This reduced emotional output creates a bottleneck, and so the surplus energy is then channeled into the facial, vocal, and respiratory muscles that produce laughter—but only because the “new channel” is too small to handle the size of the initial emotional charge. The emotional stakes have dropped precipitously. This suddenly diminished emotional pathway is the result of a "descending incongruity," or when "consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small," which Spencer argues is the necessary case for laughter (108).

Nearly half a century after Spencer's essay, Freud funneled the Relief Theory through his own theories of psychoanalysis, and in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) he created the most comprehensive theory of laughter and humor at that time. As linguist Salvatore Attardo points out, Freud incorporated aspects of the Superiority and Incongruity theories under the umbrella of the Relief Theory and dedicated scores of pages to analyzing and cataloguing the linguistic mechanisms of humor ("A primer for the linguistics of humor," 104). Perhaps because of this—or more likely because of his influence on Western letters—Freud's is the best-known articulation of the Relief Theory (*Comic Relief* 17; "A primer for the linguistics of humor" 103). As such, it deserves to be examined in more detail.

Like Shaftesbury and Spencer, Freud argues that laughter relieves emotional tension, but he underpins that argument with a complex economy of psychical forces. The complexity begins with a tri-partite division of humor into joking (*der Witz*), "the comic," and humor. Each category belongs to a different social situation—one person joking to another about a third, one person laughing at the performance of another,[18] and one person laughing at a situation—and Freud argues that in each the laughter releases a different kind of psychical energy. "The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in humor from an economy in expenditure upon feeling.[19] In all three modes of working of our mental apparatus the pleasure is derived from an economy" (293). By "economy," Freud means that our mind is saved the work it would have to do if we were confronted by the same stimuli in a non-humorous situation, and that saved energy is then vented in laughter

---

[18] This is an incredibly simplified—and therefore problematic—summary of "the comic" as Freud defines it, but further definition and distinction are not necessary for the purposes of this project. For a more detailed summary, see Morreall's treatment of the Relief Theory in *Comic Relief*, pp. 17-22.

[19] Freud elsewhere terms this as "an economy in the expenditure of affect" (*Jokes*..., 284), which works well with Spencer's model of a situation that elicits pity or sympathy or admiration but, through a humorous turn, the audience's still nascent affective reaction becomes superfluous.

Of the three laughter situations, Freud analyzes joking, or *der Witz,* most comprehensibly and (comparatively) clearly. Joking includes not only prepared jokes but "spontaneous witty comments, *bon mots,* and repartee" (*Comic Relief,* 18). Freud splits joking into two types, innocent and tendentious, and further splits tendentious joking into obscene or sexually aggressive joking and hostile joking. When someone—in Freud's analysis, a man—feels hostility or lust towards another person but cannot express those emotions openly in polite society, he might make a joke to a third person that taps into those feelings without actually accosting his target. This exchange is pleasurable for the joker because "the joke *will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible"* (*Jokes...,* 123, emphasis in original). The mind of the hearer summons the normal mechanisms that repress hostility and sexual aggression, but finds them unnecessary, and that surplus energy is released in the pleasurable experience that is laughter. Morreall points out that scholars often misrepresent this part of Freud's theory, simply and incorrectly stating that jokes vent repressed sexual or hostile emotions, when Freud in fact specifies that they release "not the energy of repressed feelings, but the energy that normally represses those feelings" (*Comic Relief,* 18, 21).

Because Freud associates laughter with surplus repressive energy, he asserts—erroneously, according to Provine (*Laughter,* 27)—that the person who makes the joke normally laughs much less than the audience (or not at all). His explanation requires mental mathematical acrobatics that are themselves humorous in their contortions. The joke-maker, writes Freud,

> himself produces the force which lifts the inhibition. This no doubt results in a yield of pleasure for him, and even, in the case of tendentious jokes, a very considerable one, since the fore-pleasure obtained by the joke-work itself takes over the lifting of *further* inhibitions; but the expenditure on the joke-work is in every case deducted from the yield resulting from the lifting of the inhibition—an expenditure which is the same as the one which the hearer of the joke avoids. (*Jokes...*, 183, emphasis in original)

If laughter is the venting of surplus inhibiting energy, then the more energy used to make the joke, the weaker the laughter. In its simplest form, Freud's psychical math yields the following equation:

$$LE \text{ (laughter energy)} = IE \text{ (inhibiting energy)} - JWE \text{ (joke-work energy)}.$$

Thus, as a person puts his effort into making a "witty joke of exposure" or aggression, according to Freud's math, he reduces his pleasure output: laughter. (Though Freud alludes to a consolation prize, the "lifting of *further* inhibitions," he does not elaborate.) The hearer makes no such expenditure and subsequently conserves the full amount of inhibiting energy to vent into laughter. Unless, that is, "he is required to make an expenditure on intellectual work" to understand the punch-line, in which case the surplus energy is spent and the joke "loses its effect of laughter" (183).

This model also implies that if someone rarely represses or inhibits his lust or hostility, his *IE* (inhibiting energy) is so low that he will never laugh at a hostile or lustful joke. Freud makes this argument himself more than once, asserting that "aggressive tendentious jokes succeed best in people in whose sexuality a powerful sadistic component is demonstrable, which is more or less inhibited in real life" (175). Strong inhibition or repression is essential for laughter. Freud identifies as repression the "power which makes it difficult or impossible [...] to enjoy undisguised obscenity." Not surprisingly, the apparatuses that receive the most credit for implanting this power within us are "civilization and higher education," and once these have got us under their control, our "psychical organization undergoes an alteration [...] as a result of which what was formerly felt as agreeable now seems unacceptable and is rejected with all possible psychical force." The result is that "primary possibilities of enjoyment [...] are lost to us" having been "repudiated by the censorship in us" (120). Secondary enjoyment through tendentious humor, then, requires a strong internal censor that is only found in the highly educated.

> It is essential that [the joke-hearer] should be in sufficient psychical accord with the first person to possess the same internal inhibitions, which the joke-work has overcome in the latter. A person who is responsive to smut will be unable to derive any pleasure from witty jokes of exposure; [hostile, attacking jokes] will not be understood by uneducated people who are accustomed to give free play to their desire to insult. Thus every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity. (184-85)

Here Freud infuriatingly makes an important observation about the social nature of humor and laughter but bases it on a patently false assertion. As we will see in our discussion of the Encryption Theory, modern researchers have confirmed and are confirming that laughing at the same jokes is indeed evidence of like-mindedness or "psychical conformity"; and a successful joke depends upon shared (cultural) presuppositions, which might be a reasonable if overly-liberal translation of "possess[ing] the same internal inhibitions." However, those uncouth and uneducated masses who are *un*inhibited in their actions are by no means incapable of understanding and laughing at jokes that touch on transgressive thoughts and behaviors. As

Morreall notes, "experiments by Hans Jurgen Eysenck showed [that] it is people who usually give free rein to their hostile and sexual feelings, not those who repress them, who enjoy aggressive and sexual humor more" (*Comic Relief*, 21).

Although humor depends on "psychical accord" between the joker and his audience, Freud contends that jokes can persuade an audience. The joke is essentially a hand-crafted gift that will entice the audience to take the joker's side against the target of the joke. The joker and the hearer connect through the expression of this pleasure that is normally forbidden by society. The joke will "bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us," but often in a sneaky kind of way, as the joke persuades the hearer to agree with us "without any very close investigation, just as on other occasions we ourselves have often been bribed by an innocent joke into overestimating the substance of a statement expressed jokingly" (123). Humor, according to Freud, actually establishes the like-mindedness that it depends on, though we sometimes accept facile and spurious truths prima facie when presented in a joke. In these assertions Freud echoes Shaftesbury, who praised the use of humor in gentlemanly dialogue but warned that "[t]he false earnest is ridiculed, but the false jest passes secure, and becomes as errant deceit as the other" (Sensus Communis, 32). Both of these properties of humor—community-building and passing off specious nonsense as reason—are important points of contention within the Incongruity theory.

The usefulness of the Relief Theory is inversely proportional to its specificity. The more Spencer and Freud go into detail about re-routed channels of liberated nerve force or economy on the expenditure of inhibition, the less accurate their theories have proven to be. As with the Plum Pudding model of the atom, Spencer's model of the forces behind laughter has been left behind as scientific understanding has advanced. And his philosophical observations have not fared much better. Philosophers and humor theorists take exception to Spencer's contention that laughter comes only from "descending incongruity," citing many examples where a sudden, surprising increase in the stakes has provoked laughter.[20] Freud has suffered essentially the same fate as Spencer. Where his theories can actually be tested, the results are not in his favor. (For example, as we saw above, sexually uninhibited behavior does not preclude appreciation of sexually aggressive jokes.) And as Attardo observes, "the psychodynamic model" upon which Freud bases *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* "has been completely discredited" ("A primer..." 103).

Despite its failings as a scientific theory, the basic point of the Relief Theory forms a part of our general understanding of humor today. The universally-accepted idea that humor relieves emotional stress is encapsulated in the often-used term "comic relief" (which is the title of Morreall's most recent book). As we will see in the next three sections, this idea by itself justifies including the Relief Theory within this study. But the additional points made by Shaftesbury and Freud are no less germane. Humor can disguise nonsense as reason and reveal the folly of supposed truths. Humor can establish and solidify community. And humor can blunt the edge of uncomfortable subjects in conversation. As Freud asserts, through humor we can broach topics that would be considered inappropriate or taboo in "serious" discourse. We can, in a sense, circumvent censorship. The softening or cloaking properties of humor allow us to attack people as well as "institutions, people in their capacity as vehicles of institutions, dogmas or morality or religion, views of life which enjoy so much respect that objections to them can only be made under the mask of a joke and indeed of a joke concealed by its façade" (129).[21] Each of these applications of the Relief Theory will be useful in our analysis of humor under Franco.

---

[20] Take, for example, a *Simpsons* episode in which Homer buys a vintage convertible that formerly belonged to Springfield's resident criminal, Snake. Offended that Homer has been using regular octane rather than premium gasoline, Snake stretches piano wire across the road in an attempt to decapitate Homer and thus recover his car. Homer approaches the trap literally standing while driving, exulting at the feeling of "the wind on [his] neck!" At the last second he bends over to pick up a gumball on the floor of the car. Snake laments his poor luck: "Why do I even bother?" But then Homer's neighbor Kirk Van Houten approaches in his own convertible, frustratedly waving a sub sandwich high in the air. "I told that idiot to slice my sandwich," complains Van Houten, an instant before the piano wire chops off his arm at the elbow (*Realty Bites*). This scene contains both descending and ascending incongruity, as Homer avoids decapitation in a ridiculously contrived *deus-ex*-gumball; and then, in an equally contrived situation, the wire, rather than slicing Van Houten's sandwich as expected, chops off his arm. Based on anecdotal evidence (reddit.com), it is the second gag, with the *ascending* incongruity, that gets the big laugh from *Simpsons* fans. And according to a *New Yorker* profile of producer George Meyer, the sandwich joke made the writers' room explode in surprised laughter ("Taking Humor Seriously," 66-67).

Freedom or Functionalism? Bakhtin and the Carnivalesque

When analyzing the intersection of humor and politics, Mikhail Bakhtin can be a helpful guide. In *Rabelais and his World,* Bakhtin studies the carnivalesque and the place of comedy in European societies. He argues that comedy, a necessary balance to the seriousness of life, has since the Renaissance been irreparably divorced from serious discourse. The ideological bases of society demand "a tone of icy petrified seriousness" (73). During the social upheaval of the Renaissance, according to Bakhtin, laughter and comedy were re-established as a necessary yin to the yang of "serious discourse" but soon fell again from favor as new political and social ideologies replaced those of the Middle Ages (101). So it is that we have arrived at the current divide between comic and serious discourse, the latter of which requires that "icy petrified" tone that is, once again, "supposedly the only tone to express the true, the good, and all that was essential and meaningful" (73).

Bakhtin's analysis of comedy (in the carnivalesque) through the ages bears closer examination. Spain's history as a bastion of conservative, inquisitorial Catholicism—and thus as a nation where medieval ideologies in all their gravity and grandeur held on long into modernity—invites application of Bakhtin's study of laughter's place in society and the instances of Spanish comedy that could trace their origins to the carnivalesque. However, at this point I employ Bakhtin to illustrate how humor as a release can serve a stabilizing function in society. He posits the carnival as a state-sanctioned inversion of the normal social order—an inversion boundless in space but strictly constrained in time. It is a scheduled break from the oppressive nature of society to which the oppressed and the powerless can look forward as they suffer through the perennial misfortunes of their class. As Simon Critchley argues in relation to Shaftesbury and Bakhtin,

---

[21] For a contemporary and commercial example of this property of humor, see Dave Vance's TEDx talk "Pooping Unicorns and the Power of Comedy." Vance is the writer behind the viral commercial that made sales of the Squatty Potty skyrocket.

> Buffonic comedy is a function of, and a reaction to, repression. This explains why, on Shaftesbury's reading, the permitted inversions of the dominant theological and political order in Carnival produce such seemingly disorderly and transgressive humour. *But rather than placing in question the dominant order, such acts of comic subversion simply reinstate it by offering transitory comic relief.* After Carnival comes Lent, and one cannot exist without the other. (Critchley 82, my italics)[22]

The Relief Theory lends itself to the functionalist view of laughter and humor, i.e., that these provide regular, temporary relief from pent-up stress and thus perpetuate the political and social status quo. The findings of modern medical and psychological research would seem to support this idea: researchers have demonstrated a clear link between laughter and "the distancing from distressing events" (Keltner and Bonanno 688)[23] as well as the power of laughter to counteract physical discomfort (Cogan et al.).[24] In this respect the Relief Theory opposes the Superiority Theory. Rather than characterizing laughter as an antisocial weapon—whether employed against the weak (Plato, Hobbes) or the powerful (Benjamin, Arendt)—the Relief Theory portrays it as a social lubricant that releases the tensions between individuals and between classes and thus helps to perpetuate the existence of those classes. This duality applies to the subjects of Chapters 3 and 4, the publication *La Codorniz* and the humorist Miguel Gila, each of which was accused of collaborating with Franco's regime or, alternately, praised for attacking and subverting it.

---

[22] Critchley cites Shaftesbury—"The greater the weight is, the bitterer will be the satire. The higher the slavery, the more exquisite the buffoonery"—and sees in his ideas an explanation of the violent humor provoked by totalitarian regimes. This fact, believes Critchly, "is not incidental [...] to the circumstances of composition and indirect intention of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*" (82). Critchley continues, asserting that "Bakhtin's defence of what he calls 'grotesque realism,' his praise of 'comic heteroglossia,' of unofficial culture, of the unruliness of the body and the identification of the latter with the 'collective ancestral ground of the people,' is clearly an implied critique of the official culture and hierarchy of Stalinism and its aesthetics of socialist realism" (83).

[23] In a 1997 article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* Dacher Keltner and George A. Bonanno report on a study of instances of laughter during interviews with bereaved spouses. The authors add their findings to

Objections to, and suspicions of, humor and laughter in oppressive circumstances reflect Bakhtin's posited schism between comedic and serious discourse. Weighty, life-and-death matters, some argue, require reverential treatment and should not be approached or otherwise connected with the levity inherent in laughter.[25] The whole point of Freud's and Spencer's formulation of laughter is that it should happen only when the source of stress turns out to be a

---

the growing argument against "traditional bereavement theories, which have emphasized the importance of working through the emotional pain of the loss [...] and have generally viewed the expression of positive emotion as an indication of denial and as an impediment to grief resolution [...]" and cite numerous theorists who "have recently identified limitations of the 'grief work' view [...] and have begun to consider the adaptive functions of positive emotions during bereavement [...], which are well documented in the literature of mourning processes across cultures" (689).

[24] In a 1987 article in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, Rosemary Cogan et al. measured the reported discomfort levels of students (using an inflatable blood-pressure cuff) who had been observed laughing at a 20-minute comedy recording (Lily Tomlin's 1971 album *This Is a Recording*). The raised threshold of this group matched or exceeded that of a group who had listened to a relaxation-inducing recording; both of these groups demonstrated a significantly higher threshold than the control group and a group that had listened to an "informative narrative" (A. Rostenberg, "Ethics and Sociology of Peer Review," 1972).

For a summary of (pre-2000) research on the analgesic properties of laughter, see Provine 200-203.

[25] Even Kurt Vonnegut agrees, albeit subjectively, that some topics should not be treated humorously (or, as he puts it: "Some things aren't funny"). The famed comedic novelist, who penned *Slaugherhouse-five* (which uses humor and irony to address war in general and specifically the firebombing of Dresden in World War II), writes in his memoir that he "can't imagine a humorous book or skit about Auschwitz" or the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, Jr. "Otherwise I can't think of any subject that I would steer away from, that I could do nothing with. Total catastrophes are terribly amusing, as Voltaire demonstrated. You know, the Lisbon earthquake is funny" (*A Man without a Country* 3).

joke. Where society and politics truly oppress, militant resistors would logically want nothing of the "decreased experience of negative emotion, and in particular anger" and "the increased experience of positive emotion" that more recent studies of laughter have championed (Keltner and Bonanno 698). After all, negative emotion—pain, distress, discomfort, anger—is the fuel that powers revolutionary engines, and to remove it is presumably to kill the engine and accept the status quo. Humor, by this view, serves as an opiate to the masses rather than a weapon of the common man against the ruling classes.

Ajo y Agua: Preston Sturges and the "Hymn to the Common Man"

In 1941, the same year when Miguel Mihura began publishing *La Codorniz*, the American director Preston Sturges premiered his film *Sullivan's Travels*, which explores both sides of the argument between palliative laughter and serious analysis of trauma. It is perhaps ironic that such a study should come from Sturges, who has been called "by far the wittiest scriptwriter the English-speaking cinema has known"; "probably the most spectacular manipulator of sheer humor since Mark Twain"; and the writer-director who "restored to American film a sense of social satire ... equaled only in Chaplin's films" (Andrew Sarris, Manny Farber, and André Bazin, respectively, qtd. in *Five Screenplays*, 1). As a master of screwball comedies like *The Lady Eve* (1941) and *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), Sturges clearly knew a thing or two about using humor in narrative—in his case, to further his own career, which depended on making audiences laugh and feeding the Hollywood studio machine.

The protagonist of *Sullivan's Travels* is John L. Sullivan, a successful director of inane comedies. At the beginning of the film, Sullivan attempts to leverage his run of hits in order to make a serious film, *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*[26] an adaptation of a gritty novel by the fictitious author Sinclair Beckstein. He pitches the idea to his producers, describing the project as "a commentary on modern conditions ... stark realism ... the problems that confront the average man. [...] I want this picture to be a ... document. I want to hold a mirror up to life. I want this to be a picture of dignity ... a true canvas of the suffering of humanity" (541). Sullivan contends that he can't continue to make breezy comedies because "these are troubled times" (544): the movie is set in 1941, with the US still struggling in the clutches of the Great Depression and teetering on the brink of joining the Allies in World War II (it premiered three days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor). Sullivan's producers respond that he cannot make a film about the troubles of the common man because, thanks to his privileged upbringing, he has never experienced any of those troubles. This gives Sullivan the idea to go on the road for several weeks as a "hobo," dressed in rags with only ten cents in his pocket, so that he can understand the suffering of the poor well enough to make *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*

The movie's second act consists of Sullivan's travels and misadventures (once he escapes his studio-mandated handlers). In his final misadventure, he loses his memory and ends up being sentenced to six years' hard labor for attacking a railyard policeman. Upon arriving at the backwoods prison he regains his memory, but it is too late. The guards respond to his demands and protests with brutality, and they take away his letter-writing privileges. One day during work detail he sees his name in a newspaper and starts to read the story, but the head guard, labeled

---

[26] The title of the fictitious novel was changed for the final script. However, the revision was incomplete. The title from previous scripts was accidentally left in the first time it is mentioned. That title was *For Whom the Night Falls*—a clear reference to *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* In that version, then, Sullivan was planning to make a movie based on a novel whose themes and subject matter would have reflected those of Hemingway's novel about the Spanish Civil War, with the added gravitas of John Steinbeck and Upton Sinclair (the two-headed monster behind the apocryphal author, Sinclair Beckstein). The revised title, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?,* was borrowed by the Coen brothers for their 2000 comedy about three escaped convicts in rural, Depression-era Mississippi.

"the Mr." in Sturges's script, reprimands him and sends him to the sweatbox. After several days he is released, a hollow husk of a man reduced to inhuman misery. "His eyes are wild" and his head is "lolling on his shoulders"; when he tries to speak he "just mutters gibberish" (667).

In this dire situation, Sullivan (re)discovers the therapeutic and cathartic power of humor. The Mr. allows him to go to the Sunday night "pitcher show" at the local black church. After a sermon by the preacher admonishing his congregation "neither by word, nor by action, nor by look to make our guests feel unwelcome," the chained inmates shuffle in and sit in the pews to watch a silent comedy: a Disney cartoon featuring Mickey Mouse and his dog, Pluto. The audience of impoverished African-Americans and downtrodden inmates roars with laughter as Pluto gets stuck to flypaper, caught in a chest of drawers and finally rolled up in a window screen. The scene features a variety of close-ups of individual parishioners and inmates laughing uncontrollably, mouths wide open, some with several teeth missing. The preacher himself lets out a belly laugh and then quickly covers his mouth and looks around in embarrassment. But Sullivan does not laugh. "Alone he is glum," but as the laughter continues around him and "he watches the screen, his expression softens and he smiles very faintly" (671). Then, "[a]s if it pained him, he snorts a couple of times" and at the next roar of the audience "he throws back his head and laughs with them" (671).[27]

Despite the somewhat grotesque undertones created by the close-ups, the scene works incredibly well in the context of the film as a whole. It is the emotional climax of *Sullivan's Travels*, marking the end of the social melodrama and the return to screwball comedy. And effectively it is the narrative climax as well: Sullivan’s troubles are resolved in the next scene when he confesses to his own murder and thus garners the national attention that he needs to free himself and return to Hollywood. More importantly, however, the scene presents the answer to the philosophical question around which the plot centers. In “troubled times,” what do audiences need more: a mirror held up to the harsh realities of life, or a comedy that will make them laugh and forget? Laughter—“[one] of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation”—is what brought Sullivan back to humanity after all of his suffering, and it was not until he joined in the laughter that he became one with the downtrodden and disenfranchised people around him. Sturges drives the point even further with a closing montage (683):

---

[27] Sturges inserts at least a dozen close-ups of Sullivan's fellow audience members who could be described perfectly by Plato in his *Republic* (cited above): these are men and women "overpowered by laughter," humans who have "abandoned themselves" to laughter. They roll and sway back and forth in the pews, pumping their arms and bouncing in rapturous fits. Sullivan at first looks around at them in confusion, understandably bewildered by their violent reaction, but by the end of the scene he has joined them, rocking in his seat and punctuating his hysterical laughter by pointing at the screen.

> We hear the echo of distant laughter, and ON THE SCREEN, SUPERIMPOSED ON THE IMAGES OF SULLIVAN AND THE GIRL we see THE LAUGHING CONVICTS, what they are laughing at, and THE LAUGHING NEGROES. IN AN AIR-RAID SHELTER we see the people laughing at a single comic. BEHIND THE LINES we see soldiers laughing at a vaudeville act. We see a HOSPITAL WARD with the patients laughing at a Punch and Judy show. We see children in a BOMBED STREET laughing at an organ grinder’s monkey. To this THE PREVIOUS MONTAGE SHOTS ARE ADDED: SOLDIERS, REFUGEES, CONVICTS, WOUNDED CHILDREN AND NEGROES SHARE THE SCREEN. The sound builds into wild and deafening laughter. ON THE SCREEN appear the words: “THE END”

Sturges’s message is clear. He obviously believes what everyone in the film tells Sullivan when he argues for *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*: that a world full of starvation, poverty and war needs comedy more than they need “a document” or a “true canvas of the suffering of humanity” (541).

Sullivan’s Travels encapsulates the Relief Theory’s sociological ramifications, ruling in favor of those who extol the social benefits of humor as a release. The film addresses the debate between serious discourse—i.e., “working through emotional pain”—and comedy—i.e., increased positive emotions and “enhanced social relations” (Keltner and Bonanno). Sturges contends that laughter is the only pleasure that some people have in this life, the only thing that makes life bearable for the convicts and the African-American parishioners of the film, victims of social and racial injustice, and for everyone who suffers because of war, pestilence, famine, and death. It appears to provide welcome relief from the oppressive conditions in which so many live, an opportunity to vent the pressure and stress that build up under those conditions.

On the other hand, many argue that laughter and humor are true palliatives, providing relief from symptoms without addressing the cause of the problem. Humor, as opposed to serious dialogue, turns weighty issues into punchlines. It channels “strong feeling” into “muscular actions [that] are purposeless,” i.e., laughter (Spencer 104), rather than into actions that build towards change. In Shaftesbury’s terms, buffoonery, burlesque, and satire may indeed “fall heaviest where the constraint has been the severest,” but the “discharge (of) free thought” in these modes does nothing to remove the yoke of tyranny, spiritual or otherwise (*Sensus Communis* 20). As accusers of Gila and *La Codorniz* would argue, Gollum-based memes make us laugh at power-hungry presidents, they don’t depose them.

The Relief Theory thus opposes the Superiority Theory by presenting humor and laughter not as an attack that undermines social cohesion and creates conflict, but rather as a mechanism that allows society to function and even, in Keltner and Bonanno’s terms, “enhances social relations" (698). Enhancing social relations, after all, is the whole point of the essay that started the Relief Theory. As Simon Critchley notes, Shaftesbury was well-versed in the Roman concept of *sensus communis,* which does not fit the obvious, literal translation of "common sense," but instead "is more felicitously rendered as 'sociableness'" (Critchley 80).

Incongruity Theories

> Any two beliefs, no matter how they were originally derived, may participate in a conflict, but getting them to participate in a conflict is often the outcome of hard work—or luck! A whole society can be blissfully ignorant of the contradictions harbored in their "common knowledge" until some reflective and industrious thinker rubs their noses in the quandary—or some chance event draws everyone's attention to the problem. Science and literature are among the focal sets of processes that have gradually uncovered and resolved a host of conflicts for everybody, and we each have our own scientific agenda: rooting out and fixing the residual conflicts in our personal world knowledge. (It is amusing to realize that a comedian can be seen to be a sort of informal—but expert—scientist, leading the way, helping us expose and resolve heretofore unnoticed glitches in our common knowledge.)
>
> —Hurley et al. 112-13

Of the three major theories of humor, the Incongruity Theory—or some variant—is most widely accepted by philosophers and humor researchers today.[28] Like the Relief Theory, it arose in the eighteenth century when philosophers began to question the long-standing belief that laughter is always the result of feelings of superiority. But where the Relief Theory defines humor in terms of social, physiological, and psychical forces that produce laughter, the Incongruity Theory attempts to understand the mix of concepts that strike us as humorous or amusing, focusing on juxtaposed ideas that do not seem to fit or are incongruous.

---

[28] Attardo, Morreall, Carroll, and Hurley et al. each attest to the contemporary dominance of the Incongruity Theory. See, for example, "A primer..." 104; *Comic Relief* 10; *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* 8, 17; *Inside Jokes* 45.

Most scholars consider the first real exposition of the Incongruity Theory to be Francis Hutcheson's *Reflections upon Laughter* (1725),[29] although the concept is implied by Plato and briefly discussed by Cicero and Aristotle (*Comic Relief* 11; "A primer..." 102). Cicero noted in *De Oratore* that "[t]he most common kind of joke [is] when we expect one thing and another is said; in which case our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh" (Book II, Ch. 63).[30] Aristotle, in his discussion of metaphor in *Rhetoric* Book III, states that humorists often deceive the audience with expressions that end "not in accordance with our previous expectation" (chapter 11). As discussed above, Plato argues that we laugh when a supposedly wise friend makes a stupid mistake. Envy or malice is the purported emotion that drives the laugh, but one could argue, as Hutcheson does, that it is the contrast between "our notion of wisdom in our fellows" and the stupidity of a "gross inadvertence, or great mistake," that actually strikes us as funny (*Reflections upon Laughter,* 33).

Hutcheson's central argument, that "generally the cause of laughter is the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas" (32), was further developed by James

---

[29] Hutcheson's essays were first published in 1725 in *The Dublin Journal,* according to Elizabeth Telfer (359). However, he is most often connected to the 1750 publication of his posthumous, combined volume of *Reflections upon Laughter and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees.*

[30] In chapters 61-63 of Book II of *De Oratore* (in *Cicero on Oratory and Orators*), Cicero makes some of the most insightful comments on verbal humor that I have read in my research. Given the fact that he is advising men on how to be a great speaker, it should not come as such a surprise that his treatment of wit reads almost like a how-to book for joke writers. He observes that there are two kinds of verbal jokes: those that rely on word-play ("mere language") and those that rely on concepts ("a thought") (Ch. 61). Puns and other word-play take advantage of the ambiguity of language "to turn the force of a word to quite another sense than that in which other people take it"; but punning alone, in Cicero's estimation, "excites surprise rather than laughter, unless when it happens to be joined with some other sorts of jesting" (Ch. 62). The "other sort" is the conceptual joke, that surprises by its juxtaposition of ideas. As Cicero's Caesar says to his companions, "you are aware that that is the most common kind of joke, when we expect one thing and another is said, in which case our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh. But if something of the ambiguous," or surprise via word-play, "is thrown in with it, the wit is heightened" (Ch. 63, p 296). Cicero's advice, then, to joke writers and orators alike is that they employ both types of incongruity at once, as "men are most delighted with a joke when the laugh is raised by the thought and the language in conjunction" (Ch. 61, p 293). His observations on word-play and unusual conceptual pairs are echoed, more than two thousand years later, in Victor Raskin's work on the Semantic Script Theory of Humor, which formed the nucleus of the General Theory of Verbal Humor, the incongruity-resolution model widely espoused by linguists who research humor.

Beattie. Beattie's essay *On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition* (1764) concludes that laughter "arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them" (320).[31] These initial essays opened up a new theory of humor whose essential property—incongruity—is so open and accommodating that the theory has come to be adapted and accepted by researchers in psychology, philosophy, linguistics, literary studies, and cognitive sciences. Many scholars, in proposing "new" theories, have reconciled the other major theories under the umbrella of the Incongruity Theory. This makes perfect sense, given the fact that the goal of most humor researchers is to articulate a theory that explains every type of humor and/or laughter, and the Incongruity Theory has proven pliable and agile enough to provide that kind of adaptability. But elaborating a Grand Unification Theory of Humor is of course not the goal of this paper. Our exploration of the Incongruity Theory will for the most part avoid justifying Incongruity's dominance and will instead focus on principles of this theory—or loose constellation of theories—and the debates within it that most concern this study of humor under Franco (and which have come up in our examination of other theories): humor as absurdity or nonsense versus humor as a sense-making mechanism; and humor as way to establish and solidify community.

---

[31] Beattie is often credited with the first application of "incongruous" as a descriptor of humor. However, Beattie himself quotes from Mark Akenside's didactic poem *The Pleasures of Imagination*, first published in 1844, in which Akenside associates ridicule with the "incongruous form" of pomp, praise, or beauty mixed with "sordid fashions, ... ignoble deeds, [or] foul deformity":

Where'er the power of ridicule displays / Her quaint-ey'd visage, some incongruous form, / Some stubborn dissonance of things combin'd / Strikes on the quick observer: whether Pomp, / Or Praise, or Beauty, mix their partial claim / Where sordid fashions, where ignoble deeds, / Where foul deformity, are wont to dwell; / Or whether these with violation loath'd, / invade resplendent Pomp's imperious mien, The charms of Beauty, or the boast of Praise. (Book III, lines 249-258)

Making (non)Sense of the World

As we saw in our discussion of the Superiority Theory, the idea that humor is nonsensical did not suddenly appear ex nihilo in the eighteenth century. Humor has been considered irrational since before Plato's time (see note 12 from this work), and Plato's treatment of laughter only intensified that perspective. His isolated references to laughter in *The Republic* equate it with the loss of rational self-control, and his over-arching argument in *Philebus*, which comprises the majority of his words on laughter and humor, places these squarely under the category of pleasure and thus in opposition to wisdom.

Despite Plato's prejudicing influence, humor's reputation was somewhat rehabilitated during the Enlightenment. Shaftesbury, for example, popularized the idea that ridicule is the test of truth. "Many a formal piece of sophistry holds proof under a severe brow, which would not pass under an easy one. 'Twas the saying of an ancient sage, 'That humour was the only test of gravity: and gravity of humour. For a subject that would not bear raillery, was suspicious; and a jest that would not bear a serious examination, was certainly false wit'" (22-23). Hutcheson extolled the virtues of ridicule as an antidote to the extreme opinions that are "aggravated and increased by the violence of our passions," stating that "the application of ridicule is the readiest way to bring down our high imaginations to a conformity to the real moment or importance of the affair. Ridicule gives our minds as it were a bend to the contrary side; so that upon reflection they may be more capable of settling in a just conformity to nature" (36-37). Laughter, rather than overpowering rational control, actually restrains our passions and facilitates wise, measured judgment. If we possess "a sense of the ridiculous" then we will not fall into "perfect veneration" of "an object [that] seems great in comparison of ourselves," nor will we "run into a panic, an unreasonable, impotent terror" when confronted by "an object [that] appears formidable" (38).

“Nothing,” concludes Hutcheson, “is so properly applied to the false grandeur, either of good or evil, as ridicule” (*ibid*.).

This connection between reason and humor is nonexistent if we subscribe to Immanuel Kant’s argument. His observations on laughter in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) primarily tend toward expanding on Cicero’s idea of a “disappointed expectation.” Though Kant hints at the idea of incongruity in his introduction to jokes—“the play begins with the thoughts which together occupy the body, so far as they admit of sensible expression” (47)—he does not examine the “assemblage” of contradictory concepts or images as Hutcheson and Beattie do. Focusing instead on “the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing,” Kant sees in laughter “a favorable influence upon health” (47) but no benefit to the understanding. “In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction)” (47). Though a witticism may provoke a “sudden transposition of the mind, now to one now to another standpoint in order to contemplate its object,” it does nothing to instruct (48). Kant classifies jokes, along with music, “as pleasant rather than beautiful” (47), agreeing with Epicurus that “all gratification, even that which is occasioned through concepts, excited by aesthetical ideas, is animal, i.e., bodily sensation” (49). Having thus restricted laughter to the category of pleasing gratification, Kant attributes all of the pleasure from laughter to the muscular and intestinal “movement beneficial to health; which alone, and not what precedes it in the mind, is the proper cause of the gratification in a thought that at bottom represents nothing” (49).[32]

---

[32] Kant’s model has much in common with Spencer’s. Both rely upon mental and bodily movements being “harmonically combined” (48), though for Kant the primary connection is between the mind and the organs or intestines; for Spencer it is the mind and the muscles. Kant’s central assertion that laughter “*is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing”* is also reminiscent of Spencer’s theory that laughter is produced when “nervous energy [...] is suddenly checked in its flow.” Both philosophers therefore base their formulation on a mental surprise connected to a physiological response.

Kant therefore situates the pleasure of laughter in the body rather than in any mental enjoyment of an incongruous “play of representations” that violates expectations (47). In so doing, he poses a question that would become fundamental to subsequent iterations of the Incongruity Theory: “how could a delusive expectation gratify?” (*ibid.*). We thus return to the problem first hinted at in ancient Greece, that laughter overpowers rational control, now expressed in terms of incongruity. As Morreall summarizes it, “how could anyone enjoy the violation of their conceptual patterns and expectations? Such enjoyment looks psychologically perverse or at least irrational” (*Comic Relief* 13).

Although humor scholars only began to address in earnest what Morreall calls “the Irrationality Objection” in the late twentieth century (*Comic Relief* 12-13), the nucleus of one answer to this problem comes from Artur Schopenhauer. In Book I of *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer discusses “the advantages and disadvantages of the application of reason,” arguing that “abstract rational knowledge [...] is by no means in such entire congruity with [ideas of perception] that it could everywhere take their place: indeed it never corresponds to them quite accurately” (51). In short, the laws and concepts by which we live much of our lives often fail to match the realities that we encounter. “This very incongruity of sensuous and abstract knowledge” is the cause of laughter, which “in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it” (51-52).

Max Aub provides an excellent example of this “incongruity [...] between the concept and reality” (53) in his *Manuscrito cuervo* when the crow Jacobo discusses the worldwide conflict between fascists and antifascists. “Desde el punto de vista empírico todo está claro,” writes Jacobo, “pero mi sed de saber, mi curiosidad me ha empujado [...] a averiguar en qué consiste tal manzana de la discordia” (97). Having based his study primarily on his observations and interactions with the prisoners of Camp Vernet in the French Pyrenees, Jacobo enumerates the various differences between fascists and antifascists, addressing (among other topics) racism and concentration camps:

> Los fascistas son racistas, y no permiten que los judíos se laven o coman con los arios.
>
> Los antifascistas no son racistas, y no permiten que los negros se laven o coman con los blancos.
>
> Los fascistas ponen estrellas amarillas en las mangas de los judíos.
>
> Los antifascistas no lo hacen, bástales con la cara del negro.
>
> Los fascistas ponen a los antifascistas en campos de concentración.
>
> Los antifascistas ponen a los antifascistas en campos de concentración. (97-98)

The incongruity between concept and reality is striking. Our reasonable conception of antifascists is that they oppose fascists in ideology and behavior—hence the prefix "anti." And yet, as Jacobo notes, the empirical data clearly contradict reason in this case.

Schopenhauer argues, contrary to Kant, that one can take pleasure from "a delusive expectation," because it "convict[s] his preconceived conception of error" (60). The expectation thus violated reminds him that only the fool "seeks to be guided by reason in everything; that is to say, he tries always to proceed from general concepts, rules, and maxims" (53). Humor rewards us for spotting incongruities, teaching us an important lesson about knowledge. "In every suddenly appearing conflict between what is perceived and what is thought, what is perceived is always unquestionably right [...]. This victory of knowledge of perception over thought affords us pleasure. For perception is the original kind of knowledge [...]" (60).

This Is Your Brain on Humor

In the last thirty years, many scholars have updated and refined Schopenhauer's side of the Irrationality Objection, making a strong case for humor as an essential tool in humanity's search for and creation of meaning. Some even argue that humor is the most common evidence of an evolutionary advance in human cognition. Hurley et al. assert that humor points to mental mechanisms that comprise evolution's answer to a fundamental problem in the way our brains work. Our brains—"anticipation-generators" (93)—have to process a lot of information to understand our experience and make a reasonable prediction of what is going to happen next, so they tend to activate only the information needed for our current situation. If we are crossing the border from a fascist country into an antifascist country, for example, our brains might activate the general information gleaned from previous experiences with fascism and assume the opposite for antifascism.

These collections of data are called "frames" in cognitive sciences and "scripts" in semantics (and "schema," "daemons," and "hermeneutic frameworks," in other fields[33]) and are loosely equivalent to "abstract knowledge" or "reason" as they are referenced by Schopenhauer, though the source code for frames almost always consists of what Schopenhauer calls "sensuous knowledge." Jonathan Miller, a comedic actor who is also a trained physician and scientist, has something like frames in mind when he talks about "rules of thumb which enable us to go on to 'automatic pilot'" and "categories" upon which we depend "in order to go about our everyday business" ("Jokes and Joking" 16).

---

[33] See Raskin's explanation of frames (*Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* 81). Each discipline has its own name for frames, and each is a true synonym in the sense that none of them mean exactly the same thing.

Many frames or scripts include information that our brains have had to supply by using best guesses. "[I]f some elements required by the frame are not seen at all—one rarely sees all the legs of a chair, and *never* all the sides of a box—the missing elements are supplied by *default*" (Minsky 182; emphasis in original). Our mind makes a best guess, for example, that the restaurant chair actually has a fourth leg that we cannot see and that it is therefore safe to sit on. Or, in the example from Max Aub's *Manuscrito cuervo,* our mind sees *fascistas* and *antifascistas* and fills out the frame by making assumptions as to opposing beliefs and behaviors between the two camps. Hurley et al. call such guesses or assumptions "committed beliefs" when we are willing to base further assumptions or actions upon them.

Here we arrive at the problem: what happens when our (usually unconscious) assumptions are incorrect, as many are bound to be? If an incorrect belief goes unchallenged, it can "generate a cascade of false beliefs resulting in a substantially faulty world representation," one that we are prepared to act upon (Inside Jokes 111). A faulty assumption can thus become a matter of life or death, as demonstrated by the defeated *rojos* who "escaped" across the border into "antifascist" France and ended up in a concentration camp.

Hurley et al., Minsky, Miller, and Morreall all argue that humor is the descendant of evolution's trick for averting "epistemic catastrophe" (*ibid.*). Humor is pleasurable to us because its sense-making and knowledge-revising function taps into a "reward system, a descendant or by-product of our reward-for-discovery system" (Hurley et al. 127). In this way, Hurley et al. argue, knowledge revision is analogous to reproduction via sexual intercourse, an activity that is necessary to the survival of the species but is so messy and incapacitating that no one would undertake the chore if it were not for the chemical payoff (79). And just as humans have figured out ways to take advantage of the reward system behind reproduction—humans such as advertisers and pornographers, for example (63)—we have also figured out "ever more potent and effective stimuli to obtain the reward [for discovery]" (127). The evolution of our culture has taken us from discovery to primitive jokes and comedies to the point where we have billions of humorists—many amateurs, but a few professionals like Mihura and Gila and Max Aub—who are experts at manipulating the clash of competing beliefs within mental spaces, and at evoking those clashes in others (*Comic Relief* 44-45).

Codes and Communities

Humor studies tend to focus on the process by which these "experts" create humor, but as with any model of communication, successful transmission depends upon what goes on inside the audience's brain. The Encryption Theory[34] is one of the few that considers the importance of sociality in humor and the audience's or receptor's role in this exchange. This theory has powerful implications for the social functions of humor, so we will briefly summarize the theory before exploring its applications to humor in Spain under Franco.

Encryption denotes a message broadcast publicly that contains a second, hidden or overlapping message whose comprehension (decryption) depends on the hearer possessing the key to the code. In the case of humor, when a speaker jokes or makes some comment intended to be humorous, the joke is often disguised as nonsense or as "bona-fide communication"[35] with a second meaning. This explains why so much of informal humor consists of coded messages or

---

[34] The Encryption Theory of Humor was first developed by Thomas Flamson and Gregory Bryant, a UC Davis anthropologist and a UCLA cognitive scientist, respectively, in their 2008 article "The encryption theory of humor: A knowledge-based mechanism of honest signaling" in the *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*. Subsequent articles have been the product of collaboration with the UCLA biological anthropologist H. Clark Barrett. See Flamson, Bryant, and Barrett, "Prosody in Spontaneous Humor" (2013); and Flamson and Bryant "Signals of humor: Encryption and laughter in social interaction" (2013).

[35] This is the the flip-side of Raskin's term—"non-bona-fide communication"—for language that does not mean what it says, e.g., lies, irony, play, and joking (*Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* 101-103).

"inside jokes." For instance, if I hear a group of people discussing Spain's economic crisis, I might comment that "las familias españolas sencillamente tendrán que reducir gastos, y podrían comenzar siguiendo la dieta de austeridad recomendada por la Merkel: ajo y agua." Spoken with a straight face, my statement might be taken as sincere or "bona-fide" communication (to use Victor Raskin's term). What Flamson and Barrett (2008) call the "surface content" of the joke—an extremely basic and unpleasant diet consisting of garlic and water—makes lexical and semantic sense, though if I use the right intonation it might be received as hyperbole-based humor. But if I deliver the joke with a straight face, no one would laugh unless they possess the "key" to the code: the hidden, shared cultural knowledge that *ajo y agua* is a euphemism for the vulgar phrase *a joderse y aguantarse*. As Flamson and Barrett put it, "humorous utterances and acts are encrypted in the sense that what makes the joke funny is not merely its surface content, but a relationship between the surface content and one or more unstated implicatures which are known by both the sender and the receiver" (261).

Because genuine laughter[36] is subconsciously triggered and thus involuntary,[37] anyone who laughed at my dead-pan delivery of *ajo y agua* would be sending an "honest signal" that reveals shared cultural knowledge and much more. A laughing response to my joke could indicate that the laugher also shares a baseline presuppositions about the topic of the "bona-fide" message (that *la Merkel* would suggest such a draconian diet). Additionally, it would signal shared attitudes about euphemistic references to vulgarity, a shared disposition to see humor in the matter of financial crises, and a similarly devious (or puerile) mind that collects euphemisms like *ajo y agua* and finds them funny. In short, the combination of my encrypted message—the joke—and the audience's genuine response—laughter—has the power to establish like-mindedness and community.[38] Conversely, anyone who does not possess the encryption key is automatically excluded from this spontaneously-formed community.

---

[36] Called "Duchenne laughter" in the sciences, after Guillaume Duchenne, the French neurologist who first observed the physiological differences between false or neurotic laughter, which does not engage the muscles around the eyes, and genuine laughter, which causes those muscles to contract. See Keltner and Bonanno.

[37] See Provine (pp. 16, 49-53).

The application of the Encryption Theory to political humor is clear. The things and people we laugh *at*, and the people we laugh *with*, indicate the community that we belong to. Consider, for example, a scene often repeated during programs that mix news reporting with humor (*The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, etc.). The host sets up and presents a clip of President Trump or one of his associates making some statement or other, and before the clip ends, before the host even has a chance to comment, the audience is already laughing. Why? Because the audience shares "beliefs, attitudes, and goals" (Flamson and Bryant 51). The live, in-studio audience has often made extensive plans (travel, accommodations, etc.) with the (unspoken) shared goal of laughing at the typical targets of such shows, and they share (unspoken) political beliefs and attitudes that presuppose a common political adversary. And so when President Trump misspells a tweeted word or mangles a turn of phrase or pauses at an unexpected point in his sentence (like a bad Christopher Walken impersonator), the audience laughs.

---

[38] One of the evolutionary implications of the Encryption theory is that humor creates a short-cut to discovering the kind of "fitness" or compatibility between individuals that predicts success in mating or other social relationships. "Humor works, in a sense, as a mindreading spot-check, 'pinging' various minds in the environment and discovering those which are most compatible" (Flamson and Barrett 266). "Mindreading" is an anthropological term that denotes "the ability to create an accurate representation of another's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and goals" (Flamson and Bryant 51). In Chapter 4 this concept is discussed as "empathic accuracy," and, as we will see, it is an ability essential both to the humorist and the translator.

Contrast this with those present at Trump's rallies or Rose Garden announcements, audiences who attend in order to cheer rather than jeer. These audiences share unspoken beliefs, attitudes, and goals that essentially oppose those of the comedy show audiences. They do not laugh where the *Daily Show* audiences laugh. For example, on the *Daily Show* episode "Al Franken" (aired June 1, 2017), host Trevor Noah presents a news montage that ends with Trump making the following proclamation: "The United States will withdraw [pause for applause] from the Paris [pause for applause] Climate Accords [pause for applause and shouts of approval] ... thank you...." And before host Trevor Noah even begins to deliver his joking response, the studio audience laughs. Later in the broadcast, Noah again delivers a perfectly serious set-up[39] for a montage of Trump's news conference:

> The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement—They went wild! They were so happy—for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America—which we all love—at a very, very big economic disadvantage. [cut] At what point do they start laughing at us as a country? [cut] We don't want other leaders and other countries laughing at us anymore, and they won't be.

On C-SPAN's uncut broadcast of the announcement, the live audience present at the White House rose garden sits silently through Trump's guarantee that other countries will no longer laugh at the US, then applaud wildly after his next sentence: "I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris" ("Thurs 8 pm"). The *Daily Show* audience, predictably, interrupts Trump's no-laugh guarantee by laughing at him.

---

[39] "I think this had less to do with jobs and America's economy and more to do with how Trump thinks this makes him look to the rest of the world" ("Al Franken" episode, June 1, 2017).

Laughter establishes like-mindedness and confirms a previously-tacit compatibility in cultural knowledge, presuppositions, attitudes, and goals. The laughter of the live *Daily Show* audience, and the TV and Web audiences, grants admission into the community formed by the comedian Noah and his writers. Those who applaud Trump's statements, rather than laughing at them, are excluded from this community.

In our discussion of social connections we must take care not to attribute causality to humor. The like-mindedness—or lack thereof—pre-exists the joke. Encrypted humor merely makes the sameness or difference manifest, though it normally only registers subconsciously. The Encryption Theory partially validates Plato's insistence that humor is antisocial, while at the same time it corroborates Freud's assertion that "laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity." Humor is thus just as likely to create division as it is to establish a social connection. It "enhances social relations" among some and simultaneously excludes others. The question remains as to whether Freud was correct when he claimed that humor can forge compatibility where it previously did not exist—using 'forge' both in the sense of creating a relationship and of producing an imitation for the purpose of deception. He writes that joking can "bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us," but the joke can sweep our argument's logical fallacies under the rug, persuading the hearer "without any very close investigation, just as on other occasions we ourselves have often been bribed by an innocent joke into overestimating the substance of a statement expressed jokingly" (123).

As we will see in the next three chapters, it can be argued that *La Codorniz* and Miguel Gila's war monologues produce all of the social effects of humor that we have discussed in this review of the philosophy of humor. Their absurdities can provide relief and escape from the status quo, or they can be interpreted as a concealed critique of those in power. They are characterized as nonsensical *disparate* on one side and as sense-making *higiene mental* on the other. The abstract humor of *La Codorniz* divides Spain into critics and admirers and yet is credited with preventing the disintegration of Spanish society (as we will show in Chapter 2). And Gila's fantastical wars establish a broad common ground between the Civil War's winners and losers but are enshrined as a loser's subversive attack against the biggest winner of all (discussed in Chapter 3).

Chapter 2: *La Codorniz*—Popular Humor Playing for Keeps

> *Opino que es un exponente de la España de su tiempo, al punto de creer que si algún historiador se propusiera diferenciar esta época con nombre representativo, podría llamarla muy exactamente "Era de* La Codorniz.*"*
>
> —Gabriel Maura y Gamazo, duque de Maura (qtd. in *Un humorista* 26)

On a recent episode of *Saturday Night Live,* Jessica Chastain plays the host of a game show called "What Even Matters Anymore?" The intentionally foggy premise of the game show is that Chastain's character, Veronica Elders, reads off something that President Donald Trump has recently said or done and then the three contestants[1] (played by *SNL* veterans Cecily Strong, Kate McKinnon, and Keenan Thompson) try to guess whether the president's words or actions will have any effect on his support base—effectively, "does it even matter anymore?" Asked whether it matters that Trump allegedly referred to African nations as "poo-poo holes" or that he allegedly had an affair with a porn star and paid her to keep quiet, the contestants reliably answer that these things would necessarily have some kind of consequence for the president. Chastain's host obviously disagrees—"because what even matters anymore?"—and grows increasingly despondent with each round, at one point downing half a bottle of wine while the contestants write their best guess at something that Trump could do that *would* sway his base.

When it becomes clear that Chastain is about to break down, McKinnon's unnamed character addresses her by her real name: "Jessica, you don't have to do this." After this decidedly meta-theatrical turn, the cast members essentially stage an intervention on behalf of the actress Jessica Chastain. Says Strong, "Jessica, we know you're upset about the way our country's going, but you can't just build a whole game-show set and make us pretend to be contestants." The sketch ends when the actress-character Chastain crosses back over the blurred boundary to her Veronica Elders character and pleads for the "contestants" to give her a much-needed hug.

---

[1] The introduction of the contestants makes it immediately obvious that the game-show premise is contrived. Chastain's host pays mere lip-service to the standard game show structure. "First, let's meet our contestants," says Chastain in her best announcer voice, at which point the three contestants wave and say "Hi," and the host wraps it up: "Great. First question..." The artificiality of the structure is driven home when the host refers to Thompson's character as Greg and he replies "Actually, it's Bernard" but she ignores him and moves on.

Although the sketch had mixed success as comedy, it demonstrates the importance of the safety/play principle of humor and a problem inherent in political humor. As jokes or comedies approach subjects that really matter to the audience, they can run the risk of evoking the negative emotions associated with the topic, which usually precludes the possibility of laughter. Popular political humor walks a narrow line between aggression against politics and politicians and safety, or between play and seriousness. It flirts with the boundaries between play and seriousness, between non-bona-fide communication and cooperative communication. In this chapter we will explore how the influential humor publication *La Codorniz* negotiated this space between a fantasy world and the very serious realities of postwar Spain. As we will see, although the magazine evolved during its 37-year run to the point where it crossed the boundary into the absurdities of Spain's political and social reality, it began at the opposite extreme: that of the *arte deshumanizado* of Spain's avant-garde.

Poniendo el Huevo: From Spain's Avant-Garde to Postwar Absurdity

Upon becoming a member of the Real Academia in 1983, the playwright and historian José López Rubio gave a talk on the lives of "La otra Generación del 27." The term had been coined by Pedro Laín Entralgo (then director of the Real Academia), whom López Rubio quoted in his speech: “Hay una Generación del 27, la de los poetas, y otra Generación del 27, la de los ‘renovadores’—los creadores más bien—del humor contemporáneo” (López Rubio 8). Since López Rubio’s talk, scholars have studied and written extensively on the “Other” Generation, which according to Laín Entralgo was comprised of López Rubio, Miguel Mihura, Edgar Neville, Enrique Jardiel Poncela, and “Tono” (Antonio de Lara Gavilán) (*ibid.*; “Los del 27”). Studies tend to foreground the avant-garde bloodline of “La Otra Generación” via their progenitor Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Many focus on the plays written (sometimes in collaboration) by these five champions of “el humor nuevo español.” Others take a slightly more populist approach, tracing the participation of most or all of the five humorists in various magazines, among them *Buen Humor* (1921-31), *Gutiérrez* (1927-34), *La Ametralladora* (1937-39), and *La Codorniz* (1941-1978). Scholars who examine *La Codorniz* through this lens seemingly attempt to raise the status of the humor magazine from mere pulp and popular culture to philosophically-dense, forward-thinking art. Given the prejudice against humor as “serious scholarship,” it is easy to see the appeal of focusing on avant-garde credentials when studying the Other Generation of 27. Connecting popular Spanish humor to the poetic genius of García Lorca and Cernuda is by now a well-worn method (see, for example, books by Catalá-Carrasco 2015; González-Grano de Oro 2004, 2005; Llera 2003; and Burguera and Fortuño 1998).

Unfortunately, this tack tends to prioritize the first 3 years—June 1941 to June 1944, when Miguel Mihura was running the magazine—and to devalue the subsequent 33 years under the direction of Álvaro de Laiglesia. The result is that Laiglesia’s *Codorniz* is often treated as a poorly-executed sequel to Mihura’s “original.” For this reason, many critics refer to “las *Codornices*” when discussing the different iterations under different directors (at least four in the period of 1977-78, though the short-lived attempts at reanimation receive much less critical interest). González-Grano de Oro, for example, makes this bifurcation explicit in the title of his 2004 book, *La "Otra" Generación del 27: El "Humor Nuevo" español y "La Codorniz" primera*. This is not to say that Mihura and Laiglesia did not differ in their humor philosophies nor that *La Codorniz* before and after Mihura's departure did not reflect those differences. Laiglesia even published a debate between himself and his mentor regarding the purpose and nature of humor, in successive issues of *La Codorniz* in December 1946.[2] The point, however, is that critics too often overlook or discount Laiglesia's *Codorniz* because it deviates from the "humor nuevo" that Mihura's cohort had been practicing for decades, a humor that in many ways reached its apex in that "first" *Codorniz*. What most scholars seem not to consider is that, just as the Other Generation of 27 made the leap to a re-conceptualized and renewed brand of humor, *La Codorniz* of Álvaro de Laiglesia took the next logical—if less intellectually prestigious—step in the evolution of Spanish humor.

The Mihura-Laiglesia transition is of great interest to this study. The arguments framed by Laiglesia and Mihura in their published debate, as well as in the works published under their direction, reflect the arguments for and against humor as an agent of political change. Is humor nothing more than nonsense, play for play's sake, a palliative that makes life more bearable but that does not affect the rest of life (the serious parts)? Or is humor a tool, a weapon, and a sense-making device? To examine these competing philosophies and their problems, we will first trace the aforementioned pedigree of *La Codorniz* from the historical avant-garde to the magazine's founding by the Other Generation, higlighting the philosophies that contribute to Miguel

---

[2] Diego Galán reproduces the debate in the notes to his interview with Miguel Gila in *Reírse en España* (73-77). The two initial letters (Mihura's first and Laiglesia's reply) are also republished in *La Codorniz: Antología*, along with a letter from Edgar Neville supporting Mihura, though Neville employs a notably softer irony than either of the primary debaters (no pagination; in the third and fourth sections, 1944-46 and 47-49).

Mihura's definition of "humor codornicesca."[3] Second, keeping *La Codorniz's* avant-garde foundation in view, we will read samples of textual and graphic humor from before and after the Mihura-Laiglesia transition. In these readings we will pay particular attention to the Mihura-Laiglesia polemic and the aforementioned philosophical debates surrounding humor: nonsense versus sense-making; community-building versus hostility; a safe space for play versus a weapon against power.

Putting the ismo in Humorismo

The much-invoked avant-garde pedigree of *La Codorniz* begins with the Other Generation's paterfamilias, Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Mihura, Tono, Neville, Jardiel, and López Rubio came under the spell of Ramón through their interactions at humor magazines like *Buen Humor* and *Gutiérrez,* as well as occasional attendance at his *tertulia* at the Café Pombo. As a participating chronicler and prophet of the avant-garde's various *ismos*, Gómez de la Serna brought the revisionist fervor of "el arte nuevo" to *el humorismo*, though he considered the latter to be the essence of the former. He published what was essentially the first and most influential manifesto for Spanish humor, "Gravedad e importancia del humorismo," in *Revista de Occidente* in 1928 and subsequently included it (slightly expanded) in his *Ismos* (1931) under "Humorismo." His philosophy of humor had a profound effect on the Other Generation. As Mihura wrote in his "Periodismo de humor" entry for the *Enciclopedia de periodismo* (1966), "Ramón, como mago, nos colocó en las narices las gafas del cine en relieve y nos hizo ver las cosas y los hombres de un modo distinto a como los veíamos anteriormente" ("Periodismo de humor" 439). The central points of Ramón's definition of *humorismo* form the center of gravity for the philosophies of humor articulated by Mihura and his colleagues and thus formulated an ideal that the early *Codorniz* strived to achieve.

---

[3] For a more detailed summary of Spanish philosophies of humor in the first half of the twentieth century, see José Antonio Llera's article "Poéticas del humor: desde el novecentismo hasta la época contemporánea," and Evaristo Acevedo's book *Teoría e interpretación del humor español* (1966).

To be clear, *el humorismo* is by no means the Spanish-language equivalent of humor as discussed thus far in this study. The *ismo* is significant. It distinguishes "el humor nuevo español" from humor in general in the same way that cubism differs from visual arts in general. Most of the philosophers and scholars discussed in Chapter 1 attempt to form an all-inclusive definition of humor—one that works for every situation that elicits laughter. But when Gómez de la Serna, Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, and the expanded ranks of La Otra Generación del 27 articulate the characteristics of *el humorismo*, they often do so by discounting the majority of the things that people laugh at.

In his essay on humor, Ramón lists the defining—and confining—characteristics of humorism, which he considers "la actitud más cierta ante la efimeridad de la vida" and "el deber racional más indispensable" (49). *Humorismo* walks a tightrope between tragedy and comedy; it rejects common comedic devices and clichéd characters and situations; and it removes itself from quotidian human experience.

First, as a reaction to "la efimeridad de la vida," *el humorismo* expresses a tragic point of view humorously. Ramón writes that the Spanish brand of humor "aclara precisamente lo que de verdadero hay alrededor de ese juego [literario de distribuciones y contrastes], el anhelo, el descontento y el vacío que hay en la vida, la limpia desesperación de reír, que es en lo que más vida adquiere la inteligencia desengañada, es decir, sin engaños, en el máximum de su refocilamiento" (53). He thus highlights the pessimistic, disillusioned center of *el humorismo*: "inteligencia desengañada," "la limpia desesperación de reír," "el descontento y el vacío que hay en la vida." The man who comprehends and feels life in this way—most often "the man," because Gómez de la Serna attests that "solo una mujer muy excepcional puede comprender a los humoristas" (59)—is melancholic at his core, "un ser enlutado por dentro que hace sufrir la alegría" (65). In the humorist "se mezclan el excéntrico, el payaso y el hombre triste, que los contempla a los dos" (58). The *hombre triste* acts almost like a Superego, filtering eccentricities and pratfalls through his sadness, and vice-versa—"reír para avasallar el llorar" (74). The humorist, according to Ramón, is the combination of Walpole's thinking man and feeling man: "'El mundo—ha dicho Horacio Walpole—es [...] una comedia para el hombre que piensa y una tragedia para el hombre que siente.' El humorista reúne a esos dos hombres en uno solo" (71). This hybrid being, thinker and feeler, produces a kind of humor that does not disguise the sadness of life, opposing the comedic tendency to ignore emotion. "Si la risa de lo cómico supone una ausencia de la emoción, el humor hace que la emoción no se disuelva en lo cómico" (65).

The extremes of emotion accompany death, and behind Spanish humor, as Gómez de la Serna defines it, death is always present. *El humorismo* is the *danza macabra,* "ese baile cómico y macabro que es la venganza contra reyes, obispos y buhoneros" (74). Again, a sense of the "efimeridad de la vida" contributes to the humorous attitude when faced with such a reality.

> El humorismo español está dedicado a pasar el trago de la muerte, y de paso para atravesar mejor el trago de la vida. No es para hacer gracias, ni es un juego de enredos.
>
> Es para transitar entre el hambre y la desgracia. Así se aclaran las almas, y no se ponen sobre ellas pesados panteones de trascendencia.
>
> El mayor reactivo de la vida, lo que la ataca en lo entrañable es este contraste entre la risa y el llanto, entre la vida y la muerte. (73)

Writing in the late 20s, Gómez de la Serna could not have known how intimately his countrymen would come to know the path between "el hambre y la desgracia" during the long postwar recovery of the 40s and 50s, or even during the global economic crisis after 1929. But "el trago de la vida" is a universal constant, and Spanish humor seeks to get through it as best possible, all the while knowing that "el trago de la muerte" awaits. For this reason, Ramón insists that the humorist must maintain the right balance. "El éxito del humorismo está en que no brote ni de lo muy cómico ni de lo muy fúnebre, que se mueva en ese trozo de calle que va del teatro a la funeraria" (74). The two locations mark the extremes of humor, places it may approach but never enter.

A tragicomic view of death and the ephemerality of life allows the Ramonian humorist to see "el doble de toda cosa" (51): the flip-side, under-side, or inverse of life. "El humor es ver por dónde cojea todo, por dónde es efímero y convencional, de qué manera cae en la nada antes de caer, de qué modo está ligado con lo absurdo, aunque no lo crea, cómo puede ser otra cosa o ser de otra manera, aunque esté muy pagado de cómo es" (52). As a consequence of its "comprensión elevada" (50), Ramón's *humorismo* rejects the clichéd comedic tropes that so many equate with humor: "el chiste, que es el humorismo que se arrastra; el retruécano, que es una cosa mecánica; la tomadura de pelo, que es una cosa de barrio bajo; el choteo, que es una cosa chulesco-matónica, y la burla, que no cree en lo que dice y que cuenta con lo ridículo, impiedad de que carece el humorismo" (61). Writing on humor at a moment of great movements and changes in literature and art, "este momento de desobediencia radical para las abstracciones literarias" (57), it only makes sense that Ramón would conceptualize a kind of humor that breaks from popular definitions and tendencies. In 1920s Spain, humor reaches a moment of "desobediencia radical," of revolution against humor itself. As with the rest of the avant-garde *ismos*, Spain's *humorismo* embraces the ideal of rebellion and breaking tradition.[4]

Ramón's *humorismo* rebels against satire as limiting and ultimately futile. "Lo satírico es una 'crítica reflexiva y didáctica' sin el lado de libre inspiración que hay en lo humorístico" (61). According to Gómez de la Serna, satire criticizes the status quo and therefore cannot escape it, whereas *el humor puro* demonstrates its contingency by imagining its inverse. Designated by Ramón as "una crítica rigurosa que no merece la vida," satire executes "una misión moralizadora" and thus contains "un elemento moral impertinente" (61). It is, at its best, "la oposición del poeta a la realidad," but true humor supplants the artist with its own reality: "en el humorismo se hace que la realidad haga la oposición a la misma realidad y es, por decirlo así, la contienda de dos realidades, una supuesta y otra cotidiana" (62). By presenting "el doble de toda cosa" and signaling "por dónde cojea todo, por dónde es efímero y convencional," the humorist walks a fine line between pointing out the fallacies of life and attempting to correct them. "No se propone el humorismo corregir o enseñar, pues tiene ese dejo de amargura del que cree que todo es un poco inútil" (50-51). Ramonian humor thus harbors no pretensions to transcendence. "El humorismo acaba en sí mismo, se completa en sus propios cuadros, se satisface en sus escenas" (62).

Humor, as Gómez de la Serna so specifically prescribes and defines it, exhibits several of the tendencies of "el arte nuevo" in José Ortega y Gasset's landmark essay *La deshumanización del arte* (1925). The correlation is particularly strong when it comes to the separation of life from art (and humor). As we have seen in our analysis of *El humorismo,* Ramón's humor "[hace] que la obra de arte (or humor) no sea sino obra de arte (or humor)"—number three on Ortega's list of tendencies of "el arte nuevo." It considers art (or humor) as "juego y nada más" (number four). The result is that humor, like art, has become "una cosa sin trascendencia" (number seven) (Ortega 14).

---

[4] For early samples of the avant-garde's rebellious spirit, see Vicente Huidobro's 1914 essays "Yo," "El Futurismo," "Non serviam," and "El arte del sugerimiento," in Nelson Osorio's *Manifiestos, proclamas y polémicas de la vanguardia literaria hispanoamericana* (1988). For an ironic look at the avant-garde's continuation of tradition through rebellion, see Octavio Paz's "La tradición de la ruptura" in *Los hijos del limo* (1974).

Using Ortega's essay on art to examine Ramón's humor is by no means a forced analogy. Besides the fact that Ortega himself uses Gómez de la Serna's work as an example of *infrarrealismo* in avant-garde use of metaphor (24), he also dedicates a substantial section of his essay to demonstrating that humor is the quintessence of "el arte nuevo." Ortega writes that "la nueva inspiración es siempre, indefectiblemente, cómica. Toda ella suena en esa sola cuerda y tono. La comicidad será más o menos violenta y correrá desde la franca clownería hasta el leve guiño irónico, pero no falta nunca" (29). Three years after Ortega's essay, Ramón notes that at moments of change or "transición" between old and new, humor is the ideal that bridges the fissure between "lo que va a desaparecer y ya está desaparecido" and "lo que aparecerá" (55). Perhaps for that reason, he declares that "[t]oda obra tiene que estar ya descalabrada por el humor, calada por el humor, con sospechas de humorística; y si no, está herido de muerte, de inercia, de disolución cancerosa" (56). Gómez de la Serna warns that literature that has no humor "tendrá un defecto de tiesura, un defecto declamatorio que la hará no curada y sólo cuadro episódico del escenario del mundo, monstruosidad en una sola dirección, aislación de un crimen sobre el conjunto del vivir" (57). Ortega is careful to point out that avant-garde art (normally) is not humorous in its content but in its attitude towards itself, in which "el arte mismo se hace broma. Buscar [...] la ficción como tal ficción es propósito que no puede tenerse sin un estado de alma jovial. Se va al arte precisamente porque se le reconoce como farsa" (Ortega 29). Without this sense of play, art and literature exhibit the stiffness and inertia that Ramón decries above.

What Ortega points to as "la burla de sí mismo" (29) is what Ramón sees as a return to the truth behind all art: "En este momento de desobediencia radical para las abstracciones literarias, *todo se reintegra a su fondo humorístico*, y por eso se descompone el arte y la literatura de escuela y se habla de crisis, cuando sólo se trata de la disolución del arte concebido en grandes pedruscos" (57, emphasis mine).

Although Ortega y Gasset does not mention them in his essay, Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías* embody many of the central principles of *La deshumanzación del arte* as well as those of Ramón's *El humorismo*. The latter gives the formula *humor + metáfora = greguería*, and the metaphors that he creates demonstrate the qualities that Ortega finds so fascinating. Ramón's *greguerías* "consiste[n] en suplantar una cosa por otra, no tanto por afán de llegar a esta como por el empeño de rehuir aquella" (Ortega 23). When Gómez de la Serna writes "Golondrina: bigotes postizos del aire" (*Greguerías* 231), the point is not to redefine swallows, much less moustaches. The *greguería* does not seek to arrive at an epiphany regarding facial hair or birds so much as to pull away from the commonplace or "humanized" reality of both objects. What really matters is the idea, the juxtaposition or "incongruity" of swallows and moustaches. Ramón follows his own prescription in *Humorismo*, "echarlo todo en el mortero del mundo, [...] devolvérselo todo al cosmos un poco disociado, macerado por la paradoja, confuso, patas arriba. Cuantos más confunda el humorismo los elementos del mundo, mejor va" (50). In Ortega's terms, the play of ideas stylizes both images: "estilizar es deformar lo real, desrealizar. Estilización implica deshumanización" (19). With one five-word analogy, Ramón defamiliarizes or dehumanizes two images that are an integral part of the "lived" or "humanized reality" ("la realidad vivida") of Spain (particularly of Ramón's Madrid).[5]

---

[5] Various critics besides Ortega y Gasset have pointed to the dehumanizing—or alienating (Brecht) or defamiliarizing (Russian formalism)—function of art and literature. For a very brief summary, see David Gorman's

It would not be difficult to demonstrate with individual *greguerías* every point made by Ramón and Ortega in *Humorismo* and *La deshumanización del arte*, respectively. Examples abound of a tragicomic sense of "la efimeridad de la vida": "El ruido del reloj es que os está cavando la fosa" (274); "Las flores sobre la tumba comprenden la muerte, porque ellas, cortadas y abandonadas, se sienten también muertas" (232). Many address "el trago de la vida": "El hambre del hambriento no tiene hache. ¡Con filigranas al *ambre* verdadera! El *ambre*, si es verdadera *ambre*, se ha comido la hache" (247). As a literary genre *greguerías* satirize nothing (with the possible exception of women as stereotyped by Ramón). They either avoid pathos and *lo cursi* in description or, more likely, dismantle such clichéd images. And they do not seek buffoonish laughter, but rather embody Ramón's interpretation of Seneca: "Nuestro Séneca ha dicho 'ríete, pero sin carcajada,' y con eso corregía ya la malicia de lo cómico. Nosotros iremos más lejos en la prescripción, que atañe directamente al humorismo y deja atrás la ironía: 'Ríete, pero sin sonreír siquiera'" (65-66).

This, then, is the ambitious, highbrow brand of humor that Ramón taught to López Rubio, Jardiel Poncela, Neville, "Tono," and Mihura. *Humorismo* acknowledges "el desengaño" and tragedy without necessarily making them its subject matter. It breaks from the easy, clichéd comedic tropes of the buffoon, seeking instead to deconstruct them along with every unexamined idiom and convention of Spanish culture. And it conscientiously strives to distance and separate itself from human experience, searching for the non-transcendence of "art for art's sake." It is an ideal whose purity was rarely achieved, whether by the Other Generation or by Ramón's

---

"Russian Formalism" in David H. Richter's *A Companion to Literary Theory*. For Brecht's highly applicable statements on alienation, see *Brecht on theater* (pages 71, 91, 95-96, among others).

contemporaries; yet its principles, individually or as a whole, underlie their works of humor and structure the articulations of their own philosophies of humor.

Acolytes of La Sagrada Cripta del Pombo

Ramón's disciples were by no means monolithic in their discipleship,[6] but the concept of *reírse sin sonreír* becomes a central pillar of "el humor nuevo" as practiced by *La Codorniz*'s founders and early collaborators. As we will see in our exploration of Mihura's statements on humor, the award-winning playwright and founding editor of *La Codorniz* bases his concept of *humorismo* and *humoristas* so solidly on Ramón's definition that he quotes him extensively. Other prominent humorists of mid-century Spain follow suit.

Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, a contributor to the early *Codorniz* and one of the early "maestros" who taught the Other Generation in the Ramonian School of Word-craft and Whimsy, offers an analogous inverse of *reírse sin sonreír* in his 1945 induction speech at the Real Academia: "la sonrisa de una desilusión" (10). Fernández argues that the universal muse of all literature is "el descontento," "la disconformidad," and the concomitant desire to combat mistaken ideas. The three possible expressions of such a desire are rage, sadness, and "la burla" (10-14). Humor, says Fernández, lies on the far side of rage and sadness. "En el fondo no hay nada más serio que el humor, porque puede decirse de él que está ya de vuelta de la violencia y de la tristeza" (15). (Again, the inverse analogue of Ramon's tripartite humorist, guided by the internal "hombre triste" who contemplates "el eccéntrico" and "el payaso.") According to Fernández, humor "tiene la elegancia de no gritar nunca, y también la de no prorrumpir en ayes.

---

[6] For a more in-depth analysis of the discrepancies between individual practices, see Llera's "Poéticas del humor" (466-69).

Pone siempre un velo ante su dolor. Miráis sus ojos, y están húmedos, pero mientras, sonríen sus labios" (15).

Having given up on rage and sadness as effective vehicles for their ideas, the discontented adopt humor as "una posición ante la vida" (10)—what Ramón had called "una manera de comportarse" (54), "un género de vida, o mejor dicho, [...] una actitud frente a la vida" (51), and, again, "[la] actitud más cierta ante la efimeridad de la vida" (49). This position—this posture, this code of behavior, this attitude—expresses itself with tenderness and understanding: "si no es tierno ni es comprensivo, no es humor," attests Fernández Flórez (15). Compare to Taine's statement, cited by Ramón in *Humorismo*, that humor uses contrast, parody and paradox to arrive at "una risa triste o ironía sublime que conserva un dejo cariñoso o simpático hacia lo mismo que se zahiere y censura" (67). Hence Fernández's assertion that, given all of the insubstantial definitions essayed before his 1945 speech, the image that hits closest to the mark in defining humor may be "la que lo compara a la sonrisa de una desilusión" (10). Wenceslao Fernández Flórez's disappointed smile is the postwar refraction of Ramón's unsmiling laugh of 1928.

Fernández Flórez's speech has left a lasting impression on his compatriots' conceptualization on Spanish humor, as demonstrated by the inaugural address for the 2016 XI Seminario Internacional de Lengua y Periodismo, in which Queen Letizia quoted Fernández extensively.[7] That said, his talk also encapsulates the problems with *el humor nuevo español* as its practicers define it. As we will see in our examination of the early *Codorniz*, when humor reacts to life—as "una posición ante el trago de la vida" (to paraphrase Fernández and Ramón)—

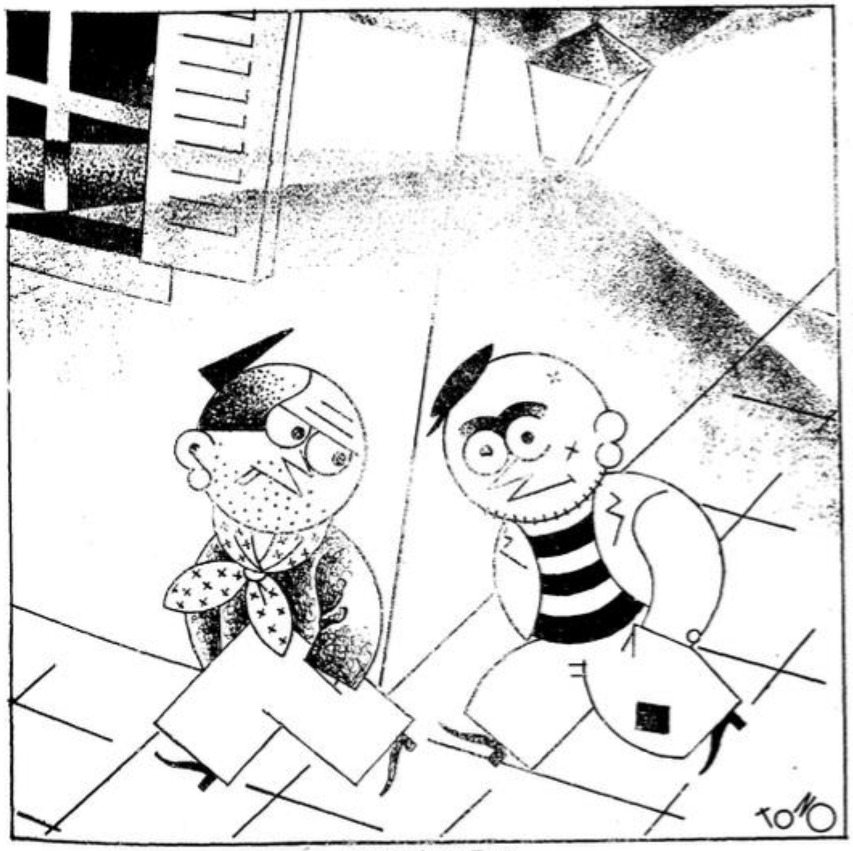
---

[7] See https://www.fundeu.es/san-millan-2016/#noticias and http://www.casareal.es/ES/Actividades/Paginas/actividades_actividades_detalle.aspx?data=12776

it is difficult to keep it completely separate from life. If loftier, ethereal birds that glide for days must occasionally return to the Earth, it should come as no surprise that the very-much grounded *codorniz* should do the same.

At this point, though, our task is to follow the thread of "el humor nuevo" by examining its pre-Civil War manifestations. The many issues of *Buen Humor* and *Gutiérrez* make high quality samples easy to find. As publications that span Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and the early years of the Second Republic, both magazines are valuable artefacts deserving of their own in-depth treatment. Here, however, we will limit ourselves to studying one of the many exemplary issues of *Gutiérrez* that feature a majority of the Other Generation.

The second issue of *Gutiérrez* (May 14, 1927) provides several examples of an *humor nuevo* already well established among four of the titular members of the Other Generation: José López Rubio, Édgar Neville, Mihura, and Tono. In the latter's *viñeta* on page 5, titled "Apaches" (i.e., "Big-City Thieves"), two men converse while turning a corner on foot. "Ahora me he dedicado a la vida 'honrá' y trabajo en una fábrica de relojes," says the first. "A verlos," responds the second. The joke itself is perhaps only remarkable in that it leans towards Ramonian humor in its pessimism and its subversion of the criminal-going-straight trope. The visual style, however, recalls the avant-garde roots and aspirations of Tono's generation. Compared to those of his *Codorniz* years, the drawing shows a greater art deco influence: a flattened, geometric style very much in keeping with *Gutiérrez*. (See, for example, the drawing signed by "Gutiérrez (hijo)" on page 14 of the same issue, an arguing couple whose torsos and heads are perfect circles, like two-tier snowmen.) Tono's thieves are all circles and angles: circular heads, eyeballs and pupils; ears made of incongruous circles that resemble incomplete 8s; circular torsos atop legs made up of two rectangles merged perpendicularly; a sideways, acute *W* suggests a nose and upper lip below the circular eyeballs. Despite the slide-rule perfection of the perspective, the drawing is visually flat. Tono does not shade the circles into spheres, the vanishing points of the street corner's lines are so far off the page as to lose the effect, and the angle of the perspective is so steep that the figures look as though they are going to slide off the corner and out of the bottom of the frame. The drawing is conspicuously a two-dimensional composition of geometrical shapes, with no attempt at mimesis. The *viñeta* thus combines a somewhat anti-pathetic joke and strongly dehumanized visuals to distance itself from Ortega's "realidad vivida."



APACHES, por Tono.

—Ahora me he dedicado a la vida "honrá" y trabajo en una fábrica de relojes.
—A verlos.

Figure 2: Antonio de Lara, "Apaches"

Page four of the same issue features a short *historieta* by Mihura that inverts the formula in Tono's *viñeta*, using more mimetic visuals to deflate the *cursi* gravitas of representations of death. Mihura does stylize his figures, especially their beak-like noses and their outsized eyeballs that protrude from their oval heads like breasts. But the perspective of the furniture and the positioning of the figures suggest three-dimensional reality. Admittedly, there is a certain theatricality to the mise en scène, which should come as no surprise considering Mihura's background in theatre. The composition and perspective, in fact, look exactly as they would from seats on the mezzanine. And theatricality—artificiality—is the point of the joke, after all.

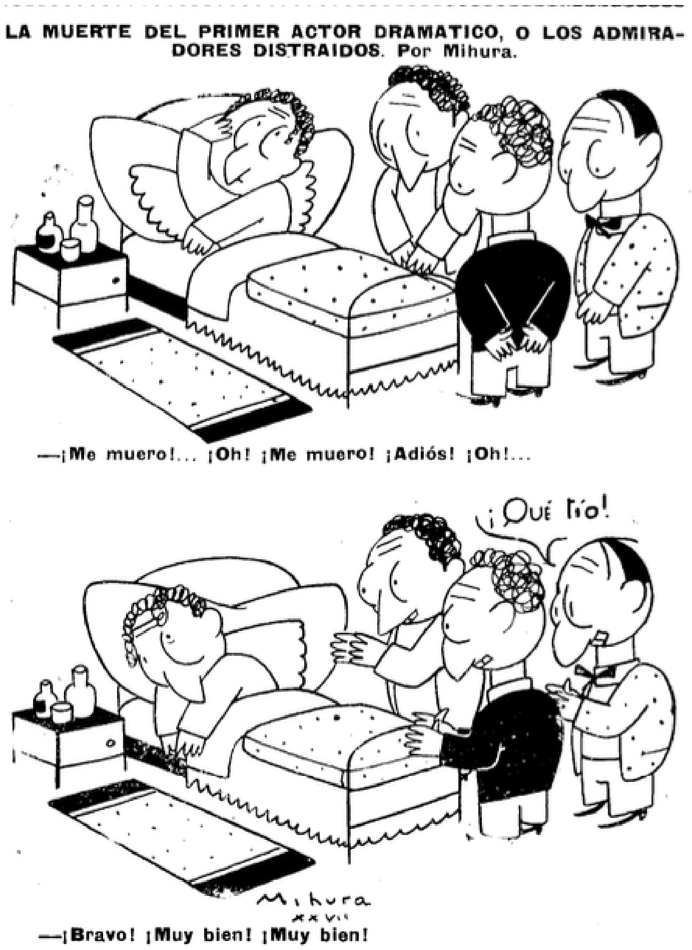

LA MUERTE DEL PRIMER ACTOR DRAMATICO, O LOS ADMIRADORES DISTRAIDOS. Por Mihura.
—¡Me muero!... ¡Oh! ¡Me muero! ¡Adiós! ¡Oh!...
¡Qué tío!
Mihura
—¡Bravo! ¡Muy bien! ¡Muy bien!

Figure 3: Miguel Mihura, "La muerte del primer actor dramático..."

Mihura's humor targets the ridiculous staging by a dramatic actor of his own death scene and, by extension, all the tired, *cursi* representations of "el tópico, . . . la frase hecha, . . . el lugar común" (*Mis memorias* 300). The visual style is unrecognizable to readers accustomed to Mihura's much more Tono-esque *viñetas* in *La Codorniz*, but the *cursilería*-subverting theme is quite familiar to those same readers.

Edgar Neville contributes two short, connected notes on the nationality of Christopher Columbus—apparently a topic that was making the rounds at the time—and an article (page 8) questioning the "prestigio imponderable" that the Roman empire still retained in Spain. The article's humor, as Ramón says, sees "el doble de toda cosa"—in this case, the double of everything that the Romans built in Spain. Neville's Romans arrive on the Peninsula and inexplicably decide to set up their business ventures as far as possible from the major population centers of Madrid, Seville, and Barcelona. In such remote corners as Mérida, Itálica and Sagunto, the supposedly savvy Romans "se dedican a la extraña labor que desarrollaron en todo el mundo: la construcción de ruinas. Tallan estatuas, les cortan los brazos y la nariz y después las entierran. Hacen columnas, para luego truncarlas. Se dedican a escribir lápidas en latín para que nadie las entienda, y emprenden los negocios más disparatados." Foremost among these ill-advised enterprises, writes Neville, is the Roman entertainment industry, which requires expensive yet shoddily-built theaters ("musgo en los pasillos, todo desvencijado y en desorden"), circuses, and hippodromes. Amazingly, they often build all three in the same region, which means that they then have to compete against themselves, cannibalizing their own scant profits since, as Neville reminds the reader, these mismanaging Romans have chosen to build, "siguiendo en su manía, en ciudades de poca población y, por ende, de poco público." To cap it off, they do zero market research: "se echa de ver en seguida la falta de conocimiento del país que pisaban, al establecer como espectáculo la escena de los cristianos devorados por las fieras. ¡Qué duda cabe de que ello podía ser divertido, y hasta negocio!… Pero en otro país, pues aquí, con ese afán de criticarlo todo, lo desacreditaron y tuvieron que cerrar." Although the not-so-subtle jabs at provincial

theater audiences violate the anti-satirical precepts of *Humorismo*, the general thrust of Neville's article stays true to the non-transcendent, dehumanized core of *el humor nuevo.*

The two short entries regarding Columbus's country of origin go further towards absurdist humor. The first (page 2) consists of a paper trail of internal communications from "el Negociado de Incobrables de la Dirección General de Cuentas Atrasadas." The office chief, the eponymous Señor Gutiérrez, officially requests that the clerk, Neville, search "los muchos y voluminosos legajos existentes en esta oficina" for any documents that might indicate "de dónde era natural el individuo objeto de estas diligencias." Neville's official response indicates that on page 536 of the office's proceedings against "el que dijo llamarse Cristóbal Colón" for failing to pay renter's tax, he has found a birth certificate "donde consta claramente que el descubridor de América era natural de la Habana." This absurd response goes unexplained until almost the last non-advertising page of the issue (page 20 of 23), in a section called "De Actualidad." Neville (signing off as "N.") explains that Columbus ("el de la estatua") was "un cubano que, sintiendo la nostalgia de su patria, se volvió a ella acompañado por unos descubridores. Ni más ni menos." In an editor's note that immediately follows, the unnamed editor (most likely Neville) refutes a popular theory that "después de unas diferencias económicas con la Reina, [Colón] intentó fugarse a Inglaterra, y equivocándose de barco, se metió en uno de los que hacen servicio con la Habana, descubriendo de esta manera el nuevo continente." This theory, the editor explains, is patently false given the fact that "en aquel tiempo, como no se había descubierto América, no había vapores que fuesen allá."

Each of Edgar Neville's interventions turns upon the humorous use of anachronism. Neville inserts twentieth-century capitalism into the Roman empire, and steam transportation into the age of exploration. Just as Tono flattens spatial perspective in his "Apaches" drawing, Neville flattens centuries and millennia, disrupting and dislocating ("descoyuntando") history and forcing incompatible or incongruous eras to coexist. In doing so, he exemplifies one of Ramón's principles of *humorismo*. "Cuanto más confunda el humorismo los elementos del mundo, mejor va. [...] Que cometa el dislate de reunir dos tiempos distintos o repetir en el mismo tiempo cosas remotas entre sí" (50). Like Don Quixote's thirteenth-century dress, speech, and behavior in seventeenth-century Spain, Neville's anachronisms exploit incongruities for humor's sake.

Flattening history removes the logic of cause and effect and produces absurdity. If the Romans had actually arrived a decade before Neville's 1927 article rather than two thousand years before, their actions—disfiguring recently completed statues and burying them, building huge outdoor entertainment venues in remote corners of the Peninsula—would have made no sense. Columbus's Cuban nationality doubles down on the absurdity, but Neville covers the ridiculous premise with a veneer of logic when he ironically argues against the "Wrong Boat" theory. It does make sense that no steam lines would offer passage to a continent that has not yet been discovered. But the logic of this rebuttal only compounds the absurdity of asserting that a continent was discovered by one of its natives—an absurdity seen as ironically wise from today's perspective—and Neville undercuts the logic by arguing not that steam ships did not exist in 1492 but rather that they did not travel between Spain and Cuba.

Even considering the avant-garde tendencies of Neville's and Tono's contributions in this second issue of *Gutiérrez*, it is José López Rubio who provides the closest approximation to Ortega's dehumanized art and Ramón's *Humorismo*. López Rubio's short account, "El suicida" (page 18), shuns the pathos one would expect from the subject matter and features clear examples of metaphor as described by Ortega and exemplified by Ramón's *greguerías*.

Lorenzo, the titular *suicida*, is more accurately "un suicida frustrado." He has an unhealthy obsession with the idea of suicide without any of the determination required to actually go through with any of the numerous methods that he toys with. "Era que lo estaba pensando bien." He lays on train tracks at times when he knows no trains are scheduled to pass. He visits friends who live in high-rise apartments and drops coins from their balconies, wishing for "profundidades más sin entrañas" but finding the trip to the mountains too tedious. He practices drowning himself in his bathtub but discards that method because he always gets water in his ears. "Y para envenenarse un poquitín y hacerse al mal sabor de los tóxicos, probaba en la mesa los platos que nunca le habían gustado." He considers using every blade and tool of a Swiss Army knife:

> [D]espués del aviso serio de la hoja grande, venía la cosquilla de la navaja chica, el punto del punzón sobre la i de su pensamiento, la raspadura graciosa de la lima, el falso mordisco de las tijeras—ese mordisco de perfil—, y la caricia blanda de la cuchara junto a los puntos suspensivos del tenedor. Por último, ahorcaba su dedo índice en la argolla de colgar y respiraba después, de vuelta de tantas muertes chiquitas, seguidas de tantas muertes dibujadas con lápiz.

Lorenzo, "enfermo de suicidio" but unable—or unwilling—to commit, cannot heal. "[N]o se curaba, y ya, cada vez más, se iba volviendo desmadejado y pálido. Se iba a morir de tanto no matarse." Finally his friend the narrator intervenes. No longer able to bear Lorenzo's deteriorating condition, he administers the only viable cure. He clasps his hands around Lorenzo's neck and chokes him, pressing down until his friend is on the brink of dying, at which point he releases him. While Lorenzo recovers, the narrator points out to him that he has now experienced death. "Ya te has muerto. ¿No te has visto morir en serio? ¿No has sentido cómo el corazón daba los últimos toques? ¿No has visto esos otros ojos que se ven en la muerte, y cambiarse el color de las cosas? Es que te he ahogado, Lorenzo. Estás muerto, para que te enteres." Lorenzo responds, "Bueno, si estoy muerto, ¿a ti qué?" and ends the friendship. But every time the narrator sees him afterwards, he is wearing light-colored suits and laughing. The somber suits, with the meticulously composed suicide note peeking out of the breast pocket, are nowhere to be seen.

Lopéz Rubio dares to see "el doble" of a dramatic subject, and he builds a protagonist in Lorenzo who is pathetically laughable in the vein of Ramón's "reírse sin siquiera sonreír." His humorous treatment of a dark subject matter unites the comic and death, "[moviéndose] en ese trozo de calle que va del teatro a la funeraria." Perhaps even more remarkable, though, is López's eerie use of metaphor. The paragraph on suicide-by-Swiss Army Knife, cited above, contains several surprising, seemingly disjointed metaphors—"la cosquilla de la navaja chica" and "los puntos suspensivos del tenedor," for example. But the language that best exemplifies Ortega's characterization of metaphor comes from the passage that describes Lorenzo's flirtation with firearms as a means of suicide. "Se asomaba al ojo de cerradura de las pistolas, al largo túnel de las escopetas, a los gemelos de teatro de las escopetas de dos cañones." With a loaded shotgun, "mirando, le daba vueltas al cañón, por si veía el caleidoscopio negro de los perdigones." Muzzles, barrels, and shotgun pellets become keyholes, tunnels, opera glasses, and kaleidoscopes. In Ortega's words, López Rubio "[suplanta] una cosa por otra, no tanto por afán de llegar a esta como por el empeño de rehuir aquella," but he does not effect these transformations merely to surprise. He chooses images that overlay Lorenzo's "enfermedad de suicidio" with voyeurism (keyholes), curiosity (tunnels), entertainment (opera glasses), and fascination (kaleidoscopes). "El suicida" thus combines the playful language and the "actitud/posición ante la vida" of avant-garde *humorismo*.

In these samples from López Rubio, Neville, Mihura, and Tono, we find "el humor nuevo español" already flourishing fourteen years before the first issue of *La Codorniz*, which means that by 1941 "el humor nuevo" was only new to the uninitiated—which, in postwar Spain, was apparently a significant segment of the population. That being the case, the Mihura years of *La Codorniz* represent, on the one hand, the zenith of *humorismo* à la Ramón, and on the other, the sudden, transformative expansion of an intellectual niche of humor into a popular, national style.

As we will see in the next section, the early *Codorniz* certainly displays a visual and verbal style that typifies "el humor nuevo español." But despite Miguel Mihura's adherence to the prescriptions of "el maestro Ramón," humor cannot entirely escape "la realidad vivida" or avoid commenting on it.

Mihura's Hatchling *Codorniz*

> *Hay dibujos de Tono que deberían exponerse en el Reina Sofía.*
> —Félix de Azúa, "'La Codorniz,' según Félix de Azúa"

Miguel Mihura writes in his memoirs that the idea to publish a magazine called *La Codorniz* came to him when his opera-singer aunt, Leocadia, abandoned her baby on someone's doorstep. This of course is not the actual origin story of *La Codorniz*. Because *Mis memorias* satirizes its own pathos-infested genre, it contains very few facts, if any, though it does tell the truth in a roundabout way. The founding of *La Codorniz* was inspired not by the pathetic circumstances of Mihura's cousin but by Mihura's drive to combat "[el] mal humor constante;

[el] genio de mil demonios" and to help people see that "la vida no es tan desagradable como parece y que si lo es, la mejor postura es hacerse el tonto" (*Mis memorias* 297-98).

Miguel Mihura considers humor to be the best vaccination against "el mal humor" caused by focusing on the perceived difficulties and disagreeableness of life, and against tired and lazy representations of life that perpetuate pathetic behavior: leaving a baby on the doorstep, fainting at the news of a relative's death, poisoning oneself over a lost love, disinheriting one's child because of a less-than-advantageous marriage, fighting with one's father over his proposed marriage to one's governess; yelling in one's study; crying over "cualquier bobada" (299). Mihura blames all of these behaviors on the playwrights and novelists and film directors who lazily represent them to their audience. Without such clichés in print and on stage or screen, "[l]a gente, en vez de perder el tiempo en estas tonterías, trabajaría tranquilamente, se divertiría muchísimo, estaría siempre de buen humor, y llegaría a convencerse de que la vida es bárbara y amable, aunque estos autores traten de convencernos de lo contrario" (299).

The solution that Mihura proposes—vaccination vía humor—is essentially the opposite of Plato's suggestion that representations of laughter be censored in The Republic. "¿Por qué no prohibir, como espectáculo, lo dramático, lo desagradable, lo violento? ¿Por qué, si todo esto existe, no ocultarlo como una repugnante enfermedad? ¿Por qué no vacunar a la gente contra el mal humor, contra el tópico, contra la frase hecha, contra el lugar común, como se le vacuna contra la viruela?" (299-300). Producing such a vaccine, according to Mihura's highly stylized—i.e., highly dehumanized—memoir, was what motivated him to start his own humor magazine (for the second time, after turning *La Trinchera* into *La Ametralladora* during the war).

Mihura's simile—humor as a vaccination—bears closer examination. Vaccination protects an organism against a disease by introducing into that organism a clinically denatured form of the disease (often weakened or killed by heat), allowing the body's defenses to build up an immunity to the agent without endangering the body. This analogy suggests, then, that humor denatures the disagreeable or pathetically *cursi* or painful things in life—in Ortega's terms, "deformar lo real, desrealizar"; in Ramón's, "devolvérselo todo al cosmos un poco disociado, macerado por la paradoja, confuso, patas arriba"—and thus inoculates us against the evils and the stupidity of the world, allowing our minds to recognize and combat them. Taken to its logical conclusion, Mihura's suggestion comes remarkably close to Minsky's hypothesis that humor is the mind's mechanism for working out "cognitive bugs" (a mental anti-virus application, as it were) and Miller's (and essentially Schopenhauer's) assertion that humor allows us to correct the unexamined "rules of thumb" ("abstract knowledge" for Schopenhauer) by which we live our lives.

But having professed his vows within the Order of San Ramón, Mihura cannot allow himself to assert that humor actually solves problems. Thus, after declaring that his mission is to inoculate people "contra el mal humor, contra el tópico, contra la frase hecha, contra el lugar común," Mihura insists that humor does none of these things. In a paragraph littered with paraphrases and verbatim passages of Ramón's *Humorismo* (I have italicized the direct quotes), he argues that

> el humor verdadero *no se propone enseñar o corregir*, porque no es ésta su misión. Lo único que pretende el humor es que, por un instante, *nos salgamos de nosotros* mismos, nos marchemos de puntillas a unos veinte metros y demos una vuelta a nuestro alrededor contemplándonos por un lado y por otro, por detrás y por delante [...] y descubramos nuevos rasgos y perfiles que no nos conocíamos. El humor es verle la trampa a todo, darse cuenta de *por dónde cojean* las cosas; comprender que todo tiene un revés, que

> todas las cosas *pueden ser de otra manera*, sin querer por ello que dejen de ser tal como son, porque esto es pecado y pedantería. *El humorismo es lo más limpio de intenciones* [...]. (305)

Lest the reader harbor any doubts about Mihura's adherence to the Gospel Acccording to Ramón, he later cites Gómez de la Serna directly in the latter's extension of Seneca: "Ramón Gómez de la Serna, nuestro maestro, ha ido más lejos [que Seneca] todavía: 'Ríete, pero sin sonreír siquiera'" (*ibid.*).

Here we arrive at the paradox of Mihura's humor, and of "el humor nuevo" as most of its practicers define it. Humor does not teach or correct, and yet humor can point out what is wrong and how it is wrong. A true humorist does what Mihura praised Julio Camba[8] for doing: "aclaraba nuestras ideas sobre la vida y sobre los hombres [...]. [Y] allí donde encontrábamos algo que no marchaba bien y que, sin saber las causas, no funcionaba a nuestro gusto, el maestro intervenía con su fría habilidad de cirujano y nos mostraba el mal y cuál era el motivo de su funcionamiento deficiente" ("Solos, sin Camba"). A humorist apparently is an annoying sage—a gadfly, perhaps—who knows everything except how to fix all the problems that he points out.

> Estaba [Camba] tan de vuelta de las cosas que no intentaba arreglar nada ni poner tratamiento a ningún mal de nuestro tiempo, quizá porque sospechaba que era inútil a más de pretencioso. Ni tomaba partido ni se molestaba por encontrar una solución. Él se limitaba a descubrir las grandes tonterías, a señalarlas burlonamente con el dedo, a dar su veredicto, y después, sonriendo, se largaba a otra parte con aire de tenerle todo sin cuidado. (*ibid.*)

---

[8] Julio Camba (1884-1962) was a journalist who shared Fernández Flórez's role as teacher to the Other Generation in the Ramonian school of humor. See *La "otra" Generación* 62 (62-68).

The humor employed by Mihura and Tono and the rest of the Other Generation in the early *Codorniz* is thus supposed to be self-contained, "juego y nada más," devoid of allegory, non-topical, non-critical, and especially apolitical. It does not address politics, social justice, poverty, hunger, or the human condition. It is play for play's sake. It does not "steer clear" of specific topics because, on a map of topics, "el humor puro" digs deeper or climbs higher within humor itself with only slight wobbles in any given cardinal direction. It can barely be said even to address literary conventions. It does not criticize. It merely imagines. As Mihura proclaims in his retroactive manifesto (written in 1948, seven years after the fact),

> *La Codorniz* no se apoyará nunca en la actualidad, ni en la realidad, será un periódico lleno de fantasía, de imaginación, de grandes mentiras, sin malicia. [...] No nos burlaremos del caído ni halagaremos al que está en las alturas. *La Codorniz* será como una pieza musical, [...] como un disco de música de baile para pasar el rato y nunca para aprender álgebra y trigonometría. El que quiera aprender [...] no debe leer *La Codorniz,* porque no le resultará eficaz. (*Mis memorias* 305)

Mihura refuses to instrumentalize humor. Its only use is to make human beings forget the problems of life. He is perhaps the purest of purists when it comes to the aesthetics of humor as nonsense, play, and relief.

In exalting fantasy and imagination, Mihura takes Ramón's concept of opposed realities, "una supuesta y otra cotidiana," to new heights. In fact, where the purity of play is concerned, Mihura exceeds even his master. In his 1948 memoir he criticizes the topical humor of so many publications and ends up rejecting the defining characteristics of Ramón's and Fernández Flórez's *humorismo.* The comic magazines "hablaban de cosas sensatas, actuales [...]. Todo en ellas tenía un doble sentido, una mala idea; una innoble intención" (306). Presumably he is referring to the ulterior motives of satire, “obra del mal genio, del rencor, de los celos, del resentimiento. Lo satírico es agrio, antipático, es un aguafiestas que llega a una casa convidado y dice cosas desagradables a la gente, sin necesidad” (304). In this he echoes Ramón, but in his rejection of humor magazines he includes not only those that had “una innoble intención” but also those that had “eso que se llama la sonrisa de una desilusión; las lágrimas escondidas, la tristeza del payaso” (307). These are clear references to Fernández Flórez’s discourse on humor, given three years previous (1945), and Ramón’s characterization of the humorist as a mix of “el excéntrico, el payaso y el hombre triste” in *Humorismo* (58). Gómez de la Serna caps his cubist portrait of the humorist by referencing the story of the man whose melancholy becomes so acute that a doctor recommends that he attend a performance of the legendary clown Grock. The man replies that such a cure is “¡Imposible, inútil!” When asked why, he explains, “Porque soy yo” (*Humorismo* 58-59).

After lumping Ramón’s and Fernández’s humor together with that of the satirical party-poopers, Mihura clarifies his objection to his mentors’ definitions. “¡Abajo la tristeza del payaso! [...] ¡Abajo la sonrisa de la desilusión! Seamos alegres porque sí, sin pretextos, sin darle vueltas al asunto, sin justificar nuestra alegría” (307). From Ramón’s *humorismo* Mihura distills the pure laughter of childhood play, filtering out the tragic component of “el hombre que siente.” “*La Codorniz* tenía alegría de niño, ingenuidad de niño, candor de niño y hasta hacía travesuras de niño.” Mihura and his collaborators, practicing their rarefied art, shook off criticism with the happy distractibility of children. “‘¿A qué jugamos hoy? ¿A los novios? ¿A las visitas? ¿A la primavera? ¿Al tren? ¿Al volcán?’ Y éramos felices jugando” (*ibid.*).

The combined impression of Mihura’s railings against Laiglesia’s *Codorniz* and his dismissal of Ramón’s “payaso triste” paints him as an elitist snob, and we would not be unjustified in reading his ivory-tower arguments as an overreaction to Álvaro's more topical bent and his own regret at having given his "daughter" in marriage to "un señor barbudo, que dice cosas impertinentes y desagradables" (No. 267, 1946). However, Mihura's arguments are more than just snobbish resentment. Many of the articles in Mihura's *Codorniz* serve as evidence that he and his collaborators truly revered and sought to achieve the ideal of humor as pure play, in a space removed from the trauma and stresses of postwar Spain, which they offered to their readers as an escapist antidote to reality. "'Jueguen ustedes —les decíamos—. No se preocupen del qué dirán. Después de jugar con nosotros se irán ustedes a trabajar más contentos, más optimistas.' Y jugaban con nosotros" (*Mis memorias* 308).

"El humor puro" in Mihura's *Codorniz*

> *Todavía no hace muchos años, al pisar alfombras de colores se estaba pisando 'cubismo' sin saberlo (aunque pronto lo supo todo el mundo). Todavía los primeros lectores de* La Codorniz *(hoy creo que lo sepan casi todos) estaban hojeando 'suprarrealismo' sin sospechárselo.*
>
> —Vicente Aleixandre (qtd. in *Un humorista* 19)

Playtime begins immediately on June 8, 1941, with Tono's cover for the first issue of *La Codorniz*. His *viñeta* features a woman with two children in tow who sees an acquaintance in the park and remarks to him, "¡Caramba, don Jerónimo! Está usted muy cambiado." The man answers, "Es que yo no soy don Jerónimo," and she responds in turn, "¡Pues más a mi favor!" The joke itself could easily be interpreted as mockery of dimwitted women, if Tono had not included the final line, “Pues más a mi favor.” The woman’s response moves the scene beyond the realm of gags exploiting awkward social situations and simple stupidity—staples of comedy at the time, and since the dawn of civilization through today—and into the sphere of humor based on the new and the unexpected. It invites the reader to make the sudden jump to see “el doble de toda cosa” by playfully imagining how the fact that the man is not Don Jerónimo could prove her initial point: that he has changed so much as to become almost unrecognizable.

In a 1998 article Antonio Mingote suggests that Tono’s joke is partly meta-humor in that it acknowledges the complete lack of any attempt to mimic reality. “¿Qué clase de señora tan estúpida que podía confundir una figura geométrica con don Jerónimo?” (“*La Codorniz*” 153). The fact is, in comparison with the *apaches* in *Gutiérrez* discussed above, Tono’s figures in the park (14 years later) are less rigidly geometric—more organic—and yet somehow less mimetic. He draws the woman and man in profile with noses like huge, blunted wedges. Their heads are essentially a gigantic dolphin-esque nose with eyes and mouth trailing behind. All we see is one eye with a slit above for an eyebrow and another below for a mouth. Without these noses like ships prows, the reader would find it difficult to determine which direction the adult bodies are facing, as with the two cyclopean children. These noseless chess pawns and their single visible eye gives no hint at their physical orientation. Their slanted *boinas* are dark squashed ovals balancing on larger oval craniums that top off trapezoidal bodies. Tono presents the Spanish general public of 1941 with vague approximations of human beings, trees, and birds drawn so geometrically that in this post-personal computer age they look as if they were created using Microsoft Word’s Draw feature on a computer running Windows 95. Mingote, in the same article, refers to these figures as “un pretendido ser humano encarnado en un trapecio isósceles

con sombrero, y una hinchadísima señora que se adivinaba que era señora por lo hinchadísima, y unos supuestos niños que eran apenas unos círculos con ojos” (152).

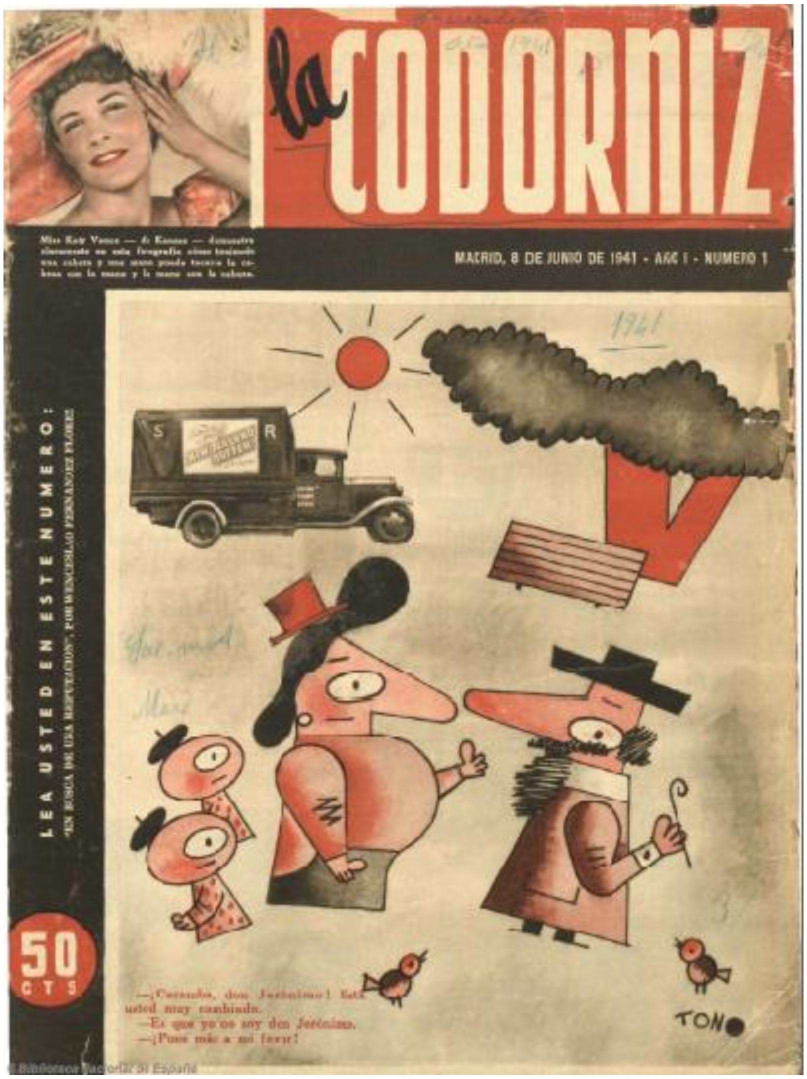

la CODORNIZ
MADRID, 8 DE JUNIO DE 1941 - AÑO I - NUMERO 1
LEA USTED EN ESTE NUMERO:
"EN BUSCA DE UNA REPUTACION", POR WENCESLAO FERNANDEZ FLOREZ
50 CTS
1941
—¡Caramba, don Jerónimo! Está usted muy cambiado.
—Es que yo no soy don Jerónimo.
—¡Pues más a mi favor!
TONO
Biblioteca Nacional de España

Figure 4: Antonio de Lara, "¡Caramba, don Jerónimo!"

The impact that the first cover of *La Codorniz* must have had is easy to understand if we also comprehend the social context in which it appeared. Besides the political environment of early postwar Spain, which we will discuss below, we must consider the comedic tropes that still persisted and were perhaps strengthened by the imposition of conservative social norms. As Mingote attests, the magazine’s cover “era estrafalario y bastante ofensivo para quienes estaban acostumbrados a reírse con los tipos que habían dado risa toda la vida, a ser posible baturros o suegras gordas con bigote" (152). Tono's drawing, with its near-abstract protagonists in the foreground and an actual photo of a truck advertising and/or transporting New Zealand Butter pasted into the background, serves as *La Codorniz*'s manifesto. Just as the avant-garde attempts to cut all ties to the artistic movements that precede it, *La Codorniz* announces with the cover of its first issue that it has broken from the prevailing comedic traditions of postwar Spain.

We might question this notion of rupture and "breaking from tradition," quite apart from the inherent paradox that Octavio Paz reveals in modern artistic movements as "la tradición de ruptura" (15-17). Characterizing the humor of *La Codorniz* as a "rupture" is problematic given the fact that in many ways it is merely a continuation of much of the humor in *Buen Humor, Gutiérrez,* and *La Ametralladora*. But we should keep in mind that when *La Codorniz* appears in 1941, it has been two years since the final issue of *La Ametralladora*—seven and nine years in the cases of *Gutiérrez* and *Buen Humor*. "El humor nuevo español" has been missing in action, and the humor that *is* being published is pro-Franco (e.g., *Flechas y Pelayos*) and/or a representative of all of the safe comedic clichés that "el humor nuevo" rebels against. For these reasons alone *La Codorniz* represents a break from the dominant humor of its day, and it operates in an environment of censorship that would not have tolerated the more topical elements of *Buen Humor* and *Gutiérrez*. Finally, as discussed above, Mihura's ideal goes so far as to rebel against the sad clown of Ramón's *humorismo*—extending the tradition of rupture even as it takes up the standard that its predecessors let fall.

The first cover of *La Codorniz* also carries over the anti-*cursilería* leitmotif from *Gutiérrez* and *Buen Humor*. In the upper left corner, next to the masthead, a photograph apparently cut from a US publication shows a young woman—Katy Vance from Kansas, according to the caption—sporting one of the finer hats that midwestern fashion could offer. The hat by itself is ridiculous enough, pink and wide brimmed with an enormous white faux feather curling over the edge, but it is Miss Vance's pose and expression that bear the brunt of the critique. Her head leans to the right, with the palm of her left hand resting lightly over her left ear, the fingers extended forward and up towards her temple. She gazes languidly to the left of the viewer, wearing a smile that may have been trying for relaxed and confident but instead comes off as insipid. The hat, pose, and expression together reek of pretentious artificiality—in a word, *cursilería*. Hence the very Mihura-esque caption, which points out how Miss Vance "demuestra claramente en esta fotografía cómo teniendo una cabeza y una mano puede tocarse la cabeza con la mano y la mano con la cabeza." By dismantling the clichéd pose, Mihura masterfully exposes the unnatural inanity of a commonplace (*lugar común*), continuing an avant-garde tendency at least as old as Vicente Huidobro's 1914 declaration, "Guerra al cliché" ("El arte del sugerimiento" 38) and combining it with his own crusade against *lo cursi.*

Among the sixteen pages that represent 1941-42 in *La Codorniz: Antología, 1941-1978* (1998), the anthologists Melquíades Prieto and Julián Moreiro include several pieces that express this sentiment (or lack thereof). See, for example, "Paisaje," Neville's brief account of a train and a cow who fall in love, which he frames with a wolf devouring "la oveja más cursi y más estúpidamente buena" while the sheepdog looks on, "muerto de risa." Or a loosely-termed sonnet by Mihura (writing as El Vate Pérez), "Niña inmunda," that accompanies the portrait of a young girl in a dress, tights, and heels, holding a bouquet in each hand, her smiling head tilted to one side à la Katy Vance.

> ¡Niña inmunda!, / ¡vergüenza de tus padres!, / ¡engendro del averno!, / ¡cursi atroz!
>
> ¡Quítate de delante / si no quieres / que te pise las botas / y te desrice el pelo, / y te rompa las medias, / y me coma las flores con arroz!

> ¿Quién te ha vestido así?, / ¿quién ese gesto idiota te enseñó?, / ¿quién te puso esa greca de lavabo?, / ¿quién las rosas de trapo te entregó?
>
> ¡Vete pronto a tu casa, / niña inmunda, / y dile a tu mamá: / ¡No, no, no y no!, / no quiero que me vistas de adefesio / para llevarme al *fotografó*!

Mihura calls for the younger generation to revolt against parents' attempts to preserve conventions (in dress and language and thought) that have been stripped of meaning and originality to the point of banality and ridiculousness. Later that decade he would again emphasize this divide between the generations in *Mis memorias,* where the children abandoned on doorsteps by their uninventive mothers would laugh at the perfect inanity of their parents. "Porque los niños y las madres, como era natural, pertenecían a dos generaciones distintas y es lógico que los primeros pensasen de esta forma. Las madres tenían de la vida una visión deformada de espectadores de teatro malo y de lectoras de folletines. Y, en cambio, los niños, eran ya unos niños modernos, con ideas nuevas, inteligentes y despreocupadas" (298). Such children feel deeply the shame of being abandoned on a doorstep by their mothers, "pero no por lo que tiene esto de incómodo y de dramático, sino por lo cursi que resulta, por el topicazo que representa, por el insulto que se hace a los de nuestra generación" (298-99).

The anti-*cursi* theme appears often in dialogues between lovers. The absurd inanity of supposedly romantic dialogue is a favorite target of the Other Generation, whose criticism of the subject dates at least to López Rubio's *Cuentos inverosímiles* (1924). Among the themes of that collection, José María Torrijos lists "la cursilería y falta de espontaneidad en las relaciones amorosas" ("El humor inverosímil..." 145). Prieto and Moreiro include in the 1941-42 *Antología* many examples in prose, poetry, and *viñeta.* Another El Vate Pérez sonnet, "Primavera," narrates an inane conversation between two lovers: "—¿Quién quiere a mi chatita? —dice el tío. / —Su ‘chubesky’ bonito! —es la respuesta. [. . .] —¿Quién quiere a su chatarra / remonona? —añade la mujer, / que, a veces, miente... / —¿Quién se va a comprar hoy / un abrelatas para el viaje de novios?” responds the ironically-named Don Juan, “satisfecho ante el halago [...]. / Ellos se aman sin saber más razón / que la de haber ‘llegao’ la primavera” (n.pag.). The progression of pet names—“mi chatita,” “‘chubesky’ bonito,” “chatarra remonona”— increases in ridiculous inanity with each iteration. The names themselves are at best meaningless placeholders, at worst ironic indicators of a forced and shallow attachment that is nothing more than the result of circumstance, “[el] haber ‘llegao’ la primavera”.

By the time that he started publishing these pieces in *La Codorniz* (1941), Mihura had been mocking contemporary representations of lovers’ dialogues for nearly a decade, in more than one medium. During the 1930s he repurposed parodies that he had published in *Gutiérrez* for films by Eduardo García Maroto (one of Berlanga’s principal inspirations), including the groundbreaking series of shorts *Una de...* (*Una de fieras* (1934); *Una de miedo* (1935); *Y, ahora, una de ladrones* (1936)) as well as the feature-length film *La hija del penal* (1936). Some dialogues in the latter, as González-Grano de Oro notes, are barely altered from Mihura’s “Alicia y Roberto” in issue 76 of *Gutiérrez* (November 10, 1928; see *Ocho humoristas...* 35-37). The titular pair speaks earnestly of the sky and the moon, as *cursi* lovers do, but with much greater scientific vigor. The conversation jumps from the blue of Roberto’s armchair to the color of the sky, to clouds—“Las nubes son masas de vapor acuoso suspendidas en la atmósfera,” says Alicia”—and thence to the atmosphere—“Siendo la atmósfera una capa de aire que rodea el globo terrestre,” adds Roberto, and the encyclopedic details continue to flow. At their next meeting, they talk as lovers do of the moon, of French, of foreign cities and rivers, but again as if reading from an encyclopedia. Roberto remarks that he has been contemplating the moon, and

Alicia dives in with “La Luna es el satétite de la Tierra, cuarenta y nueve veces menor que ésta, a la que da vueltas en veintisiete días, siete horas y treinta y cuatro minutos. Es un planeta muerto.” Roberto responds that “Los muertos huelen mal,” and in rapid-fire succession, Alicia defines *el olfato*; Roberto gives its translation into French, English, and German; Alicia identifies the capital of Germany; Roberto names the river that runs through it; Alicia locates the river’s headwaters; and Roberto blurts out, “Es cierto, Alicia. Pero yo te amo. ¡Te amo!” (“Alicia y Roberto”). As González-Grano de Oro writes in his treatment of *Tres sombreros de Copa*, “Mihura, tan joven [in his late twenties], se ha venido dando cuenta de que la lengua (y la garganta, el velo del paladar, las fosas nasales) se han puesto al servicio de unas voces que falsifican lo que dicen mediante palabras huecas, ideas que nada representan, diálogos en los que nadie escucha” (*Ocho humoristas...* 55). Within the formula of a romantic comedy, Mihura encloses absurd dialogues full of hollow words and empty ideas, whether it be Alicia and Roberto sharing the details of the Earth’s atmosphere or *la chatita* and her *chubesqui* lovingly discussing the can opener they will buy for their honeymoon.[9]

Mihura is not the only expert in absurd dialogue who writes for *La Codorniz.* In another of the pieces included in the 1941-42 section of *Antología*, Tono crafts a conversation that actually surpasses Mihura’s confections if we consider characterization and cohesion to be important elements of a story. (It would be easy to argue that Mihura does not.) In “La primera tarde (novelaza de amor),” Tono presents a typical scene: the first visit of a young woman to her boyfriend’s apartment. The dialogues follow Mihura’s tendencies and seem to perform the same function—both internally, by bringing the lovers together without substantive communication actually taking place, and externally, by using exaggerated absurdity to critique the inanity of such scenes as they are represented by other, less self-aware authors. But where Mihura’s “Alicia y Roberto” features variations on typical romantic subjects of conversation, the lovers of “La primera tarde” discuss utterly mundane topics. Rather than dissertate upon the moon and the sky, Tono’s Pepe and Paulita discuss noses, electricity, and gas. After an awkward start to their conversation, Paulita compliments Pepe on the apartment and asks how much he pays in housing monthly.

---

[9] Various scholars have noted the affinity between Mihura’s absurd dialogues and those of Eugene Ionesco. See for example Douglas R. McKay’s 1977 biography *Miguel Mihura* (especially pages 35-39), which also cites Ionesco’s treatment of Mihura’s *Tres sombreros de copa*, much of which is applicable to *La Codorniz*: “Humor is the only possibility that we have of liberating ourselves from the tragicomedy of our human situation, from the insipidity of our existence. Logic is revealed in the illogic of the absurd. the work of Mihura requires a bit of effort, a certain agility of spirit on the part of the spectator [or reader], to surprise the rational through the irrational, to pass from life to dream, from dream to life. [...] It is excellent intellectual gymnastics” (138 note 5).

> —Treinta duros; pero tiene gas.
>
> —¿Tiene gas?
>
> —Tiene gas.
>
> —Y ¿para qué sirve el gas?
>
> —El gas sirve para tener gas. ¿Tú no tienes gas?
>
> —No. Mi padre dice que eso de tener gas es para la gente que no tiene nada que hacer.
>
> —Eso es verdad. Pero yo por ti soy capaz de tener gas toda mi vida.
>
> Paulina se dejó caer en el sofá y, cogiendo un libro, exclamó:
>
> —¿Sabes leer?
>
> —Algunas cosas.
>
> —Este libro parece muy bonito.
>
> —Sí, es muy bonito; sobre todo por la parte de fuera. ¿A ti qué es lo que más te gusta de los libros?

> —A mí, el lomo.
>
> —A mí también.
>
> —Está visto que hemos nacido el uno para el otro. Pepe se dejó caer también en el diván al lado de ella, y exclamó:
>
> —¿Quieres que sigamos hablando de gas?
>
> Ella respondió emocionada:
>
> —Sí; hablemos de gas. ¡Qué ganas tenía de que llegara este momento! (Moreiro and Prieto n. pag.)

Tono's dialogue is just as absurd as Mihura's, though the former places tedious topics within a romantic framework where the latter shifts romantic topics into a non-romantic mode of expression. Partly because of this difference in method, the contents of Tono's conversation are not merely disposable placeholders that are discarded as soon as they have called attention to the absurdity of conventions. Each topic reappears at least once during Tono's "primera tarde," with heightened stakes. After the initial conversations about gas and electricity, for instance, Paulita confesses to Pepe that he is "el primer hombre sincero que había conocido, pues ninguno, hasta ahora, le había explicado lo que era el gas y lo que era la luz eléctrica, y que, debido a esto, había vivido siempre en la más completa ignorancia" (*ibid.*). These internal consistencies allow "La primera tarde" to draw more complete characters who are no less complete for the ridiculous inanity of their conversations. (Again, we might argue that Mihura prefers more disjointed, artificial characters.) The piece stands alone even as it demonstrates the contingency of the scenes that it mocks.

By mocking theatrical, literary, visual and comedic platitudes, Mihura's *Codorniz* takes up the standard previously carried by *Gutiérrez* and *Buen Humor*, a standard of meta-artistic, meta-literary, and meta-comedic humor. *El humor nuevo* in *La Codorniz* distances itself from reality by making art its only referent. Traditional art imitates life, with greater or lesser fidelity, and the critics of *La Codorniz* poke holes in that imitation. Other, more fantastical veins of humor in *La Codorniz* make their link reality even more ephemeral, dispensing with art and focusing instead on language itself. See, for instance, Tono's article questioning the epithet *burro*, "Intentemos una defensa del burro, si somos hombres" (1943).[10] He remarks that "[el] burro es uno de los seres más de la creación más vituperado, y nosotros nos preguntamos: ¿Es que el burro no es tan digno de respeto como el caballo y como la vaca? (¿Han visto ustedes cómo nos preguntamos esto?)" In this metalinguistic twist, Tono questions the language that he uses to question language. Further on he points out that "[el] único defecto que afea el burro es ese de llamarse burro; pero este desgraciado defecto no es culpa suya, ya que posiblemente, a él le gustaría llamarse cocodrilo o llamarse faisán o llamarse Antonio." The arbitrary nature of language is playfully laid bare. A burro by any other name would, perhaps, contribute articles and viñetas to *La Codorniz*. Those contributions would not depict the life of a burro, its many hardships and rare joys. They would instead maintain the most reluctant and tenuous of connections to reality, establishing the minimal common ground of the commonplace in order to deconstruct it with "originales descoyuntamientos de la frase, de la situación, del tópico" (*Teoría e interpretación* 251).

The purest expression of "el humor puro" develops when Tono and Mihura and their friends play together, or when they play with straw men of their own creation. Mihura writes apocryphal letters to the editor under the names of Rosendo Álvarez and Serafín Cortisano, attributing nefarious and miraculous powers, respectively, to *La Codorniz*; and Mihura responds to each in turn by denying any virtues and confirming all vices attributed to his publication (Prieto and Moreiro 1943-44). Tono writes to the editor complaining that the first page of issue number 110 contains the unoriginal and frankly unfunny phrase "Madrid, 25 de julio de 1943." Mihura's published response admits to the oversight and assures Tono that "miles de agentes, disfrazados, rodean el edificio de la redacción para ver si descubren al culpable que, mezclado entre nuestros obreros, trata de hundir esta revista, poniendo en ella sin [su] consentimiento, esas frases estúpidas y poco graciosas" (*ibid.*). Although these playful communications contain ironic responses to critics of the magazine, for the most part they constitute a humor that has turned its back on the world and retreated within the fantasies on its own pages, a self-contained and self-referential humor given the freedom to play in a space untroubled by hunger, poverty, violence, or oppression.

---

[10] This article has the distinction of appearing in more than one anthology: in the 1943-44 section of Prieto y Moreiro as well as in Salcedo (43-44).

No tan puro

> *Lo curioso de La Codorniz está en la sátira feroz y casi trascendental que se oculta sin quererlo bajo el cándido reclamo de un humor aparentemente eutrapélico y desinteresado. ¡Quién sabe qué documento no acabará siendo la colección de este hilarante 'pájaro' sucesivo! Pero nada de ponerse serios. Leamos* La Codorniz *y suene la sana risa que equilibra, fortifica y alegra.*
>
> —Vicente Aleixandre (qtd. in *Un humorista* 19-20)

Despite the purest and purist intentions of the Other Generation of 27, humor can never be completely isolated from human experience. All three of the major philosophies require the human element that Bergson evokes from the very beginning of his treatise on laughter (Bergson 10). Relief or release of tension, as presented by Shaftesbury and Freud, depends on sociality. Superiority, as presented by Plato and Hobbes, requires a human target. And incongruity, as presented by Schopenhauer, Kant, Kierkegaard, and the majority of philosophers since, needs a shared understanding of norms and conventions, a social context from which to deviate unexpectedly. Even Fernández Flórez, who praises and insists upon humor as tender and comprehending, asserts that it is an attitude of "descontento" in response to life—human, contemporary life ("El humor..." 11-15). Humorists of every stripe craft their humor *against* something real in life or something imitated in art. The contributors to Mihura's *Codorniz* (1941-1944) are no different, despite his aspirations to dehumanized humor. Their *viñetas* and written pieces may dig at something as inconsequential as an unexamined set phrase: "Anda, Pepe: tú que sabes de música, toca el timbre de esa puerta" (Prieto and Moriero 1943-44). But more often than Mihura would like to admit, they smuggle social—and even political—criticism into his fantastical kingdom of innocent play. Three *viñetas* included in the Mihura years of *Antología* demonstrate the subtlety with which such criticism infiltrates the borders of his realm.

The *viñetas* in question each depict stereotypically romantic scenes in which lovers would be expected to give free rein to their passions. In the first, "Impaciencia," (found in the 1941-42 section of *Antología*), the publicist and artist José María Picó López presents newlyweds on their wedding night. Picó's style is atypical of the early *Codorniz,* much more mimetic that Tono's and Mihura's, and rich in detail. The groom holds the bride's hands in his, leaning in seductively. The bride, demure, is turned towards the viewer, looking away from her new husband with her legs primly crossed. Picó intensifies the scene's intimacy with the setup: "Y ahora que nos hemos casado, y estamos al fin solos..." The couple are presumably faithful Catholics and therefore still virgins, and this is the moment when we would expect them to release their long-suppressed sexual desire and consummate their marriage. But Picó pulls a bait-and-switch, replacing one marital privilege with another: "...te voy a traer la americana para que me cosas ese botón que te dije que se me había caído." The *viñeta* can thus be read as a commentary on the role of women in Spanish society: sexual objects who also perform domestic duties. In addition, the reader might infer that the husband only considers replacing the button to be so urgent because other urges have already been satisfied, suggesting that in a devoutly Catholic nation, individuals are not as devout as they would have their neighbors believe.

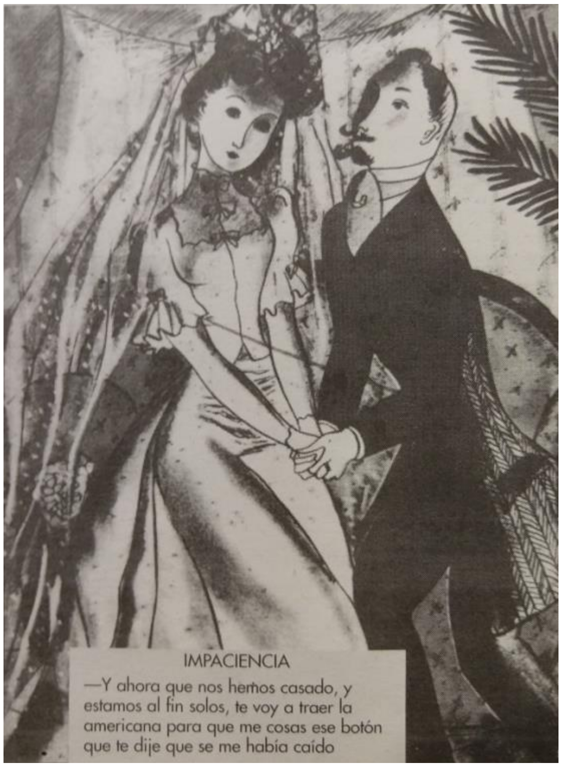

IMPACIENCIA
—Y ahora que nos hemos casado, y estamos al fin solos, te voy a traer la americana para que me cosas ese botón que te dije que se me habia caído

Figure 5: José María Picó López, "Impaciencia"

In the second *viñeta* (found in the 1943-44 section of *Antología*), Tono presents his own pair of newlyweds. This couple has returned home from the ceremony. The bride is in the living room talking on the phone, and the groom is in the background—in the bedroom, presumably—removing his gloves. He wears a top hat and tuxedo, his torso a black semicircle that suggests a coat with tails. The bride is in a flowing white dress. Significantly, she is still holding her bouquet and has yet to remove her veil with its crown of flowers.

Tono's composition is surprisingly meticulous, a play of congruencies and complementary opposites. The bride and groom are both in profile, turned toward the left-hand border (or stage right), ostensibly moving towards the same goal: consummation. Yet in everything else they oppose one another. Tono sets the bride in white against a dark background—the floor and wall of the living room—and the groom in black against a light background—the interior of the bedroom. His head tilts forward, his long nose angling down past the point of his chin, while her head and ski-jump nose tilt upward. The glove in the groom's left (or downstage) hand complements the bouquet in the bride's left (downstage) hand, but each object sends a different message. The glove hints that the groom has already begun to disrobe, however decorously. But the bride still holds to her flowers, a symbol—along with the veil she still hides behind—of the maidenhood that she is apparently not ready to give up.

Considering these visual hints, the reader could already be expecting something in the general vein of Tono's punchline. "¿Qué dices?" the bride says into the telephone handset. "¿Patatas...? ¡Ahora mismo voy a tu casa!" It may be that the reader laughs at the suddenly violated (or frustrated) expectation of sex and gives it no further thought. But the bride's choice of food over sex might also suggest to the reader one of two possibilities: either that the bride will use any pretext to postpone consummation, or that eating really is more urgent than sex. Considering the widespread hunger that characterized the postwar period, the second, very real possibility carries with it a social commentary. This bride may have looked forward to her wedding night for years, but at that long-awaited moment the prospect of potatoes is much more exciting. In post-war Spain, food trumps sex.

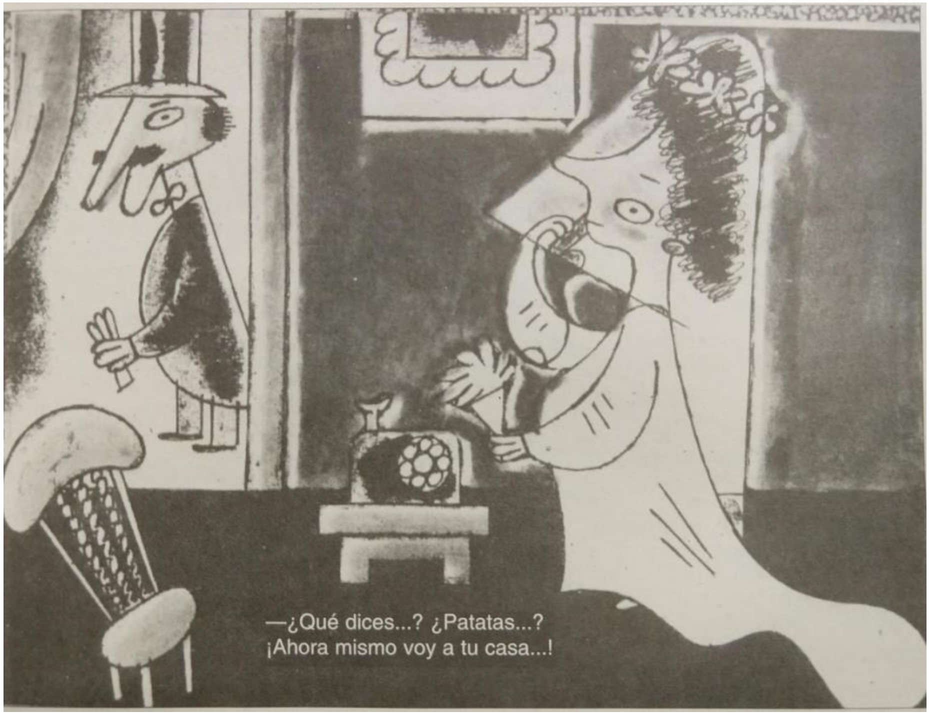

—¿Qué dices...? ¿Patatas...?
¡Ahora mismo voy a tu casa...!

Figure 6: Antonio de Lara, "Patatas"

The third sensual *viñeta* may have actually appeared during the period when Mihura had already handed over the reins to Álvaro de Laiglesia but continued to contribute pieces. However, even if it was published during Laiglesia's tenure, the fact that this *viñeta* was created by Mihura himself makes it germane to this discussion. We are, after all, considering examples of social criticism that sneaks its way into *La Codorniz* against Mihura's wishes because of the nature of humor, and this final piece of evidence demonstrates that the same process occurs within Mihura's own work.

In the 1944-46 section of *Antología*, Prieto and Moreiro include a *viñeta* by Mihura that employs a set-up almost identical to those of Picó and Tono discussed above. It shows a couple all alone and apparently in the mood, though in this instance the couple is not married and they are on a remote hillside rather than at home. The drawing is representative of Mihura's later and least mimetic drawing style. The characters are two-dimensional (with minimal shading only on the man's torso), and Mihura arranges them in awkward positions that leave their spatial relationship to each other ambiguous. The huge flowers on the slope are outsized even for sunflowers, and their positioning also contributes to the flattened dimensions of the composition. The drawing has an almost complete lack perspective, with objects arranged as if they were magnets thrown haphazardly onto a refrigerator door.

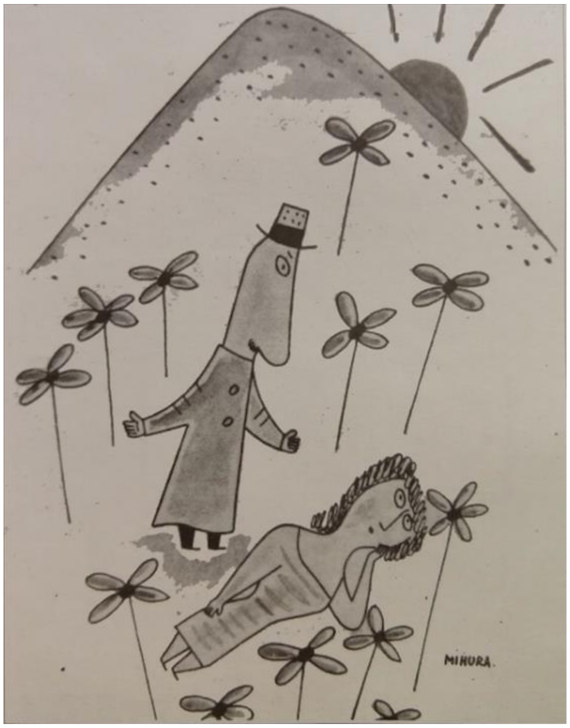


Figure 7: Miguel Mihura, "Los Amantes"

The man is standing, leaning over his beloved—or at least tilting over her. She is ostensibly lying on her side, propped up by her left elbow with her left hand supporting her head, though she looks more like a standing wooden figure that has fallen over. The situation evoked by the man's argument suggests, against the evidence of our eyes, that she is relaxing among the flowers on the hillside.

> Todo nos favorece, amada mía: es primavera y, dando un paseo, nos hemos alejado bastante de la ciudad; en estos lugares solitarios no hay nadie que pueda escucharnos ni vernos; tu padre está muy lejos de aquí, ocupado con sus negocios; pronto se hará de noche, puesto que el sol empieza a ocultarse en el horizonte; tú has cumplido ya tu mayoría de edad... ¿No te parece, por lo tanto, que ha llegado el momento de que te enseñe la letra de 'Ojos verdes'?"

Once again, the setup creates the expectation of sex, scandalous in this case because of the characters' unmarried status, and the punchline frustrates that expectation with something as innocuous as the lyrics of a popular song.

We might attempt to explain Mihura's joke with Spencer's concept of "descending incongruity," when "consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small" (108). The drawing and the monologue build up powerful emotions in the reader in anticipation of a long-awaited first liaison between lovers. When the reader discovers suddenly that this 1940s Don Juan has orchestrated the romantic setting, the isolation and the secrecy simply to teach his lover the words to "Ojos verdes," the "large amount of nervous energy [...] is suddenly checked in its flow" (107). That energy finds its release valve in laughter or, as Mihura might prefer, a simple smile.

In addition, we might take Mihura's *viñeta* as an example of Kant's explanation of laughter, "the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (47) or into "a thought that at bottom represents nothing" (49). In this romantic scene, "nothing" is the idea of two lovers meeting clandestinely to rehearse the lines of a song. If we take the punchline at face value, it comes off as "something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction)” (47). As Mihura would no doubt argue, it is pure play, not intended to instruct or correct but merely to delight.

But if Mihura wanted to play in his ivory tower of abstract unreality, he should have chosen a different song for the punchline. The *copla* “Ojos verdes” (created in 1935) is a popular song that tells the story of a night of passion between a horseman and a prostitute, so by 1941 Spanish censors had prohibited the song’s performance, whether live or over the radio. Until 1966 it was one of several songs that Radio Española’s censors had designated as “no radiable,” even with the opening line “Apoyá en el quicio de la mancebía” changed to less salacious options, among them “...en el quicio de tu casa un día” (see Lapuente, *Canciones prohibidas*; and Moreno, *¿Qué me estás cantando?*). According to the section that Fidel Moreno dedicates to the song in his book *¿Qué me estás cantando? Memoria de un siglo de canciones*, “Ojos verdes” was so well known, despite the best efforts of the censors, that Franco himself requested that Concha Piquer perform it—unaltered—at an 18th of July celebration at La Granja Palace (n. pag.). And so, by choosing “Ojos verdes” as the punchline, Mihura turns his lovers into subversive resistors of censorship. He thus presents in *La Codorniz* the kind of humor that is anathema to the magazine’s founding principles, where humor serves as a medium of social and political criticism. In this Trojan Horse of a cartoon, Mihura—however inadvertently—brings pre-marital sex, prostitution, and criticism of puritanical, state-imposed and self-enforced moral codes into the supposedly safe confines of the fantasy world he created.

Social and political commentary do not infiltrate Mihura’s *Codorniz* via *viñeta* only, but in narratives as well. One of the most salient examples is Wenceslao Fernández Flórez’s story “El fantasma en peligro” (in the 1941-42 section of *Antología*). Recycling a theme from his 1930 collection of stories *Fantasmas*, Fernández tells the story of a ghost who has grown despondent due to his inability to do his age-old job. He can no longer terrorize humanity because he cannot top the horrors that humanity has created to terrorize itself.

Fernández sets the story in a Madrid that is frequented by ghosts and haunted by its recent past. The narrator meets the ghost while walking home late one night, along the streets near the Parque del Oeste where "aún hay ruinas y cadáveres de casas muertas por las granadas de la guerra." He has to decide between walking on the side of the street where a ghost is approaching, "una figura alta, blanca y fosforescente," and the side where a known communist is waiting on the corner: Pirruchi, "que fue un técnico del comunismo y que ahora anda por ahí diciendo que debemos olvidarlo todo." The narrator chooses the lesser of two terrors, and asks the ghost to take his wallet for safekeeping, explaining that "aquel que viene por ahí es el comunista 'Pirruchi,' que por nada del mundo despreciaría esta ocasión de registrar a un burgués desvalido." Upon hearing that a communist is approaching them, the ghost gathers the hems of his floating sheet and runs off with the narrator close behind. When they finally stop to recover their breath, the mortified ghost explains that "los comunistas nos impresionan. Durante la revolución sufrimos horrores con ellos. Nos quitaban las sábanas y las cadenas."

The narrator and the ghost end up discussing the spectral job market. As might be expected in postwar Spain, there is "un paro tremendo." The narrator assumes that society has simply stopped believing in ghosts: "Claro, el descreimiento, el positivismo, la..." But the specter responds with string of experiences that demonstrate that the modern world has too many horrors more frightening than ghosts.

First, he tells of trying to terrorize an old castle, where he produces "los más prologados aullidos de mi repertorio y produje modulaciones capaces de helar la sangre en las venas del más valiente." The baronet and his family, hearing the ghost's howls, run in terror from what they believe are approaching warplanes, but their fear turns to relief when they learn that it is only a ghost.

Next, he tells of a family living in an old house in Madrid, where he is assigned to “lanzar gritos histéricos y carcajadas sardónicas.” But the father of the house merely complains from his bed that his “empecatado hijo [...] ya está escuchando en la radio una comedia!” He wraps his head in a sheet and goes back to sleep.

The final and most disheartening experience comes when the ghost receives orders to haunt an old bachelor man who trades on the black market. He enters the man’s room having assumed his most fearsome appearance, but the man merely looks up at him for a moment and returns to working on his ledger sheet. “Conque voy, doy unos brincos y me acerco a él y le hago: ‘¡Uuuh!’, casi en las narices. Y nada.” The ghost complains, “¡Hombre, don Higinio, haga el favor, que estoy aquí hace un cuarto de hora y hay que ver que no le ha dado a usted ni un repeluzco; que parece que uno no es nadie!” The “buen comerciante” leans back in his chair and answers, “Pero... ¿qué quiere usted de mí? Por esa misma puerta entraron hace cinco, hace cuatro, hace tres años, muchos sujetos más feos que usted, más terribles que usted, con puñales y con pistolas y con sacos para llevarse mi dinero y camiones para cargar con mis muebles, y con las ideas más estremecedoras que pueden ocurrírsele a un verdugo. ¿De qué me voy a asustar?”

After the narrator commiserates, the ghost finishes up by announcing the development of a seventy-ton “súperfantasma [...] dotado de recursos modernos,” a necessary advancement to keep pace with the man-made horrors of the modern age, and the only way to save the ghost from the extinction hinted at in Fernández’s title. “Todo menos seguir así,” says the downtrodden specter. “Usted no sabe los sustos que nos dan las nubes de ‘cazas,’ los rojos, los aparatos superheterodinos, ni el pavor de encontrarse entre una lluvia de paracaidistas que encienden de pronto, en la noche, la blancura de sus paracaídas... No. Es horrible. Yo, señor, nunca he pasado tanto miedo como desde que soy un fantasma."

There is much for the Francoist censor to love in "El fantasma en peligro." The communist turned petty thief jives well with Franco's demonization of communism. When the ghost recounts the horrors of warfare, the censor can assume that it refers to wars that Franco did not start—indeed, wars in which Franco ostensibly and proudly kept Spain from getting involved. And when the black-marketer says that three, four, and five years ago he was robbed by frightening and ugly armed men who took all his possessions and threatened him with impressively imaginative means of torture and death, the censor can assume that Fernández attributes such behavior to the Republican forces that held Madrid until 1939.

The very elements that would have garnered the censor's approval should have inspired disdain in Mihura. Based on the criteria set forth in his manifestos, "El fantasma en peligro" has no business appearing in his *Codorniz*. Where readers should find "fantasía, [...] imaginación," and "grandes mentiras, sin malicia," they find instead *"*la actualidad" and "la realidad" that *La Codorniz* was supposed to shut out: unemployment, bombed-out homes, poverty, modern warfare, and liberal-anarchist-socialist-communist armies.

To be sure, very little of the "humor puro" in Mihura's *Codorniz* was a Trojan Horse. The pieces that I have cited in this section are not a representative sample. The humorist Evaristo Acevedo, a long-time contributor to Laiglesia's *Codorniz*, insists that during the Mihura years the magazine contained 75 percent "humor abstracto" and 25 percent "crítica contemporánea" (252). The majority of the pieces by Tono, Mihura, and the rest of their Generation (along with mentors Fernández Flórez and Gómez de la Serna), holds true to the ideals of dehumanized humor. And yet there are those who argue that even the purest "codornicesco" humor, in its most abstract form, contained “una crítica implícita de la vida nacional, de la España triunfante,” and that dismantling “[el] tópico convencional y costumbrista era una manera de no estar de acuerdo con la tradición” (García Garreta 68).

Perhaps the strongest and most persistent voice among those who proclaim the progressive essence of the early *Codorniz* belongs to Antonio Mingote. The celebrated cartoonist, who readily admits to partiality where *La Codorniz* is concerned (“La Codorniz” 151; Prieto and Moreiro 9), insists that the magazine’s publication in postwar Spain is nothing less than “Acontecimiento Histórico Trascendental” (“La Codorniz” 151), “insuficientemente alabado [...] por historiadores y sociólogos y todavía a falta de la clamorosa ovación que se le debe por haber sido una de las causas de la conversión de millones de fanáticos, intransigentes y violentos españoles en los civilizados europeos que, más o menos, somos hoy” (Prieto y Moreiro 9). Mingote makes this argument in his induction speech at the Real Academia in 1988 and repeats it as often as he is asked to give his opinion on the matter. He appears to be the chief cheerleader for both *Codornices,* but when he talks of Transcendental Historical Events he is referring only to Mihura’s *Codorniz* (“La Codorniz” 159, “Dos momentos del humor español” 34). However successful that first *Codorniz* may have been at producing “el humor puro” “lleno de fantasía, de imaginación, de grandes mentiras sin malicia,” it could not keep itself from leading the generation that had just survived the Civil War toward a new way of thinking. Mihura’s drive to wean that generation from *cursilería* and cliché resulted in a critical mass of “burla inmisericorde de costumbres, lenguajes y actitudes, modos que sus abuelos habían considerado correctos y respetables” (Prieto and Moreiro 9), what Mingote refers to as “una bomba de relojería debajo de la silla, respetabilísima en aquel momento, de la pacatería, de la intransigencia, de la cursilería, de la rutina” (“Dos momentos” 33-34). Mingote credits *La*

Codorniz with effecting generational change against the current of El Movimiento. It produced "una evidente e irritante disonancia en una España que estaba en trance de recuperar el talante imperial, los valores eternos y el piadoso comportamiento general, amén de afianzarse como la reserva espiritual de Occidente. Era una disonancia sobre todo para los que tomaban al pie de la letra aquella palabrería" ("Dos momentos" 34). As evidence of *La Codorniz*'s irritating dissonance, Mingote cites the hatred that the publication inspired among "la gente llamada bienpensante, los que sólo oyendo su nombre ya palidecían de ira o enrojecían de indignación" ("La Codorniz" 157).

All of this subversive activity, argues Mingote, went unnoticed by censors and, for the most part, by the playful humorists themselves. It turned out that "el humor descomprometido," absurd and surreal and definitely non-political, by its mere existence questioned the status quo.

> Si los censores hubieran sido personas verdaderamente inteligentes y no unos simples fanáticos del dogmatismo y la decencia, habrían prohibido tajantemente la publicación de una revista que caricaturizaba todo lo que ellos consideraban respetable e intangible. Pero los censores atendían principalmente a tapar escotes, alargar faldas y respetar lo establecido. Sin pensar que lo establecido se apoyaba, principalmente, en todo lo que *La Codorniz* iba destrozando poco a poco. A veces tengo la impresión de que ni siquiera los que hacían *La Codorniz* tenían conciencia de su labor de dinamiteros. ("La Codorniz" 158)

According to Mingote, this ostensibly innocent bird, created by Miguel Mihura as a mere plaything to distract from the difficulties of postwar life, took on a life of its own à la Frankenstein's Monster. We can infer that Mihura, had he been alive for Mingote's speech, would have denied that his *Codorniz* had the paradigm-shifting effect on Spanish society that

Mingote so often attributes to it.[11] Indeed, Mihura does deny the idea of a transcendent *Codorniz* in at least one apocryphal exchange of letters (discussed above) between Serafín Cortisano and himself, as well as in the oft-cited, retroactive manifesto recorded in 1948 in *Mis memorias* (also discussed above). The father of *La Codorniz* defends the honor of his daughter, as any good Spanish father would, maintaining her reputation as a pure vessel while under his care. It is only after she has left his protection via marriage that he admits that she has demonstrated anything other than unsullied and unadulterated "humor codornicesco." After all, the father cannot always predict with perfect foresight the proclivities of his son-in-law. And Álvaro de Laiglesia, the metaphorical *yerno*, begins to exert his influence even before the honeymoon is over.

Laiglesia's *Codorniz*, from Adolescence to Senescence

If Francisco Franco's last reported act had been to shake his fist and groan "¡Maldita *Codorniz*!", Miguel Mihura might have torn out his hair and eaten his hat, or some other less clichéd and more Mihura-esque expression of disgust. Not because Mihura was an ardent supporter of the Falangist Movement and thus might have been distraught at losing El Caudillo, but because if he ever found that a humor magazine of his creation might have effected political change or in any way addressed “lo desagradable” or “lo violento” in real life, such a realization would have laid waste to his ivory tower of unadulterated *humor puro*.

---

[11] The historical consensus seems to be against Mihura, both in his characterization of the first *Codorniz* and in his formulation of "el humor nuevo español." Along with Mingote and Fernández Flórez, other friends of Mihura's attribute mysterious, paradigm-shifting powers to his *Codorniz*. Francisco Umbral, whom Mihura admired and befriended towards the end of his (Mihura's) life, expresses views similar to Mingote's regarding the social effects of the first *Codorniz*'s surreal humor. See, for example, his tribute to Mihura in *El País* the day after Mihura's death. "No hay que creer que *La Codorniz* de los años cuarenta era tan inocente como se ha dicho, porque hay en ella una subversión idiomática y una puesta en cuestión del estatus burgués que son muy corrosivas. Digamos que aquellos humoristas tiraban por elevación" ("Ramón, Jardiel, Mihura"). Eight years later, Umbral would refine his statement on "subversión idiomática" in another article for *El País*: "[Mihura y sus compañeros de *La Codorniz*] se estaban cargando el pequeño convencionalismo burgués, consagrado por Franco y su Victoria, mediante el costado más desprotegido: el lenguaje, las frases hechas, los tópicos conversacionales de la burguesía invicta e inculta" ("La Codorniz").

But even though Franco’s doctors did not pronounce *La Codorniz* as the cause of death, the publication seems to have inspired a certain amount of disgust in its creator. Like any artist who sees his once-groundbreaking aesthetic become the popular form of expression, Mihura came to regret the burgeoning popularity of *La Codorniz* and its manifestations in Spanish society. As he writes in his entry for *Enciclopedia del periodismo* (1966),

> La Codorniz le empezó a hacer gracia a mi tía, y a las señoras gordas que iban de visita a mi casa, y a una serie de chicos y chicas que empezaban a hablar ‘en codorniz,’ como ellos decían, lo cual significaba que *La Codorniz*, como las revistas anteriores, se había hecho burguesa, se había amanerado y, sobre todo, que su humor se había hecho fácil y estaba al alcance de cualquier imbécil. (“Periodismo de Humor” 449)

His beloved *Codorniz* had devolved, in his estimation, into a tame, bourgeois publication full of cheap jokes. And it is no secret who Mihura blames for this fall from grace: his handpicked successor, “el yerno” Álvaro de Laiglesia, whose differences with Mihura lie in their very disparate philosophies of humor—philosophies expounded in debating letters published by Laiglesia in *La Codorniz* in late1946 and early 1947.

It should be noted that the Mihura-Laiglesia debate does not turn on the ethics of using humor to assassinate heads of state. Álvaro’s stated objectives are neither so ambitious nor so violent. (Moderate hyperbole as a rhetorical device must be allowed in humor as well as in scholarly studies, but even the somewhat relaxed, post-1966 standards of censorship would have come down hard on anyone who wrote so much as a humorous hint at inhuming El Caudillo.) The published debate between Laiglesia and his mentor centers around the function of humor and the role of the humorist. Because of its implications for this study of humor under Franco, and particularly the social and political aspects of humor in a dictatorship, the debate deserves close examination.[12]

Suegro vs. Yerno, o las Nubes vs. el Pimentón

Mihura fires the first shot in December 1946 (issue 267), responding to an invitation by Álvaro to submit an article for an upcoming issue. This request, writes Mihura, comes as a surprise, as he considers his fractious aunts to be more capable of producing something that would fit in the new *Codorniz*. This is his assessment of the changes that Álvaro made after taking over in June 1944, in particular the popular section "¡NO! Crítica de la vida." Álvaro and his collaborators sought out "cualquier falta o deficiencia que pudiera, dentro de los estrechos márgenes de la censura, ser denunciada" (Prieto and Moreiro 22). The deficiencies included "el mal funcionamiento de los tranvías, del metro, [...] la escasa calidad del tabaco de picadura, etc., y, alguna vez, sobre las cartillas de racionamiento" and were usually followed by "las soluciones más peregrinas" (*ibid.*). But however strange and whimsical the proposed solution may be, the very idea of addressing the small annoyances of daily life raises the hackles on Mihura's neck. "Porque yo le confieso que desde que *La Codorniz,* en lugar de hablar de flores, de pájaros, de caballos blancos y de vacas rubias, habla del precio del pimentón y del precio de las patatas, y de si hay queso o de si no hay queso [...], no se me ocurre nada que escribir para ese semanario" (Galán 73). He suggests that his aunt would do a better job writing the article that Álvaro has in mind, "porque, además de saber el precio exacto de todas las legumbres, [...] es una de esas señoras que, como ahora *La Codorniz*, se quejan de todo: de que los tranvías no funcionan bien; de que en el Metro hay poca luz; de que no hay lombarda; [...] de que hay muchos coches oficiales y de que no hay suficientes bancos en el Retiro" (*ibid.*).

---

[12] See pages 73-77 of Diego Galán's *Reírse en España?* for a faithful transcription of Mihura's initial letter, Álvaro's response, Mihura's follow-up, and a statement by Mihura regarding the debate; or the sections corresponding to 1944-46 and 1947-49 in Prieto and Moreiro's *Antología* for a slightly abbreviated version of Mihura's initial letter and Álvaro's response, plus a letter to Álvaro from Neville.

Mihura goes on to argue that this cantankerous attitude does not fit his purposes in bringing *La Codorniz* to life. Complaining about mundane matters, however jokingly, is the exact opposite of what he wanted to do in his magazine, as he explains in what may be the first of his retroactive manifestos (reprinted in Galán 73-74):

> Y recuerdo que *La Codorniz* nació para tener una actitud sonriente ante la vida; para quitarles importancia a las cosas; para tomarle el pelo a la gente que veía la vida demasiado en serio; para acabar con los cascarrabias; para reírse del tópico y del lugar común; para inventar un mundo nuevo, irreal y fantástico, y hacer que la gente olvidase el mundo incómodo y desagradable en que vivía. Para decir a nuestros lectores: "No se preocupen ustedes de que el mundo esté hecho un asco. Una serie de tipos de mal humor lo han estropeado con sus críticas, con sus discursos, con sus violencias. Y ya no tiene remedio. Vamos a olvidarlo y a procurar no enredarlo más. Y aquí reunidos, mientras la gente discute y se mata, nosotros, en un mundo aparte, vamos a hablar de las mariposas, de las ranas, de los gitanos, de la luna y de las hormigas. Y nos vamos a reír de los señores serios y barbudos que siempre están dando la lata buscándole los pies al gato."

Here we find a space, his "mundo aparte," that in his 1948 *Memorias* he will describe in terms of play. The purpose of such a space is to forget "el mundo incómodo y desagradable," a world "hecho un asco" by "unos tipos de mal humor [...] con sus críticas, con sus discursos, con sus violencias." (Directly addressing violent malefactors seems out of character for Mihura; perhaps this is why Prieto and Moreiro omit those phrases from their anthologized version of his letter.)

And because these disagreeable men have left the world broken beyond repair, the only solution for Mihura is to forget, to retreat to the confines of *La Codorniz* and play while in the real world everyone else argues and kills each other.

The escapist pessimism behind Mihura's playful abstractions is precisely what Álvaro de Laiglesia refuses to accept. In his response to Mihura's letter (in the next issue), he goes so far as to make the following quixotic declaration: "Soy menos cerebral que usted, y en lugar de pensar en la luna, que ya está tan vista, cojo mi estilográfica como una lanza y lucho por un mundo real más limpio, más bueno y más confortable. [...] Yo combato para convertir la tierra en una Jauja próspera y tranquila" (Galán 75). Rather than escaping from "las pequeñas causas que producen el mal humor," Álvaro addresses them directly in his "Crítica de la Vida" in hopes of destroying them (*ibid.*). Interestingly, he refers to his work as a kind of therapy or "tratamiento" in which he tries to restore "el optimismo perdido" to "gentes gruñonas como su tía" (*ibid.*).

In some ways Laiglesia admits that his crusade is a foolish one that requires a quixotic stubbornness. "Si hay tanto ceño fruncido en el mundo, es porque nadie ha sido lo bastante terco para combatir las eternas y a veces ridículas causas de estos fruncimientos" (*ibid.*). He argues, however, that Mihura's alternative is even more naive.

> Pero mi Jauja no se consigue haciendo chistes ni trepando a las nubes. Usted, con sus pájaros, sus vacas rubias y con todas esas cosas tan chistosas que menciona en su carta, ni desterró los tópicos, ni pudo hacer olvidar a la gente la dureza del mundo actual. Usted quiso acabar con las cascarrabias haciéndoles burla, y eso es tan difícil como civilizar negros del Congo sacándoles la lengua. (*ibid.*)

Laiglesia clearly disagrees with the assessment that Mingote would make decades later (beginning with his 1988 speech at the Real Academia). Álvaro in 1946 sees no evidence that, after three years of reading *La Codorniz*' fantastical jokes (1941-44), Spanish society has become any happier or any less set in its ways. And so he dedicates himself to his quest, foolish though it may be, and bids the father of his "bride" a fond farewell. "Que usted lo pase bien en su nube irreal en compañía de sus poéticos bichitos. Yo me quedo aquí [...] del brazo de la hija que usted abandonó, luchando fanáticamente por el pimentón nuestro de cada día" (76).

Mihura responds to Laiglesia's response with predictable disbelief at the naiveté demonstrated by his editorial son-in-law and literary offspring. (Neville points out these relationships in his own response, calling Álvaro an "impetuoso adolescente.") He points out the obvious *cursilería* of any writer calling his pen a lance and admits that he had expected more humility and sophistication from his protégé. Mihura specifically uses the phrase "de vuelta de las cosas" in referring to his own idea of a humorist (Galán 76), a phrase that echoes Fernández Flórez's statement (in 1945) that humor is "de vuelta de la violencia y de la tristeza" ("El humor" 15) and which Mihura uses again in his tribute to Camba: "Estaba tan de vuelta de las cosas que no intentaba arreglar nada ni poner tratamiento a ningún mal de nuestro tiempo, quizá porque sospechaba que era inútil a más de pretencioso" ("Solos, sin Camba"). The fact that Álvaro was only 22 years old when he took over *La Codorniz*, with five years' experience mostly under Mihura's tutelage, perhaps justifies his mentor's characterization of him as lacking experience. Conversely, of all of the humorists whom Mihura brought from *La Ametralladora* to *La Codorniz*, Laiglesia is the only one who actually experienced fighting in a war. He missed the better part of first two years of *La Codorniz,* first as a member of the División Española de Voluntarios, commonly referred to as the División Azul because of its strong ties to the Falangist movement. (Laiglesia, who took pains to keep himself separate from the Falange, preferred the official name.) He was seriously wounded in Russia, and after his recovery returned to Germany as a war correspondent for *Informaciones* (*Ocho humoristas* 377). Actual combat apparently does not qualify as one of the experiences by which Mihura defines a humorist, or "las cosas" from which he insists one must be "de vuelta."

In Mihura's view, Laiglesia's lack of applicable experience is what leads him to actually try to solve problems with humor. Álvaro's youthful zeal causes him to depart from the ways of the true disciple of "el humor nuevo español." In doing so, he goes against one of Ramón's laws of humor. "No se propone el humorismo corregir o enseñar, pues tiene ese dejo de amargura del que cree que todo es un poco inútil" (*Humorismo* 50-51). Mihura, as discussed above, cites his master, chapter and verse, in his own *Memorias*: "el humor verdadero no se propone enseñar o corregir, porque no es ésta su misión. Lo único que pretende el humor es que, por un instante, nos salgamos de nosotros mismos" (305). There is only one god of humor—Ramón—and his prophet is Mihura. Laiglesia's topical turn as director of *La Codorniz* directly opposes two canonical principles of *humorismo*, as seen in the passages above: Álvaro denounces the escapist ideal hinted at in "[salirnos] de nosotros mismos," and he does seek to teach and correct because he refuses to believe that such attempts are "un poco inútil." For Mihura, such intentions disqualify his successor as a humorist and move him instead into the realm of politics, as the prophet makes clear in his response to his son-in-law's heresy:

> Pero si usted, al escribir en *La Codorniz,* no pretende que sus lectores pasen el rato, que ya es bonito, sino lo que pretende seriamente es que en Madrid y en Barcelona [...] haya niños bien educados, y calles espaciosas, y grifos con agua caliente, y tranvías acogedores, y ascensores que funcionen bien, y Metros holgados, y más bancos en el Retiro, entonces está claro que usted no quiere ser humorista, sino que lo que quiere es ser concejal [...]. (Galán 76)

From Frogs and Butterflies to Ministers and Caudillos

> *Aforísticamente: creo que* La Codorniz *es la cantidad de humor que cabe en España sin meterse con los ministros.*
>
> —José María Pemán (in 1951, qtd. in *Un humorista* 19)

Although Álvaro de Laiglesia never actually entered politics, there is no question that, as his 33-year tenure progressed, *La Codorniz* increasingly engaged political and social issues, breaking more and more frequently from the avant-garde ideals of art as "juego y nada más" and "una cosa sin trascendencia" (Ortega y Gasset 14). The most obvious evidence of this engagement is the long list of fines and penalties imposed by censors. Laiglesia's book *La Codorniz sin jaula*, published the year of his death (1981), documents the magazine's infractions and its director's counterarguments. But one need not look beyond the contents of the magazine to note the dramatic departure from the abstract humor of the Other Generation.

Many of the most famous Spanish *viñetistas* of the twentieth century come into their own as contributors during Álvaro's tenure: Mingote, Chumy Chúmez, Máximo, Summers, Forges, and Gila, to name a few. Gila's *viñetas* demonstrate quite clearly the topical turn of *La Codorniz,* both in their content and in the timing of their appearance. He submitted several cartoons to the magazine during Mihura's time as director, but it was not until September of 1945, a year into Laiglesia's tenure, that he finally succeeded in publishing his work in the most admired and exclusive humor publication in the country. The cartoon that earned him a position as a regular contributor featured a soldier addressing his commanding officer. A headless horse stands in the background, and the soldier, pointing to the horse's head he is holding under his right arm, says, "Mi capitán, se me ha roto el caballo" (Ortega and Lobato 61, 106; *Y entonces nací yo* 260). This type of dark, *tremendista* humor is present in many of Gila's works in *La Codorniz*. Álvaro felt no qualms about publishing Gila's war-related cartoons separated from the rest of the page by a red, banner-like border with the word "¡Guerra!" repeated over and over (see, for example, the issue published April 17, 1949). Scenes of violence and poverty often featured men who had lost limbs in the war or who were in the process of losing them, as in the *viñeta* published April 24, 1949, in which a large projectile has just decapitated a still-standing officer and a soldier on the field telephone says, "Aquí el puesto de mando. Digan al asistente Felipe que no traiga la gorra del capitán, porque ya no la necesita." Such topics would never have made it into Mihura's *Codorniz* among its collection of butterflies and clouds.

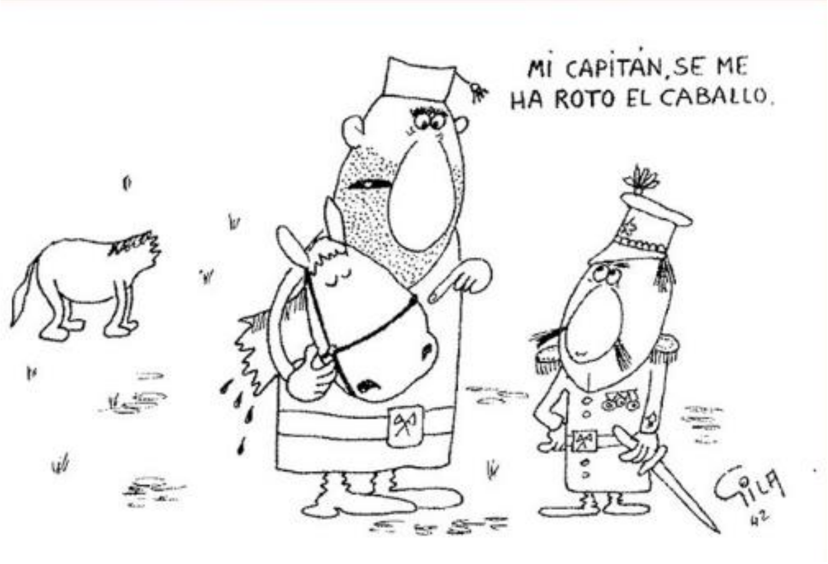

MI CAPITAN, SE ME HA ROTO EL CABALLO.
GILA 42

Figure 8: Miguel Gila Cuesta, "El Caballo Roto"

This is not to say that Álvaro's *Codorniz* completely abandoned the abstract humor that had defined it during its first three years of publication. Despite their philosophical disagreements with Laiglesia, Mihura, Tono, Herreros, and other proponents of "el humor puro" continued to contribute pieces (Herreros created almost every cover well into the 1950s). In the 1950-52 section of *Antología*, Prieto and Moreiro include a lovers' dialogue by Tono that is reminiscent of his absurd "Primera tarde" (1941-42) and Mihura's "Alicia y Roberto" (1928). In

"Amor y realidad" a professor of botany woos his intended with trite phrases such as "Para mí, sólo tú existes en el mundo," "lo más grande que existe en el mundo, eres tú," "por ti soy capaz de todo," "para mí, no eres como las otras mujeres," and "tú lo eres todo para mí." His girlfriend, however, questions the accuracy of each statement. "Entonces, ¿para ti no existen los arrabales, ni la preponderancia, ni las ensaladillas de mariscos, ni la terapéutica, ni Bilbao, ni la difusión, ni la esgrima?" "Entonces, ¿soy yo más grande que los balnearios, y que las compañías de teléfonos, y que Barcelona?" "Entonces, ¿eres capaz de sostener en la punta de la nariz un paralelogramo, y sobre él una silla, y sobre la silla una pelota amaestrada, en la cual esté subida María, la criada [...]?" As in previous dialogues, Tono demonstrates the ridiculous inanity of so many commonplace phrases, a perennial target of *el humorismo*. The dialogue could have appeared in Mihura's *Codorniz* or even in *Gutiérrez*, but unlike the couples in "La primera tarde" and "Alicia y Roberto," the botanist and his girlfriend do not inhabit the same world. He deals in *cursilerías*, and she refuses to accept his clichés, almost as if he grew up pre-*Codorniz* and she grew up post-*Codorniz.* The blend of abstraction and reality reflect the changing ideals under Álvaro's leadership.

The changing philosophy was not only noticeable in the content of individual *viñetas* and articles. The very format of the magazine opened up to new spaces that, like Álvaro's "¡No! Crítica de la Vida," addressed real-life issues, often in a section that by design satirized the government. El Papelín General satirized the Boletín Oficial del Estado in language at least, if not in content. In 1951 the publication debuted a section entitled "La Cárcel de Papel," in which concepts, institutions, and individuals were tried and sentenced to "incarceration" for seven days and one hour.[13] Evaristo Acevedo took over the weekly feature after the first two weeks and wrote every entry through the rest of the magazine's run. His first "prisoner" was Fernando Álvarez Sotomayor, the director of the Prado Museum, who published a letter in *Madrid* calling all surrealists "locos." Álvarez brought a suit against *La Codorniz* but the suit was dismissed (*Teoría e interpretación* 254). In later decades, especially in the early 70s when the by-then storied publication found itself competing against *Hermano Lobo* (1972-76), *La Codorniz* added more direct political satire with sections like "Politicomics," "Política ficción," and "Polititeca" (all by José García Martínez-Calín, "Pgarcía").

---

[13] In his memoir *Un humorista en la España de Franco* (1976), Evaristo Acevedo includes a news clipping of *Le Monde* which describes "La Cárcel de Papel" thus: "une rubrique [...] où, chaque semaine, elle 'incarcère' la

As noted above, *La Codorniz* under Álvaro had a long history of friction with censorship. However, the publication contained many pieces that satirized politics without being sanctioned, often because they did not specify any minister or officer in particular. One salient example is a dialogue by Laiglesia, "Si los políticos hablaran como en sus discursos," (included in Prieto and Moreiro, 1953-55). The two unnamed politicians greet each other:

> —Yo te saludo, forjador de auténticas realidades sociales.
>
> —Y yo tiendo mis brazos henchidos de hermandad.
>
> —¿Hinchados?
>
> —No, hombre: henchidos.
>
> —¡Ah, vamos! Permíteme entonces que corresponda a tu salutación con un fraternal abrazo exento de turbios regionalismos.
>
> —Grandes aplausos, hombre.
>
> —Murmullos de aprobación, chico.

---

personnalité artistique, journalistique ou politique qui a dit le plus grand nombre de bêtises les jours précédents ou s'est fait le plus remarqué par son verbiage" (221).

The conversation continues, bursting with the same ridiculous bombast, touching on business dealings—“he montado una fábrica de galletas, que condensa los prístinos valores de la harina vernácula”—and summer vacation—“¿Y dónde vas a pasar la ubérrima estación del estío, tan pródigo en cosechas gracias a las fecundas realidades agrarias?” Finally they take leave of each other:

> —[...] Y permíteme que dé fin a mis palabras, porque se hace tarde y la Historia debe continuar su marcha inexorable.
>
> —Tienes razón: debemos separarnos, aunque continuemos marchando por distintos caminos hacia un objetivo común. ¿Tú por dónde vas?
>
> —Yo por la ruta del progreso, hacia un mañana esplendoroso que se vislumbra en lontananza. ¿Y tú?
>
> —Yo por la senda de la productividad, que conduce al bienestar a los pueblos que saben tocar la flauta en el concierto mundial.
>
> —Pues grandes aplausos, hombre.
>
> —Murmullos de aprobación, chico.

Laiglesia continues the tradition of cliché-ridden dialogues, but instead of targeting *cursi* representations of supposedly romantic scenes, he targets the political discourse in Spain that is equally replete with meaningless commonplaces. By removing pompous political discourse from its habitual context (a technique used to perfection in Gila’s monologues, as we will see in the next chapter), Álvaro highlights its ridiculous absurdity.

After the 1966 “Ley Fraga” (Ley de prensa e imprenta) did away with prior restraint (“la censura previa”) and generally—if cryptically—relaxed censorship standards in Spain, *La Codorniz* ramped up its assault on the Movement. Even before passage of the law, *La Codorniz* featured a caricature (by Julio Cebrián) of Manuel Fraga Iribarne, then Minister of Information and Tourism and the driving force behind the new law, cradling the law in his arms like a proud new father—"la primera caricatura de la epoca franquista" according to a radio interview with Antonio Fraguas alias "Forges" (del Cerro). Cebrián outdid himself three years later (December 1968) with a cover that caricatured Franco's entire cabinet seated in their places at a meeting of the Consejo de Ministros. Only Franco himself is missing, as Cebrián drew the meeting from the Caudillo's perspective and thus replaced him with the viewer.

The appearance of *Hermano Lobo* in 1972 forced Laiglesia to step up the political commentary, an escalation that eventually brought about the government's decision to shut down *La Codorniz* for four months (February 11-June 17, 1973) and fine its director 200,000 pesetas. Various offenses led to this unprecedented punishment (with the exception of the permanent closure of the newspaper *Madrid* in 1967), most of which fall under the sin of "personalizar," i.e., singling out a particular individual rather than criticizing institutions or classes (García Garreta 58-60, *Un humorista* 221-22). Many blame the catastrophic closure on Acevedo's incarceration of Torcuato Fernández Miranda, then Secretario General del Movimiento, in the issue published on December 31, 1972 (Prieto and Moreiro 36, García Garreta 58-60). Fernández Miranda's sentencing was the culmination of several weeks in which the former was urged by Laiglesia to incarcerate one of Franco's ministers every week (Prieto and Moreiro 36, *Un humorista* 213).

Acevedo charges Fernández Miranda with the crime of making contradictory and impossibly convoluted statements on "el asociacionismo político" (Spain's way of suggesting that everyone could participate politically without actually allowing political parties). For example, Acevedo quotes a statement by Fernández to the newspaper *Ya* in November 1972:

"No caeré en la trampa de decir sí o no al asociacionismo político, porque de este modo no se esclarecería el tema. El tema está en ver si diciendo sí al asociacionismo político, se dice también sí o no, o no se dice sí, sino no, a los partidos políticos." Acevedo comments on this statement: "Exacto. Leyéndolo varias veces en la paz del campo—y lejos del mundanal ruido—se comprende la hondura del tema." Strung together and held up to the light of logic, Fernández's baroque statements become absurdly, laughably inane.

As if it were not enough to make "paper" political prisoners of Franco's ministers, the January 1973 issues mercilessly mocked El Caudillo's end-of-year speech, at times obliquely and at others with shocking directness. Many contributors alluded to Franco's invitation to "dialogar" and "ejercer una eficiente crítica de la acción política de cada día" (Franco Bahamonde 5), as in a series of cartoons by Pablo San José García featuring larger birds "dialoguing" with smaller birds in *boinas*. "Sí: nosotros admitimos el diálogo," says the largest bird in a top hat, "siempre y cuando vosotros no digáis ni pío" (January 7, 1973; p. 6).

The most direct criticism of Franco's speech appears in the "¡Oh, qué tiempos!" column of the January 28, 1973 issue, titled "El sentido común." The column was written by Carlos Robles Piquer (under the *nom de plume* of Juan Español, hijo), who would be named Spain's ambassador to Libya later that same year. Robles begins his critique by explicitly naming Franco: "Dice el sabio refranero celtibérico: «El sentido común es el menos común de los sentidos». Por ello, quien más sentido común tenga será también el menos común de los españoles. En la Celtiberia contemporánea sabemos muy bien que el menos común de los españoles se llama Francisco Franco Bahamonde [...]." He goes on to declare Franco's end-of-year speech a stellar example of El Caudillo's "common sense." Robles addresses and comments on each section of the speech and points out the inconsistencies between Franco's words and statements by high-ranking officials of his own government.

> Este contraste, entre todo lo que hemos oído de altas fuentes oficiales en 1972 y lo que acaba de decir la fuente más alta de todas, indica algo. Indica que la fuente más alta de todas también tiene…
>
> **EL SENTIDO DEL HUMOR**
>
> Este admirable sentido del humor de Don Francisco Franco, que Dios guarde y aguarde muchos años, es otro de los motivos por los que hemos querido dedicarle, libérrimamente, esta columna de LA CODORNIZ. (January 28, 1973; p. 3)

Simply referring to Franco by name produces a shock, but playfully suggesting that the notoriously unfunny dictator pranked his own *patria* makes Robles Piquer's piece brazenly subversive. And considering that "El sentido común" was only one of many accumulated infractions from late 1972 and early 1973, the government's reaction—temporary closure and an exorbitant fine—feels almost understated.

Under Laiglesia, *La Codorniz* lived up to the subtitle that Álvaro added to the cover beginning in late 1951: "La revista más audaz para el lector más inteligente." The storied publication is a singular example of humor that effected social and political change. Evaristo Acevedo credits Laiglesia's "forcejeo con la censura" with opening up greater wiggle room within the suffocating *censura previa* of the 1938 Ley de Prensa, a task that few other publications dared undertake.

> *La Codorniz* aparecía así como el más significado reducto desde el cual se iba conquistando paulatinamente una mayor libertad de expresión. Se llegó a decir que *La Codorniz* era "la única revista seria que había en España" y esto, que parece una

> paradoja, responde a la realidad de una época—ya superada—en que sólo era *La Codorniz*, sólo eran los humoristas, quienes sabían, podían y se atrevían a tocar ciertos temas. (*Teoría e interpretación* 255)

Acevedo's assessment comprehends the ability of humor to address topics that cannot be broached in serious discourse, an ability suggested in Freud's assertion that humor circumvents (internal) censorship (119-121). More importantly, Acevedo thus characterizes Laiglesia as a humorist with both the philosophy and the force of will necessary to effect such a change.

Acevedo is not the only contributor to *La Codorniz* who gives the publication the ironic title of "revista seria." Antonio Mingote paraphrases Wenceslao Fernández Flórez and applies the title to Mihura's *Codorniz* as well. According to Mingote, Fernández

> comentaba con exquisita ironía cuánto le molestaba el que La Codorniz fuera un periódico demasiado serio, y lo explica: una labor seria es luchar contra la cursilería, burlarse del encorsetamiento que se impone a la infancia, enseñar lo que hay de vulgar e inútil en los sentimentalismos al uso que buscan su amparo en los lugares comunes de la versificación. Ocuparse de todo esto es una labor bienhechora, filantrópica, de salubridad mental; es lo que hace La Codorniz. Es lo serio. ("La Codorniz" 158)

Once again, Mihura's supposedly pure, abstract humor—innocent play—becomes a force for social change, despite his strict definitions and manifestos that insistently echo Ramón's assertion that humor "no se propone [...] corregir o enseñar." What Mihura proposed to do with humor and what he accomplished were two very different things.

Both *Codornices* provide a complex answer to the questions with which we began this chapter on popular political humor. Is humor nothing more than nonsense, play for play's sake, a palliative that makes life more bearable but that does not affect the rest of life (the serious parts)?

Or is humor a tool, a weapon, and a sense-making device?[14] *La Codorniz* deconstructs the (admittedly false) binaries presented in these questions. Mihura's most abstract humor simultaneously serves as escapist play and a subversive tool, as we saw in the "Ojos verdes" *viñeta*. And when Álvaro de Laiglesia turns up the topical, concrete humor—often without abandoning the anti-*cursi* methodology of "el humor puro"—*La Codorniz* cathartically attacks the absurdities of Francoist Spain. This synthesis of humor theory, demonstrated by a variety of quite disparate contributors to *La Codorniz* over the course of more than three decades, manifests itself in a more concentrated form in the monologues of Miguel Gila.

---

[14] This dichotomy between pure art and social engagement is also seen in the differences between the avant-garde and the social novel. The latter has also been called *realismo crítico, socialrealismo, behaviorismo, objetivismo, realismo socialista,* and *realismo histórico* (see Álamo 127); and its opposition to the dehumanized aesthetic of the avant-garde is clear in this manifesto by Alfonso Grosso: "difícilmente podría cumplir una misión estética el hombre que no es capaz de ver los problemas sociales de su tiempo, que […] condicionan siempre nuestro sentido estético, o tienden, al menos, inevitablemente, a modificarlo […]. Pretendo despertar […] una inquietud política y cultural en mi país […]. Mi actitud es de denuncia […]. Intento, como otros hombres de mi generación, testimoniar e inquietar… Adopto una postura de denuncia y, desde luego, francamente *engagée*" (qtd. in Álamo 137).

Chapter 3: Gila and His Enemy

“El maestro”

In 2011, the Campofrío Food Group ran a Christmas advertising campaign, “Cómicos,” that had very little to do with food and everything to do with the relevance of humor in Spain. According to Mónica Moro, creative director for the ad agency McCann Erickson, the idea was to remind a nation in the middle of EU-imposed austerity measures, a nation suffocated by “una guerra de mercados,” of its sense of humor. “Los españoles somos únicos en el humor, siempre tenemos ganas de disfrutar, de mirar hacia delante. Y eso no nos lo va a quitar ni Merkel, ni la prima de riesgo, ni la deuda” (Piña). The ad follows several prominent Spanish humorists from different decades, including Forges, Millán Salcedo, Josema Yuste, Fofito, Fernando Esteso and Andrés Pajares, as they make their way to a kind of picnic in a cemetery. The voiceover explains that these comedians have a secret pact: “al primer síntoma de que el mal humor nos está ganando la batalla, nos encontramos allí donde algunos dicen que el maestro descansa.” After exchanging pleasantries and old jokes (and eating sandwiches with Campofrío chorizo), they gather around an isolated gravesite. Josema Yuste approaches the tomb and asks, “Maestro, ¿se puede ver cada día el lado bueno de todo con la que está cayendo?” Moments later, a cell phone rings. Millán Salcedo answers, “Sí, dígame,” and the camera cuts to an older man on the other end who asks, “¿Es el enemigo?” He is on a television screen, wearing a military uniform, crouched in a sandbag fortification. “¿Podrían parar la guerra un momento?” he continues. The call is from “el maestro” himself, Miguel Gila, at whose tomb this eclectic group of humorists has gathered for inspiration.

It is fair to say that no study of Spanish humor during the “Régimen” would be complete without including Miguel Gila, although that statement undersells his influence and importance.

Gila's career as a humorist started in the early postwar era with his first published *viñeta* in 1940 and continued well through the Transition to democracy until the last days of his life in 2001. He became known to Spanish-speaking audiences on four continents in every medium available during his lifetime: print, radio, theater, television, film, and eventually Internet. However, it is not his longevity or popularity that makes him important, but rather his popularization of a unique brand of humor with which he addressed social and political issues that included the Civil War and the poverty, hunger, and injustice of the long postwar period.

In the years since Franco's death, Gila's life story has become a major part of his brand, and his humor is increasingly considered autobiographical. As this study is limited to humor under Franco, it will not examine Gila's autobiographies except as commentaries on his humorous works. We thus avoid not only the pitfalls of basing our interpretation of Gila's material on "real"-life events but also the complications caused by his unreliability as a narrator of his life history. However, because the Spanish public and press have inextricably mixed Gila's biography with his comedic works, a summary of the salient moments of his history will help us better understand the interpretations of his work and why so many connect it with his poor childhood in Madrid, his adolescence in the Civil War, and his imprisonment and struggles during the postwar period.

Miguel Gila Cuesta was born in 1919 to a young widow and raised by his paternal grandparents in the Chamartín neighborhood of Madrid. He left school in his early teens in order to supplement his grandfather's meager income. When the Civil War broke out, Gila was seventeen, working in a machine shop and a member of the Socialist Youth movement. Consequently, he joined up with the Republican forces after lying about his age.

Gila relates several wartime experiences in his memoir *Y entonces nací yo* (1995), "aguafuertes" (as he calls them) that range from the horrific to the humorous. But one event above all others defines his time as a Republican soldier, perhaps because it is the most often repeated and thus the most well-known. In a section of his memoir titled "Nos fusilaron mal," Gila tells how one night in December of 1938 his captors, a troop of Moroccan irregulars, dragged him and thirteen other Republican prisoners of war to a field for a strange hybrid of a barbecue and firing squad. In a tale reminiscent of *Soldados de Salamina* and Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre,* Gila recounts how the drunken firing squad missed him completely, how he played dead for hours until the last executioner had fallen asleep, and finally walked away, carrying a wounded corporal whom he found moaning among the corpses.

According to Gila, he turned himself in to a group of Legionnaires who told him that a column of captured Republican combatants would pass by the next morning. With no way to escape to Republican-held territory, he joined the caravan of prisoners in their march to the prison camp at Valsequillo, where he would pass the remaining months of the war. But real freedom would not come until several years after the war's end. Within weeks of returning home (to his grandparents' flat in Madrid) he was arrested, supposedly for a crime unwittingly committed during the first days of the war. Gila spent the next few months in three different prison camps. He was released in July 1939 but in 1940 was conscripted for what would end up being four years of forced service in the Army (once under the same general, Juan Yagüe, "Butcher of Badajoz," whose troops had tried to execute him).

Gila's long career as a humorist began as a creative outlet during those years of military service. He published his first *viñeta* in the magazine *Domingo* in 1940 and began working for Radio Zamora as a sports commentator and host (Ortega and Lobato 103). In 1951 Gila decided to go to Madrid to try to break into theater. He was a somewhat known commodity, having published *viñetas* in *La Codorniz* since September of 1945, originally under the *nom de plume* XIII but eventually (as early as 1949) simply signing with his last name. But he continued to struggle to make ends meet, until August 24, 1951, when he performed a monologue at the Teatro Fontalba. Gila would later claim that he crashed that night's revue, defying the established comedic actors who had refused to perform his work. Others insist that they tried to convince him to perform and finally shoved him out into the spotlight. But newspaper ads from that day list him among various performers slated to appear that night as part of a tribute to one of those actors, his friend Antonio Casal (*ABC* August 24, 1951, page 19).[1] However he got there, Gila took the stage that night in a generic soldier's uniform (topped off by his now iconic helmet), delivered his first war monologue, and instantly became a star.

If we had to choose just one work to represent Miguel Gila's career as a humorist, without a doubt it would the descendant of his Fontalba debut, the routine referenced in the Campofrío ad: his best-known monologue about war, commonly titled "¿Es el enemigo?" This is not to say that Gila has not contributed to Spanish humor in other ways. Many of his plays, theatrical revues, and movies were well liked and commercially successful. And his numerous *viñetas* continue to stand on their own merits. He had already published several in *La Codorniz* and other periodicals long before he began to perform his monologues; and he continued drawing through the rest of his career, publishing one cartoon a day in *El Periódico de Catalunya* from

---

[1] Unsurprisingly, Gila's memoir often reads as a rebuttal to his critics. To those who accused him of collaborating with the regime as an artist, he responds by criticizing the Nationalist uprising, relating his own heroics during the war, enumerating his run-ins with censors, and explaining the political reasons for his self-exile. And to those who tried at some point to take credit for discovering him, he responds by inventing his triumphant, against-all-odds debut. His account of that first performance at the Fontalba works as a rebuttal to both camps of critics, as he explains that he took his apocryphal leap of faith in order to "encontrar un camino en una posguerra de vencedores y vencidos, siendo yo uno de los vencidos" (302).

1995 almost to the day he died. This rich, thematically complex corpus of print work establishes Gila as an important component of Spain's boom in graphic humor during the second half of the twentieth century. But even his achievements as a graphic artist are not what first come to mind when Spaniards talk about Gila. The most common representation of Gila depicts him wearing a khaki green helmet and coat, speaking into the handset of an old black telephone. And this signature image goes hand in hand with his masterpiece, the more famous of his two soldier monologues: "¿Es el enemigo?"

By Gila's own account, it was a soldier monologue that launched him to stardom, and he continued to perform and add to his repertoire of war-related acts throughout his career. Though he tweaked them here and there over the years, the variations on "¿Es el enemigo?" and its prototype, "Mi primera guerra," share the same thematic core. Both monologues touch on issues common to any war: equipment problems, non-combatants, spies, impending attacks, and negotiations. Both are equal parts absurdity and dark humor. Both question war in general as a construct and subtly target one war in particular.

Reviewers hailed this dense text and the monologues that followed it as a new kind of humor, though in many ways it was merely the kind of humor that Gila had already refined in print and had for the first time brought to the stage. He synthesized the opposing currents of Mihura's and Laiglesia's humor discussed in the previous chapter. The impact of Gila's innovations to humor crossed borders and oceans, bringing him lucrative performance contracts not only throughout Spain but in Mexico, Cuba, and Argentina as well. His first album, a 45-RPM vinyl record titled *Gila ... y su teléfono* with "¿Es el enemigo?" on the A side, stoked the demand for his successful international tours, where audiences that had heard the recordings came to see him in the flesh. And in Spain the fame of his monologues and his radio performances created a built-in audience for every revue, play, and film that he produced afterward.

Gila's iconic soldier monologues, his springboard to fame, will be the primary focus of this chapter. First, we will present key components of two versions of "Mi primera guerra" and a compilation of the numerous iterations of "¿Es el enemigo?" together with a brief history of the monologues' evolution.[2] Second, we will consider the different elements of humor that make these monologues so effective and unique. And finally, we will examine the reception and interpretations of the monologues, and offer an argument for Gila's unofficial military career as essential "reading" not only in this study of Spanish humor under Franco but in any study of Spain's twentieth century.

Gila's Wars: A Compilation

The history of Gila's soldier monologues begins in his series of war cartoons, many of which were published in *La Codorniz.* Although they share the same subject matter and the jokes are similar, his *viñetas* feel darker than his monologues because of the simple fact that his drawings by their very nature provide a visual referent for the words of the joke. The depictions of gory violence lend to Gila's visual humor a *tremendista* tone that remains somewhat muted in his monologues.[3] His treatment of war in the medium of his *viñetas*, while necessarily darker because of the visuals, allowed him to experiment with the central themes and the individual jokes that would end up in his monologues. As the journalist and humorist Ángel Palomino writes in his introduction to a 1957 book of Gila's cartoons, Gila's performances are essentially "una reelaboración de sus chistes dibujados" (*Gila y sus gentes* n. pag.).[4]

---

[2] For a biographical approach to Gila's monologues, see *Miguel Gila: Vida y obra de un genio*. Juan Carlos Ortega and Marc Lobato trace the origins of much of Gila's work to his childhood in Madrid and, obviously, his experiences in the Civil War (taking Gila at his word where the evidence does not contradict him).

[3] José Antonio Llera aptly labels Gila's humor as *tremendista* in his study of *El humor verbal y visual de* La Codorniz (386).

Many of Gila's cartoons center around the same willfully ignored violence seen in the *viñetas* about the broken horse and the decapitated captain (discussed in the previous chapter). A cartoon in the April 7, 1949 issue, for example, depicts three soldiers staring at a fourth whose uniform is riddled with holes. The soldier explains, "He llenado mi uniforme de agujeros. Así, aunque me peguen un tiro, no se me nota." Gila's soldier displaces the serious possibility of a violent death with an absurd concern for the effects of that violence on his uniform. Bullets may perforate his body, but his uniform's appearance will remain unaltered. As we will see, Gila's monologues perform this same act of displacing or masking violence.

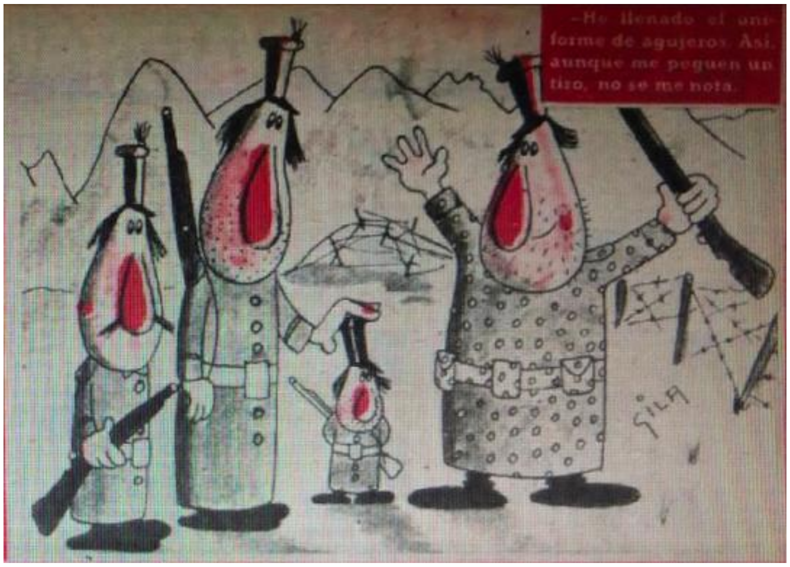

—He llenado el uniforme de agujeros. Así, aunque me peguen un tiro, no se me nota.
GILA

Figure 9: Miguel Gila Cuesta, "He llenado mi uniforme de agujeros."

Gila's cartoons and monologues hide the violence of war by shifting it to a less lethal context. Two *viñetas* (featured in the 1947-49 section of Prieto and Moreiro) depict soldiers in everyday city life. In one, three soldiers receive directions from a short civilian: "Para ir a la guerra tienen que torcer a la derecha y luego seguir por la segunda calle a mano izquierda." Here war is simply another common destination in the city, like a church or a market. Another cartoon from the same period (also included in Moreiro and Prieto 1947-49) shows two soldiers shopping for ammunition at an *armería* like houskeepers making last-minute preparations for an unexpected dinner party. "Deme usted una peseta de balas," says the taller soldier, "acaba de estallar la guerra."

---

[4] José María Pérez González (the political cartoonist Peridis) also connects Gila's cartoons with his monologues. "No era dibujante, tenía una torpeza en el dibujo, pero esa misma torpeza era su arte. [Su estilo visual era] infantil, pero muy efectivo, muy acorde con los *sketches*" (*Imprescindibles*).

The play of shifting contexts also flows in the other direction, with everyday concerns transposed to the theater of war. Another *viñeta* featured in the 1947-49 section of Moreiro and Prieto shows the military version of the shortages so common in postwar Spain. An officer browbeats a soldier for asking for more ammunition. "¡Munición, munición!: ¿y que has hecho con la bala que te dimos el mes pasado?" (Similar cartoons appear in Gila's 1957 book *Gila y sus gentes*. An officer congratulates a soldier for tying a string to an artillery round: "vamos a ahorrar mucha munición." Another officer instructs his men to turn on the searchlight only for big planes in order to avoid a repetition of the previous month's exorbitant electricity bill.) These variations on the theme of war served as building blocks that Gila would connect to create his star-making monologues.

Of Gila's two soldier monologues, the one that has come to be known as "¿Es el enemigo?" has enjoyed much greater popularity, resulting in more frequent repetition and greater variation through the half-century of Gila's performances. Conversely, the absurdist war story that inaugurated his career as a live performer in 1951, known alternately as "Gila y la guerra," "Gila en la guerra," or "Mi primera guerra," has changed much less. It was this monologue that brought him notoriety, and it formed the foundation of his repertoire until Gila incorporated the telephone into his act sometime in the winter of 1951-52.[5] This physical and artistic device allowed him all the advantages of a comedic dialogue without the problems inherent in artistic partnerships. (The American comedian Bob Newhart would leap to stardom almost ten years later with a comedy album centered around telephone conversations with historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln and Sir Walter Raleigh.) More importantly, the telephone became his trademark and essentially divided his on-stage work into two categories: monologues (proper monologues) and telephone conversations.

"¿Es el enemigo?" is one of many acts that Gila created for the telephone, most likely because of the popularity of "Mi primera guerra." His new war monologue held onto many of the salient elements of "Mi primera guerra." But now instead of narrating absurd solutions to armament problems and conversations with a friendly enemy, Gila could act them out in real time, as it were, by calling the weapons manufacturer or the enemy on the phone.

Transposing the monologue to the mode of telephone conversation was by no means the last change Gila made to his soldier act. He constantly tinkered with "¿Es el enemigo?" It was his most popular monologue over his fifty-year career, and it remains his most referenced and most viewed online.[6] He has varied the ordering of the monologue, both on the macro level—calling the enemy first versus calling the weapons manufacturer—and on the micro level—moving jokes around within the conversation to find a more effective or logical progression. Often he would pack two or three other war-related bits onto the beginning. In his later years, he

---

[5] Gila does not provide a date for his first telephonic act except to say that it was after he signed a contract to perform at El Club Castelló. His debut performance at the Fontalba (August 1951) led to a contract at Pavillón, a *sala de fiestas* located in what is now the Casa de Vacas Cultural Center in El Retiro Park; this contract ended with Pavillón's seasonal closure for the winter, which led Gila to take the offered contract at Castelló. His time at Castelló ended when he began work on his first theatrical revue, *Tengo momia formal*, which premiered a few weeks after Gila's first performance for Franco (July 18, 1952).

[6] A search of "Gila monólogo" on YouTube brings up a search results page containing one or two miscellaneous monologues mixed in among eight or so variations of "¿Es el enemigo?"

added as a preamble a segment known as “De mercenario,” in which he calls the current US president and asks where the Pentagon wants him to go next. He would then transition to “¿Es el enemigo?”, starting with the “fábrica de armas” segment.

Gila often modified his monologues from one night to the next, especially when touring outside of Spain, adapting his material to the audience’s reactions at the first performance in a given location to make his “humor disparatado” easier to understand (*Y entonces* 381). According to an interview with his daughter, Malena Gila, he carried a notebook in which he rated his performance and his audience’s responsiveness on separate ten-point scales. Upon returning to a location, he would look up his previous score and try to improve upon it (Ortega and Lobato 385). With his constant tinkering and modifying, it might be more accurate to say that rather than just one “¿Es el enemigo?” monologue there are hundreds of variants. But with all their differences they are still recognizable as the same performance because of the shared DNA of a soldier conversing casually with the enemy.

The lack of definitive, concrete versions of “¿Es el enemigo?” and “Cómo llegué a la guerra” makes it difficult to determine the “texts” of these monologues as Gila performed them during Franco’s regime. We cannot even determine beyond all doubt which of his two war monologues Gila performed for Franco at the 1952 gala celebrating the 18 July uprising, though Gila’s account of the performance suggests that it was in fact the story of “Cómo llegué a la guerra / Mi primera guerra” and not “¿Es el enemigo?” He mentions that in the week leading up to the gala, when organizers told him he would be performing and asked what he planned to perform, he recited “el monólogo de la guerra y el de la historia de mi vida” (*Y entonces* 328-29). His monologue “La historia de mi vida” seems never to have made the transition to a phone conversation, so by referring to both acts as monologues he suggests that “el monólogo de la guerra" and "el de la historia de mi vida"—at that performance, at least—shared the same format. Additionally, Gila explains that for his performance he only needed a spotlight and a microphone—no telephone. The title of his act as it was listed on the official reception program, "Una guerra de mentira," could be applied equally fittingly to either monologue. And given the fact that Gila was "invited" back several more times for 18th of July celebrations, it is likely that he performed both "Cómo llegué a la guerra" and "¿Es el enemigo" at least once for Franco and his wife, Doña Carmen. But there is no way to determine the exact content of those historical performances.

In trying to establish the text of the war monologues as they were performed during Franco's regime, there is a temptation to hold strictly to the recordings that Gila made between 1951 and 1975. That would mean using Gila's 1957 and 1959 albums (containing "¿Es el enemigo?" and "Gila en la guerra," respectively), possibly supplementing the second with the track "Mi guerra" from *Historias de mí*, the album that he made in Argentina in 1968. However, such a restriction would produce an inaccurate and inadequate understanding of these monologues, fossilizing them as static texts rather than works in progress that varied with each performance. The differences between 1959's "Gila en la guerra" and 1968's "Mi guerra" demonstrate that, despite the fact that he performed it less often than its telephonic descendent, Gila made many changes to the original soldier monologue (what we have called "the Fontalba monologue") while maintaining the general structure and linguistic techniques (which we will discuss in the next section). It is reasonable to expect that he created even more variations of "¿Es el enemigo?" during the dictatorship. Therefore, the "texts" that we analyze will be a hybrid of various recordings and transcriptions, with the 50s recordings providing the general structure.

Our hybrid of the Fontalba monologue will also include elements from the version that Gila records in *Y entonces nací yo*, despite the unreliability of Gila's account of its first performance.[7] We must allow that the comic narrative that he presents in his memoir may in fact be very similar to what he actually delivered on that night. It differs very little from the iterations featured on his 1959 and 1968 albums. This fact allows us to give Gila the benefit of the doubt where the content of that crucial monologue is concerned, even though he gives us good reason to doubt his commitment to historical accuracy. His dramatic account of the build-up to his debut, of his triumphant leap of faith in stage-crashing the performance of a popular revue, has been contradicted by others who were present that night and is easily refuted by the ad promoting his performance in the *ABC* edition from that morning.

The Fontalba monologue itself as he reproduces it in his memoir contains at least one egregious anachronism. Gila in 1995 writes that the Gila of 1951 (dressed in a uniform from the 20s) supposedly said that as a newly promoted spy his army-issue disguise included a miniskirt, though these did not become popular or even become known by that name until the 1960s. In order for a Spaniard who had never left Spain to have known about miniskirts, he would have had to break the laws of space and time as well as the barrier of censorship. (Censors did not allow the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*, whose only female character had a wardrobe consisting almost entirely of miniskirts, to be shown in Spain until 1967.)[8] So it is clear that Gila mixed up some of the details of the Fontalba monologue over the decades. But it is also clear that he did perform a monologue on war that night that inaugurated a new kind of humor and jump-started his career. The reviews and the sudden change in his fortunes make it impossible to argue otherwise.

---

[7] Gila's admirers among the community of Spanish humorists do not fault him for any embellishments to his history. As Julio Rey (of the *viñetista* duo Gallego y Rey) argues in the *Imprescindibles* documentary, "si alguien no puede inventarse una vida de sí mismo, ¿quién puede hacerlo?" And Juan Manuel Serrat, a lifelong friend of Gila's, says in the same segment, "Creo que todos nos inventamos una vida, y si no nos inventamos el argumento completo sí lo maquillamos y lo adaptamos a nuestras conveniencias [...]. Porque vivir con la verdad sería algo absolutamente horrible […], un castigo especialmente doloroso para cualquiera. No sé hasta dónde se inventó una vida, pero si lo hizo fue porque la que tenía no le gustaba."

[8] *Forbidden Planet* is often credited with being the first Hollywood film to show a woman in miniskirt (see, among others, the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of *Forbidden Planet*'s US premiere on the ABC.es site HoyCinema). But that distinction belongs to *Flight to Mars*, a 1951 film in which miniskirts were worn by all human *and* Martian women. Science fiction film and television (including *Star Trek*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Lost in*

So, lacking any overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we will incorporate the version of "Mi primera guerra" that Gila reproduces in *Y entonces nací yo,* taken with the requisite grain of salt. And the fact is that although one can easily find dozens of variations on "¿Es el enemigo?" in print and on YouTube, "Gila y/en la guerra" is much more elusive. Outside of his memoir, it survives today on the two albums, in a few of his books (some posthumous), and in a handful of YouTube videos that require the perseverance to continue watching a long way into the search results or the automatically generated playlists. And perhaps because he performed, recorded, and published it much less than his more popular war monologue, "Gila y/en la guerra" exhibits much less variation. Aside from the miniskirt and other cosmetic differences, it remains largely unchanged. This, combined with close similarities to his 1959 and 1968 albums, suggests that the version in *Y entonces nací yo* really may be an accurate though slightly flawed recollection of the innovative story that he told that night in 1951. (Those interested in the version on the 1959 album may reference Chapter 4 of this work, which features a transcription and translation of that single.)

Although it has almost been lost in the shadow of "¿Es el enemigo?", Gila's original war monologue—in all of its variations ("Mi guerra," "Mi primera guerra," "Cómo llegué a la guerra," etc.)—deserves equal billing in this study of humor during Franco's regime. For one

---

Space) had apparently reached the consensus that the miniskirt was so functional and comfortable that every woman would be wearing it in the future.

thing, it provides a unique, non-telephonic foil of "¿Es el enemigo?" It expresses in a different mode many of the latter's principal motifs. But just as importantly, it contains several examples of innovative language that recalls the avant-garde roots of "el humor español nuevo." The hybrid version that follows is based off of the 1959 album in order to approach as closely as possible a representation of his performances in 1950s Spain. Such a representation is doubly useful to this study, both as a historical record and as the aforementioned foil to Gila's most influential monologue, "¿Es el enemigo?"

The Fontalba monologue, or "Cómo llegué a la guerra," ostensibly explained how a soldier had ended up on the stage on the night of August 24, 1951. It starts with Gila as a newly-unemployed pharmacy errand boy (or elevator operator) whose family encourages him to answer a want ad: "Para una guerra importante se necesita soldado que mate deprisa." He arrives early in the morning but the war is closed, so he sits on a bench to wait "con un soldado que no mataba porque estaba de luto, y cuando abrieron la guerra entré [...]." Before too long he meets with the commander and introduces himself: "Que vengo por lo del anuncio del periódico, para matar y eso." And so the job interview begins. "¿Qué tal matas?" asks the commander. "Pues de momento flojito, pero cuando me entrene..." Gila gets the job, despite not owning his own equipment. They give him a rifle and six cartridges and the captain says, "¡Hala, ponte a matar! Aquí se mata de nueve a una y cuatro a siete." Gila the precocious apprentice impresses his superiors. "Y estaba yo matando tan calentito con mi tortilla y mi fusil y dijo el comandante: '¡Prepárate que vas a ir de espía!'" Disguised in the futuristic miniskirt (in the 1968 version as well) with heels and a blonde wig,[9] Gila encounters the enemy. "¡Hola!" "¿Qué quieres?" "Soy

---

[9] In the 1959 recording "Gila en la guerra": "Arréglate, que vas a ir de espía.' Y me pusieron una bata de cretona, y unos lazos."

Mary Pili,[10] que vengo a por los planos del polvorín." The soldier on watch replies, "Tú hace poco que trabajas de espía, ¿no?" and sends him back empty-handed after a mild scolding.

The colonel, unfazed and proactive, sends him back to the fight. "Conque me puse a matar y me llamó el coronel: 'Vete otra vez donde el enemigo y que te den el avión,' porque como nos llevábamos bien con el enemigo con un avión nos arreglábamos todos, ellos bombardeaban los lunes, miércoles y viernes y nosotros los martes, jueves y sábados, y los domingos se lo alquilábamos a una agencia de viajes, para cubrir gastos." Soldier-spy-emissary Gila returns to the enemy trenches, identifies himself as "el espía de esta mañana," and brings the plane back only to discover that one propeller has been broken. "Y dijo mi comandante: 'Eso nos pasa por buenazos que somos. Pues ahora vas y los bombardeas a pie, para que aprendan.'" Gila returns to the enemy trenches and engages in another conversation that prefigures his telephone monologues. The soldier on watch greets him:

> "Pero, ¿ya estás otra vez aquí, Mary Pili? ¡Qué pesada! ¿Y qué quieres ahora?" Y dije yo: "Que vengo a bombardear."[11] Y dijo el capitán enemigo: "¡A ver si vas a dar a alguien, gracioso!" Y dije: "A mí no me diga nada, yo soy un mandado y lo único que hago es obedecer las órdenes de mis superiores." Y me dijo: "Pues apunta para donde no haya nadie." Y dije: "Más vale que se calle, porque ustedes el jueves le han dado un cañonazo a una señora que no es de la guerra[12] y a un niño que estaba jugando en una plaza, que lo

---

[10] In later years (1990s) Gila's spy name sometimes comes out as Mari Conchi, a play on *maricón* that taps some of the camp effect of a cross-dressing spy.

[11] Candid admission of deadly intent appears in Gila's viñetas as well. See, for example, the cartoon published in the May 6, 1949 issue of *La Codorniz*, in which a policeman tells two men that they cannot stand where they are standing because the king will be passing by that spot. One of the men explains, "Es que nosotros somos los que vamos a tirar la bomba."

[12] The famous "señora que no es de la guerra" does not appear in either of the phonographic versions (1959 and 1968) of the Fontalba monologue but does appear in the 1957 recording of "¿Es el enemigo?" The topic of collateral civilian casualties was part of Gila's war-related humor over the course of various decades, so it is not unreasonable to include it here.

> he leído en los periódicos." Y me dijo: "Oye, cuando estamos en guerra no nos vamos a andar fijando si son soldados o son paisanos."

Gila insists that he's merely a grunt who must follow orders. But in a twist worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance,* he finds a solution that his conscience can accept. "Pero como en el Servicio de Inteligencia me habían dicho que en el ejército enemigo había un soldado que era huérfano,[13] me dio pena matarle y tiré la bomba en un charco para que no explotara y no maté a nadie." When he returns from his bombing run (or jog, more likely), his captain informs him that the war is over. "'Que nos han pedido la licencia de armas[14] y como llevamos tanto tiempo de guerra estaba vencida y hasta que no la renueven no podemos seguir. Así que vete a tu casa y cuando la empecemos otra vez te llamaremos.' Y por eso estoy aquí, de camino a mi casa, a esperar hasta que empiece la guerra otra vez" (*Y entonces nací yo* 304-06, *Gila en la guerra*).

This war monologue was one of three monologues that comprised Gila's pre-telephone repertoire, together with a story of his career as a Chicago gangster and the story of his life (310). But while Gila continued to perform the other two throughout his career (YouTube has various recordings of them made in the 1990s),[15] apparently "Mi primera guerra" emerged only rarely from the shadow of "¿Es el enemigo?" It did produce a sort of echo in the form of short preambles to his phone calls, in which he explains to the audience who he is going to call and for what reasons. Gila often interrupts himself in the middle of dialing (a long process when using rotary telephones) to discuss the topic with the audience. Some of his classic jokes come from these ostensibly extemporaneous interruptions. In one well-known routine, he complains that he (as an enlisted grunt or *soldado raso*) never receives any medals because his superiors take them all for themselves.

---

[13] The idea of treating orphans with special consideration in wartime appears in Gila's *viñetas* as well. For example, his 1957 collection *Gila y sus gentes* contains a cartoon in which an officer reprimands one soldier while a second consoles an enemy soldier who is crying on his shoulder. "Claro que te mandamos traer un prisionero," says the officer; "pero no éste, que es huerfanito" (n. pag.).

[14] In the 1968 recording "Mi guerra," the commander explains that the war is over because their tank was towed away because it had been parked illegally, another example of warfare and quotidian city life intersecting in Gila's humor.

[15] One memorable segment of the gangster story has passed into the Spanish vernacular, often used in political criticism. After being fired as Al Capone's bodyguard, Gila joins Scotland Yard and brings Jack the Ripper to justice. He explains that he moved into the same hotel as Jack, but because he did not like to use violence, "le detuve con indirectas. Nos cruzábamos en el pasillo y le decía: 'Alguien ha matado a alguien y no me gusta señalar.' Al día siguiente nos volvíamos a encontrar: 'Alguien es un asesino y no lo quiero decir.' Hasta que a los quince días dijo: 'No puedo más, he sido yo, lo confieso'" ("Historia de mi vida" on MiguelGila.com). The phrase "alguien ha matado a alguien" is often paraphrased in political commentary. (For just one example, see Herrero López's commentary on the PP in his letter to the editor of *El País*.)

> Y no será porque no me las merezco, porque mato yo... No es por presumir, pero cómo mato. El otro día en un combate le di un tiro a uno y dice: "¡Me has dado!" Y le digo: "Pues no seas enemigo. ¿Qué quieres que te dé, un beso en la boca?" Dijo: "Es que me has hecho un agujero." Dije: "Pues ponte un corcho." Y dijo: "¿Y con qué tapo la cantimplora?" Dije: "¡Muérete ya! ¿No ves que estoy avanzando?" Total, que quería conversación, que viene el coronel y me ve hablando con el enemigo y... Tengo un coronel que tiene una mala leche... Ahora, también tiene buenos sentimientos. A veces estamos en pleno combate y cruza un ciego o una anciana y dice: "¡Alto el fuego!" Y hasta que no termina de pasar no seguimos.

Another common pre-call segment addresses the pros and cons of war. "Ahora, también tiene sus ventajas, porque te hinchas a matar y la policía, nada. Un día maté treinta y tantos, y pasaba la policía. Dije: 'He sido yo. ¿Y qué? ¿Pasa algo?' Dijeron: 'Nada, perdone.'" These pre-call segments directed at the audience are a kind of fossil record of the War Story monologue that opened the door to Gila's career.

In "Gila y/en la guerra," we "hear" several variations on the themes of "¿Es el enemigo?" Although we will examine some of them—war as play and war as work—in the next section, it is worth mentioning a few others here: sociality and cooperation between enemies, scarcity and disrepair of supplies and equipment, and civilian casualties. These and many other themes connect the two formally different monologues, as we will see below. (Space constraints prevent me from presenting “¿Es el enemigo?” in the format that makes the most sense, that of a dramatic script with blank lines where Gila’s absent interlocutor would speak. So instead I will present it in paragraph form, with new paragraphs marking the transition to a separate topic of conversation. In all cases, ellipses reflect Gila’s delivery rather than representing omitted portions of the “original text.” Ellipses preceded by a space represent pauses in the monologue where Gila implies that the imaginary interlocutor is speaking. Ellipses attached to words represent either a stammering repetition, a pause mid-sentence, or a sentence fragment cut off by the nonexistent interlocutor.)

> Oiga, ¿es la... fábrica de armas? ... ¿Está el ingeniero, el señor Emilio? ... Que se ponga. ... De parte del ejército. ... [sings to himself] Señor Emilio, que le llamo para un asunto de reclamaciones. ... Que de los seis cañones que mandaron ayer, vienen dos sin agujero. ... Pues estamos disparando con la bala por fuera. ... O sea, al mismo tiempo que uno aprieta el gatillo, otro corre con la bala. ... Sí, pero se cansa y la suelta. ... Pues no sabemos dónde, porque como no vuelven... Y ¿ustedes no venden los agujeros sueltos? ... Bueno, mándeme dos contra reembolso ... o tres por si se pierde uno. ... De acuerdo.
>
> Y el submarino que mandaron ayer, de color bien, pero no flota. ... Nada, lo echamos al fondo del mar después de comer, y todavía no ha subido. ... O sea, que era un barco... Pues ¡nos costó un trabajo hundirlo! ... Como no dijo nada el que lo trajo... Claro, pero con una cosa de ese precio, ¡se manda por lo menos un folleto! ... Bueno... no, mande otro que ese ya estará muy mojado.

Y le quería preguntar, ¿a cómo están las ametralladoras? ... ¿Y si compramos dos? ... No tenemos, estamos usando un fusil corriente y lo dispara un tartamudo. ... Claro, pero no es lo mismo, no mata igual. ... Y tampoco tenemos tanques, usamos un seiscientos con un enano. ... Y en lugar de disparar, insulta. ... Bueno, no mata, pero desmoraliza. ... Y en aviación nos queda un paracaidista, pero vale solo para una vez, porque los estamos tirando sin nada, por ahorrar, al pelo. ... Y tampoco tenemos caballería, estamos enseñando a galopar a los más bestias. ... Van bien, dan coces ya y comen pienso.

Bueno, otra cosa: ¿sabe usted si ha ido a comprar un avión para el ejército un soldado que se llama Julito, que su padre es pescadero y tiene una hermana que se va a casar, que tiene un lunar en el pescuezo s... según la ves a la derecha?[16] ... Que se ponga. [*sings to himself*]

Julito... Eh, ¿tú te has sentado encima del caballo del capitán? ... ¿Uno marrón, con moscas? ... Anda, mírate debajo, a ver si lo tienes. ... ¿Está ahí? ... Pues tráeselo, que van todos a galope y él corriendo detrás.

Y que te vengas enseguida, que te estamos esperando pa... para avanzar. ... No, dice el capitán que o todos juntos o nada. ... Está bien, te apartamos lo tuyo y luego lo avanzas solo. ... Bueno.

Oye, y ¿tú has salido con una chica rubia, con los ojos azules? ... ¿Y te has casado? ... Anda. Pues es un señor, que es espía. ... Bueno, como quieras. Allá tú. ... Bueno. ... Hasta luego. [*Hangs up and dials again*]

---

[16] In performances recorded after Franco's death, Gila takes the liberty of changing the location of the Julito's sister's mole from her neck to her thigh, "un lunar en la cadera según se sube a la derecha" (see the video "¿Es el enemigo?" on www.MiguelGila.com linked in note 17 below).

Oiga, eh... ¿es... es el enemigo? ... ¿Ustedes podrían parar la guerra un momento? ... Que se nos ha atrancado el cañón. ... El sargento, que ha metido la cabeza adentro para la cosa de la revista y ahora le pillan las orejas a contrapelo y no sale. ... Está vivo, porque le oímos. ... Sí, di... dice: [voz tapada] "¡Sacadme de aquí!" ... Sí, ya hemos probado con jabón, pero se le pone el pelo rubio. ... Pues, es verdad, ¡a lo mejor disparando se desatranca! ¡No se nos había ocurrido!

Otra cosa, que ha estado aquí el espía de ustedes. ... Agustín, uno bajito, vestido de lagarterana. ... Bueno, que se ha llevado los mapas del polvorín. Que los traiga, que solo tenemos esos.

Y ¿ustedes han tirado algún cañonazo el jueves? ... Anda, que la que han armado. ... Que le han dado a una señora que no era de la guerra. ... Pues está con un morro que no sé yo...

Bueno, otra cosa... ¿Qué le iba a decir yo? Ayer cantó el prisionero de ustedes. ... Por fin ha cantado. ... Dijo que de Santurce a Bilbao viene por toda la orilla. ... Ah, pues, no sé.

¿Ha... han puesto ustedes alambres con pinchos? ... Pues, hijo, no ganamos para pantalones.[17]

Por fin, ¿cuándo piensan atacar? ... El lunes... Y ¿a qué hora? ... Anda, a las siete estaremos todos acostados. Y ¿no podrían atacar por la tarde? ... Después del fútbol. ... Bueno. ... Y ¿van a venir muchos? ... ¡Hala!, qué... qué bestias. ... Sí, sí, bueno, pues no

---

[17] A cartoon in the April 17, 1949 *La Codorniz* expresses a similar sentiment. A soldier trying to advance on the battlefield complains, "Ya podían hacer la guerra en otro sitio y no aquí donde está todo lleno de alambres y pinchos."

> sé si habrá balas para todos. ... Bueno, nosotros las disparamos y ustedes se las reparten. ... Bueno, ya lo miraremos.
>
> Bueno, pues... Na ... nada más. ... Bueno, besos al coronel. ... Hasta el lunes, que usted lo mate bien. ... Adiós, adiós.[18]

Reading Gila's monologues is a poor substitute for watching or hearing him perform them, for obvious reasons. The first has to do with the shortcomings of text as a representation of orality. It is difficult to reproduce textually Gila's delivery. He stammers as much as anyone does in a normal telephone conversation, and his pauses vary in length. Paco Mir, part of the comedic trio El Tricicle, calls Gila "un verdadero artista de las pausas" (interview in Ortega and Lobato 376).

Pauses or beats that allow the audience to laugh, or simply allow a joke to sink in, play an important role in any comedy performance. Gila himself suggests that this was not something he understood at the beginning of his career. Coming from a radio background, he was not used to having to take his audience's reactions into account and allow space for them. In his (albeit inaccurate) account of his debut performance at the Fontalba Theater, he writes that his war story "era *interrumpido* con aplausos y carcajadas" (304, my emphasis). Incorporating the telephone into his act was a stroke of genius in this regard as well. A phone dialogue, however absurd its content may be, requires pauses in order to retain verisimilitude. As Gila gained more experience in live performances—in large part thanks to his studies in theater and acting while in Argentina (*Y entonces nací yo* 516-17)—he became the "verdadero artista de las pausas" admired by so many comedians of subsequent generations. Javier Cansado remarks in an interview that Gila's mastery of cadence is one of the secrets to his success as a performer: “la entonación que empleaba en un monólogo la empleaba en el mismo monólogo al día siguiente. Era un metrónomo, era perfecto” (“El monólogo”). Such metronomic precision is almost impossible to convey in writing.

---

[18] This amalgam of "¿Es el enemigo?" was compiled from Ortega and Lobato 153-55; MiguelGila.com [https://youtu.be/TcP6cQy7YTg]; and "¿Es el enemigo?", the A-side of Gila's 1957 album *Gila... y su teléfono* [also available on the CD *Monólogos de Gila* included in Ortega and Lobato].

Second, in comparison with speech, text is inherently formal (especially academic text). A written contract has more power than a gentleman’s agreement. Writing, with its punctuation and spelling conventions, imposes a rigidity that directly opposes the fluidity of speech, and the single plane of the written word cannot transmit the variety of information compressed within the sounds of the spoken word. Even if we represent undulating intonation and idiosyncratic diction with musical notation and phonetic transcription, we fragment aural simplicity into visual complexity. As we will discuss in the next two sections, much of Gila’s humor depends on the simplicity and informality in both his diction and his lexicon. Putting his monologues into writing moves the register up a notch toward the kind of speech that he is reputed to satirize.

Although it is a visual medium, text obviously lacks the bandwidth of a video recording or live performance, and with Gila the visual adds significantly to his humor. He understood the importance of visual performance from the beginning—hence the soldier’s uniform for his Fontalba debut and the addition of a physical telephone soon afterward—although it was not until he studied acting in Argentina that he took full advantage of it. He tended to use minimalist sets, often with the telephone sitting on a table and simple costume changes hanging on a coat-rack, but the visual component of his performances increased as he refined his use of body language and facial expressions over time. This is not to say that he was visually monotonous nor clownish in his early performances, as demonstrated by the 1957 footage of Gila performing to children that is included in NO-DO ("Noticiarios y Documentales," state-produced newsreels) number 732A (January 14, 1957).

The obvious advantages of audiovisual recordings over textual representation, compounded when dealing with a comedian such as Gila, are perhaps demonstrated most clearly by the tagline that he invented for his wildly successful ad campaign for Filomatic razor blades. Reading "Y da un gustirrinín" does little to inspire laughter, but seeing Gila's expression and hearing his delivery as he recites the line makes it easy to understand how it became a catchphrase in 1960s Spain that is still in use today.[19]

But even if we could embed an audiovisual recording in this text,[20] there are other characteristics of recorded performances that leave us at a disadvantage compared to the audiences that witnessed Gila's live performances in the early 1950s. As Provine and others have pointed out, laughter is inherently social and thus more frequent and intense in direct interactions (Provine 129-139). Comedy recordings are best viewed in the company of other people who are also in the mood to laugh.

But even Gila-watching parties would lack the immediacy of the live performance, and the sad truth is that most of the video recordings available electronically were made in the 1980s and 1990s, when he was already famous and his innovative style and methods were three or four decades old. As Gila's notebook demonstrates, no two audiences are the same. There is no way to recreate the moment of Gila's 1950s performances or their impact on his audiences. The first decade of *La Codorniz*, under Mihura and Álvaro, had taught a generation of Spaniards to eschew easy laughs and to reject sentimentalism and clichéd comedic figures. But this revolution of *el humor nuevo español* had made limited sallies from its print stronghold. The theater of Neville, Jardiel, and López Rubio had found success, as had Mihura's collaborations with Joaquín Calvo-Sotelo, Tono, and Álvaro de Laiglesia.[21] The plays that best exemplified *el humor puro* often struggled to find a venue.[22] Mihura's revolutionary *Tres sombreros de copa* did not premiere until November 24, 1952, two decades after it was written, and in his subsequent plays—during a twelve-year tear that produced fifteen plays, ending with *Ninette y un señor de Murcia* in 1964—he made "concesiones que, sin obligarle a renegar de sus más originales características, le [abrieron] las puertas del éxito comercial, del beneficio económico" (de Miguel Martínez 123). Theatergoing audiences, then, would have had at best intermittent exposure to undiluted *humorismo*. The rest of Spain—those who lacked the inclination or the money (or both) to patronize the theater—would not have seen or heard *el humor nuevo* performed. In Gila they had a writer and artist who performed humor that most had only seen in print if at all. And he performed to anyone and everyone: to Franco and invited dignitaries at La Granja Palace; to middle- and upper-class audiences in theaters and *salas de fiestas*; and to anyone listening to a radio in their own home or in their neighbor's or in the local bar. Into all of these venues Miguel Gila brought a new style of humor that boldly applied the principles and techniques of *el humor*

---

[19] For examples of "gustirrinín" from the last eight years, see a recent interview in which Jordi Évole, a screenwriter and presenter of the show *Salvados*, said that being recognized by the *New York Times* "[tiene] un punto de 'gustirrinín'" (for the VerTele page of ElDiario.es); or a 2010 op-ed on Catalonian politics in the *Catalunya Press* ("... Da un gustirrinín"); or the April 8, 2018 tweet on the official account of La Guardia Civil: "Con el gustirrinín que da cuando regalas un buen #zaska [*sic*] no te rebajes a insultar o amenazar al que piensa diferente a ti."

[20] An electronic document at least allows for the possibility of following a link to view an audiovisual recording. The website MiguelGila.com has curated links to some excellent samples from YouTube of Gila's work under its "Monólogos" tab, including "¿Es el enemigo?"; "De mercenario" (which contains a medley of his mercenary monologue and a shortened "¿Es el enemigo?"); and a recording of "La historia de mi vida" that, according to the website, captures the last time Gila performed any monologue.

---

[21] Three of the four initial National Theater Prizes (Premio Nacional de Teatro) went to Jardiel Poncela (1946), Mihura (1952), and López Rubio (1954). Mihura collaborated with Calvo Sotelo on *Viva lo imposible, o el contable de lunas* (1939); with Antonio de Lara on *Ni rico ni pobre, sino todo lo contrario* (1943); and with Álvaro de Laiglesia on *El caso de la mujer asesinadita* (1946).

[22] Tono and Mihura pitched *Ni pobre, ni rico...* to several producers, one of whom "hizo grandes elogios de ella, pero temía que le quemaran el teatro" (qtd. in Aguirre 44). It had to wait over three years to premiere.

nuevo español to the national cataclysm that had defined so many lives but that seemingly only Gila dared to address.

Descoyuntamientos: Language and Context

Various aspects of Gila's monologue allow him to address the somewhat taboo subject of war. First, he never mentions Nationalists or Republicans, so his audiences (and censors) can assume that he is talking about war in general. They are aided in this assumption by other, more recent wars like the Korean War, which had been going on for a year at the time of the Fontalba monologue, and World War II. Second, the fact that he is performing in a theater, or telling stories over the radio, ostensibly situates his words within the realm of fiction or make-believe, a context that smooths the jagged edges of uncomfortable subjects. And third, the sheer absurdity of his war further distances it from reality. Hence the title under which Franco's staff listed Gila's monologue on the program for his first performance at La Granja: "Una guerra de mentira." This distancing or falsifying of war is the result of the choices that Gila makes both in the overall structure and at the word level of his monologues.

The various refractions of Gila's war monologues succeed as humor because he masterfully transposes or "dislocates" words, registers, and semantic scripts to create surprising shifts in contexts and themes. Evaristo Acevedo's assessment of the early *Codorniz* applies equally well to Gila's monologues. The soldier monologues have "alto significado [...] en orden a la evolución del humor. Sup[ieron] despertar al lector (o público) hispano, abriendo amplios boquetes en su característica 'pereza mental' para que comprendiera y se deleitara ante nuevos panoramas abiertos por originales descoyuntamientos de la frase, de la situación, del tópico"

(*Teoría* 251). The *situación* and *tópico* dislocated in Gila's monologues correspond (obviously) to war and (somewhat less obviously) to the trite representation of heroic soldiers waging glorious battle.[23] The dislocated *frase* tends to fly past unexamined. Here we will examine it.

Gila's monologues create humor at the basic level of language by violating tacit linguistic norms. The clearest example of this is his use of *matar*. In some versions of "¿Es el enemigo?" he uses *matar* during his conversation with the arms dealer, lamenting the comparative deficiencies of a regular carbine fired by a stutterer—"no mata igual"—and justifying the use of the Seat 600 commanded by an insult-hurling dwarf—"no mata pero desmoraliza." In other versions, "¿Es el enemigo?" uses *matar* only once, at the end of the phone call: "Que usted lo mate bien."

The refractions of the Fontalba monologue employ *matar* much more frequently. It starts off almost immediately with killing: "Para una guerra importante, se necesita soldado que mate de prisa." When Gila arrives at the war he initially has to wait outside "con un soldado que no mataba porque estaba de luto," and then introduces himself to his commander: "Que vengo por lo del anuncio de periódico, para matar y eso." The job interview begins with the question "¿Qué tal matas?" His new-hire orientation is short and simple: "Hala, ponte a matar. Aquí se mata de nueve a una y de cuatro a siete." *Matar* also appears in the fossil record preamble to "¿Es el enemigo?" primarily when Gila complains about the inequality in military medals. "No es que no me las merezca (las medallas), porque mato yo... No es por presumir, pero cómo mato."

---

[23] Franco's own screenplay-turned-novel, *Raza* (1941), contributed in no small part to the official narrative praising Spain's victorious military as glorious heroes, "los que sienten en el fondo de su espíritu la semilla de la raza, los elegidos para devolver a España a su destino. Ellos [...] llevarán sus banderas hasta el altar del triunfo, para ellos fatalmente ha de llegar el día feliz de la victoria."

The use of *matar* as a habitual or progressive action violates the norms that language users have tacitly established for that verb. It is not a question of grammar but rather of semantics. *Kill* in English carries some of the same category restrictions. We do not normally use *kill* in the same structures as "everyday" activities like *walk, work,* or *play*. The structure "¡Hala, ponte a [infinitive verb]!" generally yields something like *trabajar,* as a linguistic corpus search demonstrates.[24] The English equivalent might be the phrase "Come on, get [verb-ing]," which we might complete with *working, going, moving,* or *cooking*—in short, with an action that normally connotes duration, hence the category of "activity." *Killing* simply does not fit. We tend to consider killing as a "punctual" or "instantaneous" action[25] rather than an activity like *working* or *trabajar.* Gila intensifies this jarring use of *matar* when he relates his commander's instruction that "aquí se mata de nueve a una y de cuatro a siete." Again, the phrasing stretches a punctual action over three or four hours, an idea that sounds just as strange as blinking (once) for twenty minutes or “noticing something” for an hour. Such violations of lexical aspect sound like a bad translation.[26]

---

[24] A search of the Google Books Spanish corpus (Davies 2011-) gives the following as the top verbs used after the string "[ponerse] a [infinitive verb]": *trabajar, escribir, pensar, llorar, hacer, estudiar, hablar, buscar, leer,* and *discutir.* The first verb in the list that does not connote duration—e.g., that is not a state, an activity, or an accomplishment—is probably *disparar* (152nd in frequency). Gila's choice, *matar*, is number 140 in frequency, appearing 43 times out of the total 34,452 instances of that string in the 45-billion-word corpus. In other words, when someone uses any conjugation of "ponerse a ______," there is a 99.99875 percent chance that they will say something other than *matar.* A search of the Genre/Historical corpus (from the 11th through the 20th centuries; Davies 2001-) yields essentially the same results: the top 10 most frequent (34 percent of the total) are the same except for *mirar* replacing *discutir*; and *matar* makes up 0.05% of the total results. In the Web/Dialects corpus (Davies 2016-) (almost exclusively from the last 20 years) the results are slightly different, with *matar* accounting for 0.06 percent of the occurrences (more than a few of those referring to video games). In the phrase "qué tal [present indicative verb]" the W/D corpus shows zero instances of *matar*. G/H yields a 0.0018 percent chance of *matando* after *estaba.* Clearly, Gila's use of *matar* was and continues to be extremely rare, most likely because it constitutes a violation of semantic norms.

[25] A clinical semanticist would categorize most denotations of *matar* and *kill* as instantaneous events ("achievements"), like "sneeze" or "realize" or "kill the lights." There may be uses of *matar* and *kill* that suggest progression towards a natural endpoint ("accomplishments"), like "paint a picture" or (hopefully) "write a dissertation." But no usage of *kill* or *matar* would be classified as an activity, or a "durative atelic event . . . with homogeneous successive stages and an arbitrary final point," like "working," "researching," or (unfortunately) "writing" (Smith 28).

Misusing *matar* as an activity reflects the principal incongruities that make the war monologues so effective as humor. Gila takes elements of war and transposes them to a context of work and play. The elements of work are more frequent in “Gila y/en la guerra” than in “¿Es el enemigo?” In fact, the former is essentially a work narrative. Gila’s prototypical war monologue begins with him discussing the unskilled job that he lost and then moves to his next job: killing. The story of being employed as a killer begins with a want ad, then moves to the job interview and training—almost exclusively on-the-job training—then promotion (to spy) followed by job loss through regulatory violations. Each of these workplace transitions Gila could have made funny on its own. Indeed, many comedians focus on everyday experiences like starting a new job and extract the ridiculous and the absurd using devices like metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. But Gila layers the work structure over a war narrative and thus highlights the absurdity of a job whose *raison d’être* is killing.

The final line of Gila’s telephone conversation, “Que usted lo mate bien,” echoes the transposition of *matar* to an activity, this time replacing the verb *ir* in the common farewell *que le vaya bien*. This phrase perfectly encapsulates the themes of “¿Es el enemigo?”—friendly conversation, collaboration, even well-wishing between enemies whose job comes down to killing one another.

We find an echo to “que usted lo mate bien” on Gila’s 1959 album *Gila en la guerra*, in a greeting rather than a farewell. It does not appear in the memoir version or in the 1968 version

---

[26] Bad translations make polyglots laugh for exactly the reasons expressed in the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), because they know the scripts for the target language and when these are violated they discover the reason or logic behind it within the underlying, previously clandestine script of the source language.

("Mi guerra"), perhaps because of how violently it dislocates the commonplaces of light conversation. This particular dislocation occurs after Gila the job applicant finally arrives at the right war.

> Conque fui a la otra guerra, y cuando abrieron la guerra a las nueve, entré. Y había un soldado matando. Digo: "¿Qué… qué tal matas?"
>
> Dice: "Bien, ¿y tú?"
>
> Dije: "Yo, todavía flojo, pero cuando me entrene…"

The exchange takes place so quickly on *Gila en la guerra*, so naturally, that it is almost lost among the more salient absurdities. Even when we do focus on this snippet, what initially stands out are the lines uttered by Gila's soldier: "¿Qué tal matas? [...] Yo, todavía flojo, pero cuando me entrene...." Later versions (1968 and Gila's memoir) actually stick to this shortened version and shift it to the job-interview segment of the story, with the captain or colonel asking Gila "¿Qué tal matas?" and Gila responding "Yo, todavía flojo, pero cuando me entrene...." The violation of *matar*'s lexical aspect, discussed above, is forceful enough with just those two lines. And yet, the 1959 iteration does much greater violence to language by transforming "Bien, ¿y tú?"—a phrase so commonplace that it is literally textbook Spanish—into a nonchalant response about killing. Gila essentially changes the message from "I'm fine, and you?" to "I'm killing fine, how are you killing?" He breaks language and deploys it against the current of its own established meaning, or rather the meaning that repetition has displaced with function. The beginning Spanish phrase "Bien, ¿y tú?" is so often reduced to a mere placeholder (i.e., "insert greeting response here"), a signifier that functions as a preamble to the exchange of relevant information. For those that actually notice the blip in the conversation, Gila has resurrected the message of an innocuous set phrase and simultaneously twisted it into a macabre expression of complacent, sustained killing. The sudden, acute incongruity might have been too dark to produce laughter had it not been for the fact that it was embedded within an absurd story of war as blue-collar work and childlike play.

Both "¿Es el enemigo?" and "Gila en la guerra" portray war as play wherever Gila's soldier engages the enemy. His conversations, whether in person (as Mari Pili) or over the telephone, employ a register so casual that it does not even come within artillery range of the terse, formal register associated with military communications. Print versions of his monologues often reflect his tone by removing the *d*'s from his past participles, as in "Apúntate tú que eres espabila'o" or "Anda, la que han arma'o." Gila's informal tone establishes from the beginning that this war is anything but serious.

The casual exchanges between friendly enemies perform exchanges that replicate the back-and-forth of children's make-believe. He and the enemy take turns with toys (a bomber), and in the "De mercenario" preamble they take a time out (stop the war) whenever an old woman or someone not playing their game crosses their play-space. They adjust their play schedule so that it won't interrupt the inviolably sacred, vicarious play of a soccer match. They play secret agent dress-up, and when they discover their opponent's ruse they send the spy back unmolested. They hand-drop bombs that don't explode, and after a long day of killing everyone goes home unharmed and waits for the next war to start. This war of Gila's is play just as fantastical as anything Mihura published in his *Codorniz*. But Gila, rather than playing with frogs and unicorns and rainbows and butterflies, plays *a los soldaditos* in the timeless tradition of children everywhere.

Mihura no doubt would consider soldiers and guns as too grounded in sad reality, "un mundo [...] hecho un asco" by "tipos de mal humor (que) lo han estropeado con sus violencias"

(Galán 73-74). And yet Gila has created a war so absurd that it approaches Mihura's ideal of creating a world that is "irreal y fantástico, y hacer que la gente olvidase el mundo incómodo y desagradable en que vivía" (Galán 73). Absurd and surrealist images and concepts abound in both war monologues. Bombing the enemy on foot. Running off with the shell of a defective cannon after another soldier pulls the trigger (or the lanyard) as if the artillery piece were a giant starter's pistol. Sending a demand for surrender via messenger hen. Installing a faucet on a propeller-driven bomber in order to convert it to *propulsión a chorro*. A bomber-sharing scheme between enemies that includes one day of paid tours to cover the costs.[27] Hairy, cross-dressing spies in miniskirts, or dressing gowns, or traditional Lagarterana dress. An insult-hurling dwarf commanding a Seat 600 like a tank on the battlefield. Police shutting down an army because their weapons license has expired. A straggler advancing his share of the front alone. Passing out bullets fired by the enemy. Ordering extra cannon holes—which one must assume would look like dark versions of Dalí's clocks—in case one of the holes gets lost in transit. The very act of calling to politely ask the enemy to stop the war for a moment, in a country where enemy *poets* were executed,[28] would feel as unreal as it gets.

Gila's war is so completely absurd that it loses all verisimilitude and becomes a work of abstract humor that counters its darkest elements with playful absurdities. This "guerra de mentira," like Mihura's *Codorniz*, thrives in the environment of *censura previa* because it distances itself from reality, following the escapist drive pointed to by Ortega y Gasset in his analysis of avant-garde metaphor. The soldier monologues effectively function as a sustained metaphor in the best tradition of *el arte nuevo*. Gila displaces, dislocates, or "suplanta una cosa"—war—"por otra[s]"—work and play—"no tanto por afán de llegar a esta[s] como por el empeño de rehuir aquella" (Ortega y Gasset 23). And his combination of humor and metaphor, according Ramón's famous formula, yields nothing less than a discourse-length *greguería*.

---

[27] Gila's bomber-sharing bit evokes Joseph Heller's World War II novel *Catch-22* (1961), in which Milo Minderbinder, a first lieutenant in the US Army Air Corps, contracts his squadron to bomb its own airfield on behalf of the Germans (263-269). The difference between Gila's and Heller's absurdities is that Gila's soldiers turn war into a job or a game while Heller's Lieutenant Minderbinder turns it into a business.

[28] E.g., Federico García Lorca. Miguel Hernández's death sentence was formally commuted but the result was the same—he died of disease in prison. The Republican side similarly executed famed comedic playwright Pedro Muñoz Seca by the infamous firing squads at Paracuellos del Jarama.

Reception and Interpretations

Gila's humor, with his war monologues at the forefront, conquered Spain almost as suddenly as the Nationalists had expected to do in 1936. Within weeks of his Fontalba performance he was headlining at the Pavillón, a *sala de fiestas* in the Parque del Buen Retiro. He was even double-billed some nights, performing monologues at the Pavillón and participating in celebrations and tributes at the Fontalba.[29] Within a year he was writing and acting in his own theater revue, *Tengo momia formal*, "jocunda fantasía [...] saturada de un nuevo humorismo espontáneo y regocijante" ("Informaciones y noticias teatrales"). The premiere of *Tengo momia formal* had to be postponed one week because of Gila's obligatory participation in the 18 July festivities at La Granja. Also within that first year, and most importantly for Gila's conquest of Spain, he returned to radio, now as a star broadcasting nationally on the SER radio network (Sociedad Española de Radiodifusión).

---

[29] On page 11 of *ABC*'s morning edition for September 6, 1951, Gila appears in two ads: one, in the center of the page, as "el gran humorista GILA," the featured performer at Pavillón along with "la gran cantante internacional CARMEN PADY"; and in another, directly below the Pavillón ad, listed among the twenty or so names of those participating in a tribute to the comic actor Ángel de Andrés, a list that includes Tono and Álvaro de Laiglesia.

It was the radio that made Gila a national celebrity. The limited exposure of live performances and even print could not compete with the broad, penetrating reach of radio waves. Gila's audiences were no longer restricted to theatergoers and (annually) heads of state; they now included the lower class in every corner of the country, the poor who could not buy tickets to his tours and the illiterate[30] who could not read the punchlines to his cartoons. As his albums would do for audiences abroad, his radio broadcasts laid the groundwork for national tours where he broadcasted his show in venues filled with fans who, according to newspaper reports, came to hear "números conocidos y otros inéditos" (Gil). In *Y entonces nací yo* Gila asserts that "a la hora de la emisión se paralizaba el país," to the point where the mayor of Madrid ordered the broadcast time to be moved up half an hour so that moviegoers would not miss the official NO-DO newsreels (365-66).[31] At least one contemporary source corroborates Gila's version, even if that source happens to be Ángel Palomino's prologue to *Gila y sus gentes*. The humorist and journalist writes in 1957,

> "Hoy hay Gila," dice la gente dando a la frase el mismo tono, pero más interés que si dijesen, "Hoy ha eclipse de Luna." Y ese día, millones de españoles le escuchan, y ríen con él. Y para ello, muchos han cambiado sus costumbres: han renunciado al aperitivo, han retrasado el café, han aplazado la contemplación de una película..., porque hay que estar junto a la radio a la hora de Gila.

Antonio Fraguas, the award-winning cartoonist known as Forges, brings up the effect of Gila's shows on schoolchildren's schedules. He remembers that as a child he was only allowed to stay up late on a school night when Gila was broadcasting (Ortega and Lobato 15). The importance of Gila's radio appearances, both to the Spanish public and to his legacy as the "maestro" of Spanish humorists, cannot be overstated.

---

[30] In *Y entonces nací yo* Gila includes some statistics describing 1931 Spain that are featured at the beginning of Frederic Rosiff's 1963 documentary *Mourir à Madrid*. Rosiff lists the year, the surface area (503,061 km^2), the population (24 million), and the number of illiterate: 12 million.

[31] Gila's presence even extended to the NO-DO newsreels on at least two occasions (January 1957 and January 1958).

As for the effects of Gila's humor itself, Palomino's 1957 prologue sums up the contemporary reaction to the war monologues and other popular bits. Audiences and reviewers called Gila's monologues a fresh, new kind of humor (one not based on simply telling jokes).[32] Palomino translates these statements into the language of Spanish humorists. He identifies Gila's "new humor" as "el humor de ahora, nuestro humorismo," the humor that Ramón had introduced and Mihura et al. had developed but that, until Gila, "sólo había sido captado de refilón por la gran masa; el humor actual requiere cierta preparación intelectual y cierta buena disposición de espíritu, difíciles de encontrar en eso que se llama 'público en general.'" Palomino continues: "es aquí donde Miguel Gila puede apuntarse un tanto importantísimo; él ha puesto nuestro humor al alcance de todos." Palomino credits Gila's humor, which reached "todos los rincones de todos los pueblos,"[33] with facilitating the humoristic evolution of the Spanish people (n. pag.).

---

[32] For a few assessments of Gila's humor under Franco by the humorist's contemporaries, see *Gracias, Miguel* (tributes by Leblanc and Andrés) and Pécker (1981 interview of Gila).

[33] Gila's coverage of Spain even included the last remaining colony in North Africa. The government conscripted him for a morale-boosting mission to the troops in Sidi Ifni for New Year's Eve of 1957 ("La Nochevieja en Sidi Ifni"). In David Torres's masterful novelization of this event (*Todos los buenos soldados*, 2014), Gila responds to the criminally dysfunctional state of the troops' equipment by performing the segment from "¿Es el enemigo?" in which he calls the weapons manufacturer "por un asunto de reclamaciones." (The *Imprescindibles* documentary corroborates Torres's fictional account with archival footage of Gila standing in front the troops behind a microphone stand and holding a telephone receiver up to one ear.)

> En los periódicos, en las reseñas de sus espectáculos, lo llamaban humor blanco, quizá porque él no usaba tacos ni palabras soeces ni alusiones sexuales, pero no se podía imaginar humor más negro: debajo de cada disparate, de cada arma fallida, de cada gatillazo de metal, se alzaba la muerte de un soldado, la apatía criminal de los mandos, la incuria de un gobierno al que no le importaban lo más mínimo los hombres que enviaba a morir a las trincheras. Su comicidad reflejaba la insania de un mundo que consideraba respetable matar a un muchacho al que no habías visto en la vida, que consideraba heroico dejar que te reventasen la cabeza de un balazo por nada, por una raya dibujada en la arena. (45)

Torres takes the almost universal interpretation of Gila's humor as a needed release during Franco's regime and applies it specifically to the soldiers whom Spain's leaders had, he argues, abandoned in North Africa.

The interpretation of Gila's humor, and especially of his war monologues, understandably took a political turn after the dictatorship. This shift was no doubt aided by the political motivations touted by Gila himself in interviews[34] and in his two memoirs, *Y entonces nací yo: Memorias para desmemoriados* (1995) and *Memorias de un exilio: Argentina mon amour* (1998). The day that Miguel Gila died in Barcelona (July 13, 2001), the celebrated novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán penned a tribute in *El País* that captures the major points of post-Franco interpretation of Gila's work. Vázquez Montalbán dubs Gila "el flagelo de la prepotencia franquista" and characterizes him as "el emblema de la única posible higiene mental popular bajo el franquismo." The novelist specifically mentions the power of "¿Es el enemigo?" and offers its most common application to the Franco years: "Sus llamadas telefónicas desde la guerra desvertebraban la armadura épica de los vencedores" (Vázquez Montalbán). According to post-dictatorship critics, Gila's war monologues, so decidedly un-heroic and un-militaristic in register and theme, subtly countered the official narrative of the Civil War and undermined the *triunfalista* tone of its victors.

Vázquez Montalbán's interpretation of Gila's soldier monologues is echoed by military historian Gabriel Cardona, who in the press tour for his book *Cuando nos reíamos de miedo: Crónica desenfadada de régimen que no tenía ni pizca de gracia* (2010) called Gila "el gran

---

> En Sidi Ifni, ante una multitud de legionarios, tan lejos de casa, Gila tuvo una iluminación. Comprendió por fin que su humor desatinado no sólo expresaba rabia, que en él no sólo latían crítica y denuncia sino también algo más importante: consuelo. En su risa había consuelo. Lo supo al ver a tantos soldados reflejados en su diálogo inútil, oyéndole como en un espejo. También ellos hablaban con la nada, le rezaban a Dios, pedían por un milagro y al otro lado del teléfono no había nadie, nunca hubo nadie, estaban solos. Muchachos que marchaban a morir con fusiles viejos que se atascaban, con granadas que no estallaban o que estallaban en las manos, ahora se reían de su destino. Eso explicaba la clase de país en que vivían, la locura de que únicamente las víctimas pudieran descifrar la clave oculta de su humor. Mejor reírse, sí. Pero podía haber contado algo parecido a los moros del otro bando y se hubieran reído igual. Era una historia que podía contarse sobre cualquier ejército de cualquier país en cualquier época. No hacía falta ser un erudito en historia militar para comprender que el verdadero absurdo era la guerra. (45-46)

[34] For examples of interviews where Gila expounds on the political critiques embedded in his monologues, see Pécker (1981) and Moix (1993).

dinamitador de la formalidad franquista" ("El 'Soso' Franco"). It is a view supported by Gila's statements in interviews. "Me gusta ridiculizar lo solemne. Y el ejército, los himnos, todas esas cosas entran en esa solemnidad" (Moix). As our analysis in the previous section demonstrates, there is ample evidence at the language level of his soldier monologues to support this interpretation. This critical assessment forges yet another link between Gila's work and the *humor nuevo* / *puro* of Mihura's *Codorniz*, if we recall two of Mingote's statements: first, regarding that publication's unwitting role as "dinamiteros" of "tópicos patrióticos" ("La Codorniz" 158); and second, regarding its "evidente e irritante disonancia en una España que estaba en trance de recuperar el talante imperial, los valores eternos y el piadoso comportamiento general, amén de afianzarse como la reserva espiritual de Occidente. Era una disonancia sobre todo para los que tomaban al pie de la letra aquella palabrería" ("Dos momentos" 34).

By the time of his death, Gila's life and work had already begun to take on mythical overtones. About two months after his passing, Spanish TV (RTVE) broadcast a three-hour-forty-minute celebration of his life (*Gracias, Miguel*) that took place at the Teatro Conde Duque and featured tributes from contemporaries and collaborators such as Ángel de Andrés, Lina Morgan, and Tony Leblanc, as well as performances by dozens of musicians and comedians. In the years since his death his presence in Spain's collective consciousness has grown and the interpretations of his humor have broadened. Alongside the view expressed in "El Flagelo de la Prepotencia," another has gained momentum: what I classify as the Relief Theory of Gila. The 2011 Campofrío ad campaign is a perfect example of this current, with its question-and-answer climax: "Maestro, ¿se puede ver cada día el lado bueno de todo con la que está cayendo?" answered by Gila's "¿Es el enemigo?" Months later, in May 2012, a two-hour RTVE special, "¡Arriba ese ánimo!" doubled down on the figure of Gila as the champion of laughing away the hard times, "un cómico genial que supo sacarle el lado humorístico a las más terribles situaciones: la guerra, el hambre, la miseria." But this representation of Gila is problematic, as it could easily be misinterpreted as reducing his monologues to simple escapism or unalloyed relief—"una intensa bocanada de oxígeno," as the historian Cardona characterizes Gila's humor in the context of Francoist oppression. And doubtless it was a relief and an escape, but it was also much more.

Miguel Gila's war monologues possess a linguistic and thematic complexity that resist simple, one-dimensional interpretations. As we have seen in the previous section, the various iterations of "¿Es el enemigo?" and "Cómo llegué a la guerra" inscribe war within the semantic and discursive structures of work and play. This inscription produces multiple effects, one of which is the discourse-length *greguería* discussed above. Other effects are attributable to the separate components of that humorous metaphor. On the one hand, Gila establishes the semantic script or context of warfare visually (with his uniform) and aurally (often performing "¿Es el enemigo?" to a soundtrack of machine gun and cannon fire), and that context along with the mention of killing establishes a tone of black humor, very topical and un-Mihura-like. On the other hand, we have surrealist images strung together into an absurd narrative, pure fantasy that would have fit right in among Mihura's clouds and butterflies.

This duality explains how people of opposing ideologies and disparate backgrounds were able to enjoy Gila's humor during Franco's dictatorship.[35] Those who wanted to escape via abstract humor could laugh at the *disparates* and non-lethal wordplay. And those who yearned for the catharsis of criticizing Franco and El Movimiento could laugh at the irreverence directed at the sacred images of war and militarism, and at the absurd reality of a war waged between adversaries who speak the exact same dialect, a war that made no distinction between the battlefield and the workplace. Gila's soldier monologues are polyvalent palimpsests that transmit multiple overlapping codes. And yet their humor does not depend on the audience understanding the social and political referents of Spain's long postwar period. As Vázquez Montalbán notes in his article, the extraordinary longevity and international success of Gila's career "[demostraron] que no sólo nos pertenecía a los que habíamos crecido bajo el amparo de sus imaginerías radiofónicas, sino que había alcanzado la gestualidad para apoderarse de la atención de las nuevas hornadas con las pupilas adheridas a las pantallas de televisión" (Vázquez Montalbán).

---

[35] In the 2018 *Imprescindibles* documentary the comedian Javier Cansado (born in 1974) gives an example of a Franco supporter who loved Gila's humor, "una tía abuela de nosotros que pasó mucho tiempo con nosotros […] que era muy conservadora, muy católica y muy conservadora, pero se moría de risa con Gila. Entonces siempre que lo veíamos en la tele, ella se reía mucho y decía: 'Qué bruto es. Y es republicano, pero qué gracioso.'"

Despite all of the praise that Gila's soldier monologues have received, they and their creator remain almost completely unknown outside of Spain, and within Spain Gila has not received the kind of academic interest focused on "La Otra Generación" and subsequent comedic novelists and playwrights. Spanish-language scholarship on Gila, though limited, has picked up momentum since 2010 and will no doubt continue to do so with the approaching centennial of Gila's birth in March 2019. English-language scholarship on Gila, on the other hand, is practically nonexistent. Aside from the conclusion of Stephen Marsh's 2005 monograph on comic cinema under Franco, the handful of hits on Google Scholar for "Miguel Gila Spanish humor" turn out to be isolated references to Gila or lists of important Spanish comedians. (And when scholars in either language go as far as providing a short biography of Gila, it becomes clear that they have taken his memoir as if it were a rigorously researched history.)

The lack of English-language scholarship on Gila is understandable considering the media and genres that he most often worked. Unlike other recognized masters of Spanish humor—Mihura and Jardiel Poncela in theater, Eduardo Mendoza and Francisco Umbral in novels, for example—Gila does not have the kind of literary credentials normally required for acceptance into the academy. His best and most important works are performed, not written, and their humor diminishes when they are transferred to print (due to the limitations discussed above). Acceptance into the English-speaking academy generally requires translation, and there are really only two kinds of works that are selected for translation: those in the canon and those on the bestseller list. In both instances, Gila is out of luck. Although he has met the first requirement for canonization—being dead—the members of the Real Academia Española are just as unlikely to dissertate on the *oeuvre* of dead stand-up comedians as they are to induct the living ones into their ranks. And even if this dissertation inexplicably goes viral, the YouTube ad revenues for "¿Es el enemigo?" will never put it on Netflix's radar. Gila has not made it into the conversation (in either language) about the significant cultural figures of Spain's twentieth century, and it is likely that he will remain absent from that conversation.

His absence is understandable but, I submit, no longer justifiable. As I argued in the introductory chapter of this work, humor is one of the strongest indicators of humanity, so to ignore the humor in any given historical period is to suggest that those who lived during that period were somehow less human. If, then, we are going to give humor proper representation within our conception of Spain's Civil War and postwar periods, it is only logical to prioritize the humorists who had the greatest impact—those who created the largest "laugh footprint," so to speak. It also makes sense to study the most representative works of those humorists, along with the works that produced important shifts in the kind of humor that was produced and consumed.

As is no doubt obvious by now, all of these priorities intersect in Miguel Gila's war monologues. "Cómo llegué a la guerra" and "¿Es el enemigo?" introduced *el humor nuevo* *español* into every circle of Spanish society and every corner of Spain. They synthesized both sides of the Mihura-Laiglesia dialectic and removed the false dichotomy in Ramón's theater-funeral parlor delimitation of Spanish humor. They fused absurd and black humor. And they continued the avant-garde tradition of rupture, dislocating commonplace language and clichéd themes. They did all of this as open-ended texts, allowing for multiple interpretations that address or ignore the social and political issues of their day. They are explained equally well by the Superiority Theory, the Relief Theory, and the Incongruity theory. In ten pages of text or—preferably—ten minutes of audio or video, Gila's soldier monologues give the reader or listener or viewer a critical document of the artistic, social, intellectual, and political currents in postwar Spain. For the purposes of this study, they represent the apotheosis of humor under Franco, when the fool spoke truth to power and to all of his compatriots. And judging by the fact that Gila's soldier monologues and *viñetas* were never suppressed by the state or its censors (as was often the case with Álvaro's *Codorniz*), power failed to notice the truth being spoken—even when power invited the fool to speak in its own home.

To the Hispanophile scholar who is leery of entering the somewhat respectable mosh-pit of Cultural Studies, Gila's war monologues also offer the reassuring qualities of rising artistic status and real-time cultural relevance. New references and tributes to Gila's signature works appear with increasing regularity, and the gap between the humorist and the impressive bibliography on canonical literary and artistic movements becomes easier to traverse with each new publication on humor or dictatorships or [hashtag] resistance. And despite all of the barriers, the canonization of Gila has already begun. In the *Imprescindibles* documentary on Gila, the humorist Javier Cansado observes that Gila's monologues, as prime specimens of "humor absurdo," employ high-concept poetic devices such as synecdoche, metonymy, and hyperbaton.

And in the *La mitad invisible* episode dedicated to “¿Es el enemigo?” the celebrated (and recently deceased) *viñetista* Forges declares the following: “la permanencia continua de los monólogos de Gila en el acervo colectivo social de España, incluso individualmente, está en una cosa que mucha gente no ha reparado, que es en el perfecto dominio de la lengua. Cada monólogo de Gila es, por decirlo así, una gran música, ¿ve? Es una gran introducción operística, pero hecha con palabras.” Finally, and most reassuringly of all, in his introduction to Ortega’s and Lobato’s *Miguel Gila: Vida y obra de un genio*—which I purchased in the *canoniquísima* Biblioteca Nacional de España—Forges dubs Miguel Gila one of the eternal “majestades humorísticas españolas, los Reyes Magos del Humor: Cervantes, Quevedo y Gila” (16).

Chapter 4: “Is this the enemy?” Translating Gila

This chapter has a three-fold purpose. First, in order to close one of the many lacunae in Gila’s history, I have transcribed the recordings of his war monologues from the 45 RPM singles released in the 1950s. The point is to provide definitive documentation of these two monologues as they were performed during the first decade of his career. As far as I am aware they are the first such transcriptions of “¿Es el enemigo?” (from the 1957 album *Gila... y su teléfono*) and “Gila en la guerra” (from the 1959 album *Gila en la guerra*).[1] Second, in order to combat the almost complete ignorance of Gila outside of Spain, I have translated the monologues into English and presented the translations side-by-side with the transcriptions. And third, as an introduction to the translated monologues, and in order to foreground how this chapter on translation connects with the rest of this study of humor, I will present a brief sketch of the affinities between translation and humor along with an adapted model of the translator’s subjectivity: the humorist as translator.

Humor and/in Translation: The Humorist as Translator

Given the fact that both disciplines play with language, it should come as no surprise that affinities exist between translation and humor. The corpus of scholarship on translation is substantial and continues to expand in step with the importance of language in globalization, so here I will limit myself to just two concepts in Translation Studies that best apply to the ideas that we have explored in this study of humor under Franco. First, translation and humor both require extensive *encyclopedic* understanding of the language. And second, both the translator and humorist have to be able to imagine other minds.

---

[1] At the very least we can attest that no other transcriptions have made it onto the Internet. Google searches for phrases that are unique to these two albums (e.g., “mensajera pero gallina”) yielded zero relevant results (November 19, 2018). Given the near-infinite reach of Google Books, plagiaristic blogs, and transcripts in YouTube notes and comments, it is not unreasonable to conclude that zero results means that there are no print or electronic transcripts available on the Web, which is basically the same thing as saying that they don’t exist.

First, translation and humor both depend upon an encyclopedic understanding of language. I take the term "encyclopedic" from Umberto Eco's collection of essays in *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (2004). In the first chapter / essay, "The Plants of Shakespeare," Eco explains that rather than a lexical (dictionary-like) understanding of a language, translation relies on "the kind of information that is not usually provided by dictionaries, but by encyclopedias" (13). To demonstrate this distinction, Eco follows the transformation of *work* in "the works of Shakespeare," a phrase that he plugged into the old Babelfish automatic translation system provided by the (also frighteningly old) AltaVista search portal. His English-to-Italian-to-English operation "translated" "the works of Shakespeare" to "gli impianti de Shakespeare" and back to "the plants of Shakespeare" (10). Eco reasons that Babelfish used lexical equivalents but had no encyclopedic data to help it judge possible translations for "work" against the context of literature marked by the name Shakespeare. Eco then cites *Webster's* to show how "work" in English can mean "an activity, a task, a duty, the result of such activity (such as a work of art or a literary masterpiece), a structure in engineering [...], a place where industrial labor is carried out (like a plant or factory)—and many other things" (11). He concludes that, "if we accept the idea of equivalence in meaning, we could say that *work* is synonymous and equivalent in meaning both with *literary masterpiece* and with *factory*" (*ibid*., emphasis in original). Without an encyclopedic understanding of *work* and *Shakespeare*, Babelfish is left to guess (probably by means of an algorithm) which supposed synonym to use, *impianti* or *opere*, and in this case it guesses wrong.[2]

The false synonymy (i.e., homonymy) that Eco explores in "The Plants of Shakespeare" is precisely what verbally expressed humor (VEH) tends to exploit. We explored this idea in our study of philosophies of humor (Chapter 1), though we expressed Eco's concept of encyclopedic knowledge as "frames," which are also called "scripts" in semantics ("schema," "daemons," or "hermeneutic frameworks" in other fields). All of these terms refer to the points of data that "frame" a word or concept, a collection that our brains pull up when we encounter that word or concept.

Humor often takes advantage of the implicit assumptions that frames. For example, in Gila's 1957 recording of "¿Es el enemigo?" he includes the following information in his telephone conversation with the enemy: "Bueno, otra cosa... [...] Ayer cantó el prisionero de ustedes. ... Por fin ha cantado." When we hear the word *cantó,* our brains activate all of our lexical and encyclopedic knowledge connected with *cantar*—music, opera, Stevie Wonder, Montserrat Caballé, and so forth—and compare it with the "war" frame that Gila's soldier monologue (complete with a soundtrack of bombs and machine guns going off) has previously activated. The two frames seem largely incompatible, with the only possible common ground being the figurative, colloquial meaning of *cantar* (buried at the bottom of the DRAE entry at number 17): "Descubrir o confesar algo, generalmente bajo presión." This tentative assumption is confirmed milliseconds later by the word *prisionero*. The only logical commonality between the frames *guerra, prisionero,* and *cantar* is the idea of a prisoner of war divulging information under intense interrogation or torture.

---

[2] Machine translation has improved drastically since Eco tested Babelfish. Google Translate produced "le opere di Shakespeare" and re-produced "the works of Shakespeare," switching from *lavori* to *opere* as soon as I typed in "Shakespeare." It also negotiated unscathed Eco's English-Italian-German-English minefield of "studies in the logic of Charles Sanders Peirce" (and corrected my misspelling of "Peirce" in the first translation), so it is clear that Google has made use of its access to massive amounts of data to educate its translation machine (consulted November 20, 2018).

Gila's careful word choice has led us to infer that he is talking about a prisoner of war giving up strategic information. Our brains activate a new frame, "strategic information," connected with all kinds of details that an enemy would like to know—where and when an attack might come, for example. What Gila says next starts out as a perfect fit for this new frame, as it ostensibly mentions a route from one location to another: "Dijo que de Santurce a Bilbao viene por toda la orilla." The problem is, what he has just said happens to be the near-verbatim title of a popular folk song, "Desde Santurce a Bilbao vengo por toda la orilla."[3] At this moment a second, previously concealed frame jumps to the fore: a prisoner singing a folk song (perhaps to pass the time).[4]

This is the kind of maneuver that studies subscribing to the General Theory of Verbal Humor tend to focus on, where the joke-maker crafts "two perfectly overlapping and, at the same time, opposing scripts that are discernible to the recipient as a single semantic script" (Chiaro 1). Interestingly, this kind of wordplay is rare in Gila's monologues.[5] As our analysis in the previous chapter demonstrates, he seems to prefer protractedly overlapping frames that are supposedly incompatible: war and work, or war and play, or all three.

The difference between humorists and translators, in regards to frames or scripts or "encyclopedic knowledge," is that translators have to take great care to avoid doing by accident what humorists take great care to do on purpose. Unless the translator is lucky enough to be translating humor, in which case she has to recognize the misleading scripts in the source text and create some kind of equivalent in the target text in order to achieve the same effect.[6]

---

[3] "Desde Santurce a Bilbao / vengo por toda la orilla / con mi falda remangada, / luciendo la pantorrilla. / Vengo deprisa y corriendo / porque me oprime el corsé, / voy gritando por las calles: / ¡Sardina frescué!"

[4] The jump from strategic information to folk song recalls Herbert Spencer's "descending incongruity."

[5] As far as I am aware, Gila's bit about the prisoner singing does not appear in any other version of "¿Es el enemigo?" or in any version of "Gila en la guerra"/"Cómo llegué a la guerra."

Achieving the desired effect is the most important measure of success for both humor and translation, and it requires that the translator and the humorist possess the ability to imagine other minds. In both cases, the "other mind" belongs to the audience.

The prominent translation theorist (and trainer, and practitioner) Anthony Pym espouses a translation competence model that situates two abilities at the center of translation: "The ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TT_1, TT_2 … TT_n) for a pertinent source text (ST)"; and "The ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence" (489). In both processes, the first "productive" and the second "reductive," the translator constantly theorizes (492) and, as Daryl Hague notes, must use "empathic accuracy" in order to "imagine how different audiences see the world" (Hague 20). Among those audiences are the author who wrote the source text, the native readers of that source text, the potential readers of the target text, and even other translators—whether these are collaborators or simply a more critical segment of the target text audience (Hague 21-22).

To demonstrate how imagining different audiences helps to produce "a series of more than one viable target text," let us look at the example of one of Ramón Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías*: "La palabra 'inefable' parece haber sido raptado por un don Juan."

The first imagined audience is the author. Despite Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault and their "authorcidal" tendencies, most translators begin with a reverence or even love[7] for the source text that transfers to the author. The imagined reading of one's translation by the author inspires in the translator a desire to channel the author, whether she or he is living—in which case the imagined reading becomes a nerve-wracking prospect—or dead (in the biological sense, not the all-encompassing Barthesian-Foucaultian sense). Attempting to "spirit-channel" the author[8] involves recognizing his or her intentionality in the source text.

---

[6] For examples, see Anne Leibold's article "The Translation of Humor; Who Says It Can't Be Done?" and my translation of Gila's singing prisoner of war (below).

[7] In her essay "The Politics of Translation" (reprinted in Venuti 2004), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduces love into cultural translation. She writes of an intimate reading where the translator must "surrender to the text" (370). What the translator surrenders is her own subjectivity ("agency") and the demands of the imagined audience (*ibid.*);

Thus, in order to translate Ramón's *greguería,* I begin by trying to understand this particular variant of *humor + metáfora = greguería*. I have to admit that, for me, "La palabra 'inefable' parece haber sido raptada por un don Juan" is one of Ramón's more enigmatic aphorisms. The actual metaphoric structure is more difficult to discern, compared to that of "Golondrina: bigotes postizos del aire." The two opposing ideas are *inefable* and "un don Juan,"[9] so the metaphoric process may involve the personification or anthropomorphizing of *inefable,* creating a form that "a" Don Juan (or "the" Don Juan in the flesh—see note 9 below) can then seduce. Or does the metaphor work in the other direction, turning Don Juan into a cosmic force that transcends physical boundaries to seduce words themselves? (This reading works well with Torrente Ballester's 1963 *Don Juan*.) Or Ramón could have had something in-between in mind. Perhaps the word and the man remain exactly what they are. But the word "embodies" the impotence of language and thus exercises an irresistible allure for a man whose purpose in life

---

surrendering agency is possible because of the comfortable intimacy between the translator and the text, the translator's "love for the text" (371).

[8] Douglas Robinson dubs the classic model of translation "spirit-channeling" after the mystical notion that "the discarnate spirits of authors [...] take over the translators of their works and dictate the translations through them" (Robinson 25). In other words, the translator is a high-fidelity "medium" whose subjectivity does not interfere in the process of producing a perfect translation. This is also the idea behind the modern, less mystical construct of equivalence: the belief that two texts—the source and the translation—can have the same value (hence *equi-valence*) (*Exploring Translation Theories* 6-7).

[9] Why not simply the actual Don Juan? In most of my translational variants, I remove the indefinite article, partly because my imagined target audiences do not care to distinguish between a run-of-the-mill seducer and his prototype, and partly because I imagine that removing the article makes the sentence flow more easily for my imagined target audience.

depends on the power of language. And in the struggle between *lo inefable* and (a) Don Juan, the seducer comes off victorious.

In any of these cases, the humor component of the *greguería* most likely consists of the fantastical absurdity suggested in the seduction of a word. Such at least is the source of humor for my imagined authorial audience. Translation radically shifts the source of the humor, however. Various versions of my imagined target audience see in the English word *ineffable* a serendipitous (or unlucky) play on *eff*, the widely-used euphemism for *fuck*. Translation scholars often discuss losses and gains in translation. Any translation that uses the English word *ineffable* will necessarily lose some of the source's polyvalence by introducing shocking wordplay that will inevitably become the center of attention. At the same time, translating "La palabra 'inefable' parece haber sido raptada por un don Juan" into English has the potential to produce exponential gains in humor. Given Ramón's manifest aversion to "el retruécano, que es una cosa mecánica" (*Humorismo* 61), I naturally worry about the disapproval of my first imagined audience. But not enough to find another word for *ineffable*. The prospect of my imagined target audiences' laughter is too irresistible.

As stated above, I can imagine various distinct target audiences, each of which elicits a viable translation. For an audience of translators who dislike the domesticating tendencies of the into-English market, I might produce a near word-for-word translation: "The word 'ineffable' seems to have been raptured by a Don Juan." A slightly less pro-foreignizing audience might prefer "The word 'ineffable' seems to have been carried off and ravished by a Don Juan." These form-based translations carry an additional benefit: they are less likely to fracture the enigmatic relationship that Gómez de la Serna must have seen between *inefable* and seducers à la Don Juan.

For an audience that balks at the whole prospect of Don Juan ravishing or rapturing anything, I might choose a more consensual translation of *raptado*—"The word 'ineffable' seems to have been seduced by Don Juan"—though *seduced* still implies that Don Juan is the one driving the action.

For an audience familiar with Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, and/or an audience who prefers a more idiomatic or "domesticated" translation, I might open up the number and order of words to find a less stilted equivalent for *raptar*: "The word 'ineffable' seems like it should appear in Don Juan's list of conquests."[10]

For an audience that enjoys innuendo-based wordplay, I might allude to sex by altering a familiar phrase: "The word 'ineffable' probably lost its prefix to Don Juan."[11]

For an audience that considers humor enhanced when it contains the zing of mild or suggested profanity, I might go directly to the euphemism upon which the wordplay depends: "The word 'ineffable' got effed by Don Juan."

And finally, for an audience that finds mild sacrilege to be hilarious because the violation is not too threatening, I might overlay a famous verse of scripture[12] with the liberally-translated *greguería*: "For with Don Juan, nothing shall be ineffable."[13]

---

[10] If we crossed the admittedly fuzzy boundary between translation and adaptation, we might convert Ramón's *greguería* into a stanza about "inefable" that would be inserted into the famous exposition of Don Juan's deeds in the first act of part I of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. The result might be something like this: Por dondequiera que fui, / la razón atropellé, / la virtud escarnecí, / a la justicia burlé / y a las mujeres vendí. / *Cuantas veces enfrenté / lo inefable, persistí, / y el prefijo le quité, / bien* efado *lo dejé. / Todo* efable *es para mí* (lines 501-505, plus the italics which are literally mine).

[11] Another possibility, "The word 'ineffable' probably lost its *in-* to Don Juan," alludes to "loss of innocence."

[12] Luke 1:37 (KJV).

[13] E.T.A. Hoffman and (probably) Gonzalo Torrente Ballester would disagree, as they argue that it is actually Don Juan who has been seduced by the ineffable—transcendent love, unity with the cosmos—and who is doomed never to achieve it. Torrente's Don Juan says, "entró en mi corazón el deseo de eternidad, y se llenó mi espíritu del ansia de trasponer mis límites" (161). Hoffmann's Don Giovanni seeks "through love, through the pleasure of the flesh, [to achieve] on earth that which exists in our hearts as a heavenly promise only, and which amounts to just that

The ability to "generate a series of more than one viable target text" recalls a competency that Ramón and several others consider essential in the humorist. I reproduce here some of Ramón's words cited above in the chapter on *La Codorniz*. "El humor muestra el doble de toda cosa" (51). "El humor es ver por dónde cojea todo, por dónde es efímero y convencional, de qué manera cae en la nada antes de caer, de qué modo está ligado con lo absurdo, aunque no lo crea, *cómo puede ser otra cosa o ser de otra manera*, aunque esté muy pagado de cómo es" (52, italics mine). The reader may recall Mihura's plagiarization of Ramón in *Mis memorias* (discussed in Chapter 2): "El humor es verle la trampa a todo, darse cuenta de por dónde cojean las cosas; comprender que todo tiene un revés, que todas las cosas pueden ser de otra manera, sin querer por ello que dejen de ser tal como son" (305). The humorist must be able to see things from more than one perspective. To paraphrase the first tenet of Pym's model of translation competence, the humorist must be able to generate a series of more than one (viable?)[14] view of the world and his experience in it.

In order to generate these views, to see "el doble de toda cosa" and "cómo puede ser otra cosa," the humorist—like the translator—must imagine an authorial audience who views her or his own life from a safe distance. Writes Ramón: "Hay que desconcertar al personaje absoluto que parecemos ser, dividirle, salirnos de nosotros, ver si desde lejos o desde fuera vemos mejor lo que sucede" (50). And writes Mihura, plagiarizing again: "Lo único que pretende el humor es que, por un instante, nos salgamos de nosotros mismos, nos marchemos de puntillas a unos veinte metros y demos una vuelta a nuestro alrededor contemplándonos por un lado y por otro,

---

longing for infinity which weds us to Heaven"; but he is "doomed to find earthly life [...] shallow in the end" (436-37).

[14] Richard Rorty's ironist similarly acknowledges the possibility and necessity of multiple worldviews, with no expectation of ever hitting on a "final vocabulary" that expresses universal truth or reality (73-78).

por detrás y por delante [...] y descubramos nuevos rasgos y perfiles que no nos conocíamos" (305). The humorist generates his own source text by imaginatively distancing her- or himself from the moment, jumping outside of the dominant frame or script to view it as a separate authorial audience.

Victor Frankl mentions this kind of out-of-body experience in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He follows his words about humor being a weapon for the soul's self-preservation with this observation: "It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds" (63). According to philosopher Simon Critchley, this ability "to rise above any situation" makes humor "an exemplary practice because it is a universal human activity that invites us to become philosophical spectators upon our lives. It is practically enacted theory" (18).

This imagined philosophical spectator is the author of the humorist's source text. The next step, producing the target text, requires that she imagine her target audience. Flamson and Bryant, in their exposition of the Encryption Theory of Humor, note that professional humorists must take great care in crafting situations and language that access the broadest base of shared cultural knowledge with the audience, essentially manufacturing the shared "cognitive environment" (65)[15] that they argue is the key to naturalistic (conversational) humor.[16] The successful transmission (or translation) of the humorous source text depends on the humorist's ability to predict his or her audience's "beliefs, knowledge, and preferences" (Flamson and Barrett 279). I submit that the many variations of Gila's soldier monologues are the result of his capacity, honed over years of creative performance, to modulate his texts according to his predictions for each audience's beliefs, linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge, and preferences.

---

[15] Indeed, in their article introducing and testing the Encryption Theory, Flamson and Barrett (2008) explain that they used professionally produced humor because, as opposed to naturalistic humor, records of it are abundantly available. Sources of naturalistic humor are scarce. "It is notoriously difficult [...] to systematically manipulate a participant's production of humor in a laboratory setting, as reflected in the overwhelming use of professional comedy in nearly all investigations of the cognition of humor" (279).

[16] This necessary condition exists for irony as well, as Claire Colebrook demonstrates. "Irony relies on a crucial feature of language as shared recognition. In ironic speech acts we become aware of a feature that marks all language: we do not just exchange signs; we recognise a meaning that is other than the sign, or what the sign intends. This dimension of meaning and sense requires shared conventions and presupposed values" (35-36).

Here we return to the importance of empathy that Hague points to in translation competence. Arnold H. Modell writes in *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain* (2003) that "empathy is based on identification, but it is a partial identification. We imagine ourselves into other minds by discovering items of similarity" (175). Humorists and translators alike must imagine with "empathic accuracy" (Hague 20) the cultural, linguistic, and experiential common ground that they share with their audience. As Modell notes, this identification with the audience "is a partial identification. [...] With empathy, the identification is fleeting and transitory; we feel only 'as if' we resemble the other person. Empathy involves a sense of similarity while maintaining a sense of difference. To experience the simultaneity of similarity and difference requires the acceptance of paradox, which in turn rests on the cognitive capacity for metaphor" (175).

This empathic, metaphoric competency is the core of the humorist-as-translator. The translator-humorist begins by identifying with an imagined authorial audience. She uses metaphor, imagination, and empathy to see "el doble de toda cosa" and "cómo puede ser otra cosa." Her success depends on accurately imagining the minds of the target audience, requiring the ability to "salirnos de nosotros" (Ramón), "to rise above" (Frankl), "to become philosophical spectators upon our lives" (Critchley), and to "*accept the paradox of something that both is and is not.* In turn, the acceptance of paradox assumes a capacity for metaphor—a cognitive facility that allows for the play of similarity and difference" (Modell 176, emphasis original). As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, this capacity for metaphor and creative imagination—so essential for the translator-humorist—is the same capacity manifest in Ramón's *greguerías* and Gila's soldier monologues.

Gila's Wars

As the *greguería* translation exercise demonstrates, any translation is merely one of many possible translations. The following translations of Gila's war monologues are no exception. A change in translator, medium, or *skopos*[17] would result in a very different text. Another translator might produce an interlinear translation to help Spanish L2 students understand the original better. A script for an audiovisual adaptation might take more liberties to change up the English dialect or the syntax. A translator who wanted to foreground the "Spanishness" of Gila's soldiers might opt for a much more foreignized, form-based translation.

As for my translation, the primary goal has been to reproduce the *descoyuntamientos* that make the monologues so effective and unique. Special care was taken in transferring the native strangeness of *matar* as Gila uses it, the incongruity of his colloquial register, and the many contextual markers that evoke play and work. As discussed in Chapter 3, text versions of Gila's monologues are unlikely to elicit the same kind of laughter as a live performance or even a recorded performance. But this did not stop me from trying to create an English version that at least approaches the level of funniness that is still present in the transcription. This *skopos* has led me to attempt to find American vernacular equivalents for packing a *tortilla de escabeche* to war, as well as “Desde Santurce a Bilbao” and another joke that depends on word play (watch for “chorro”). Anti-domestication militants would no doubt criticize these last changes because of the way they transplant the text from its native Spain to the powerful land of imperial assimilation. My defense is that anyone who reads anything outside of these translations will have no misconceptions regarding the time and place in which Gila’s war is fought. This dissertation is not directed toward monolingual English speakers. For the (admittedly small) academic audience of this work, the presence of the transcript—not to mention the chapters spent on the evolution of Spanish humor after the Civil War—will do most of the lifting where context is concerned; and no amount of witty footnotes would prevent form-based translations of “Santurce a Bilbao” and its siblings from interrupting whatever laughter the rest of the translation may have generated. Laughter, after all, is the measure of success for humor, and I would hate to be the cause of Gila bombing—in the non-violent sense, as in “That pun about ‘bombing’ totally bombed.”

---

[17] *Skopos* theory studies the various hats that a translator can and does wear in negotiating the *skopos* or purpose of the translation; it allows the translator greater freedom outside of the actual task of translating, where the success or failure of the translation is based on whether it accomplishes the pre-defined purpose. See Vermeer, "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action" in Venuti 2004 (227-238).

“¿Es el enemigo?”[18]

[se oyen explosiones y disparos al fondo]	[explosions and gunshots in the background]
[descuelga y marca un número con teléfono a disco]	[picks up phone and dials a number on a rotary dial]

---

[18] The traditional format for bilingual texts presents the source and the translation on opposite pages. My choice not to follow tradition with these transcriptions and translations is largely a question of media. This study is unlikely to be read in any non-electronic medium. The two-column format I have chosen allows those who read on laptops, tablets, or (not unlikely) smartphones to compare the source and translation without having to scroll (or swipe) up and down to jump back and forth between the Spanish page and the corresponding English page.

Oiga, ¿es la... fábrica de armas?	Hey, is this the... weapons manufacturer?
¿Está el ingeniero, el señor Emilio?	Is the manager, Emilio, there?
Que se ponga.	Put him on.
De parte del ejército. [canta para sí mismo]	It's the army. [sings to himself]
Señor Emilio, que le llamo porque... de los seis cañones que mandaron ayer, vienen dos sin agujero.	Emilio, I'm calling because... the six cannon you sent us yesterday, on two of them the holes are missing.
Pues, tirando con la bala por fuera.[19]	Uh, firing them with the shells on the outside.
Y el submarino que mandaron ayer, de color bien, pero no flota.	And the submarine you sent yesterday, love the color, it just doesn't float.
No, porque lo hemos echado al fondo del mar después de comer, y todavía no ha subido.	No, because we sent it to the bottom of the ocean after lunch, and it still hasn't come back up.
Ah, que era un barco. Como no dijo nada el que lo trajo...	Oh, so it was a boat. Well the guy who brought it didn't say anything...
Bueno... no, mande otro que ese ya estará muy mojado.	So... no, send another one, that one's probably soaked through by now.
Pues ¡nos costó un trabajo hundirlo!	It wasn't easy sinking that thing!

---

[19] In subsequent versions Gila would extend this portion of the conversation, heightening the absurdity as well as the black humor: "O sea que al mismo tiempo que uno aprieta el gatillo, otro sale corriendo con la bala. ... Sí, pero se cansa y la suelta. ... Pues no sabemos dónde, porque como no vuelven..."

Bueno, otra cosa: ¿sabe usted si ha ido a comprar un avión para el ejército un soldado que se llama Julito, que su padre es pescadero y... y tiene una hermana que se va a casar, que tiene un lunar en el pescuezo s... según la ves a la derecha?

Que se ponga. [canta para sí mismo]

Julito...

Que... ¿tú te has sentado encima del caballo del capitán?

¿Uno marrón, con moscas?

Anda, mírate debajo, a ver si lo tienes...

¿Está ahí?

Pues tráeselo, que van todos al galope y él corriendo detrás.

Oye, y ¿tú has salido con una chica rubia, con los ojos azules?

¿Y te has casado?

Anda. Pues es un se... es un señor, que es espía.

Bueno, oye.

Que te vengas enseguida, que te estamos esperando pa... para avanzar.

No, dice el capitán que o todos juntos o nada.

Oh, another thing: Do you know if someone came to buy a plane for the army, a soldier named Julito, his dad runs a fish market and... and his sister's getting married, she has a mole on her neck on... on your right when you're looking at her?

Put him on. [sings to himself]

Julito...

Uh... did you ride off on the captain's horse?

A brown one, with flies on it?

Come on, take a look underneath you, see if you've got it...

It's there?

Well bring it back to him, everybody's galloping off and he's jogging along behind them.

Hey, have you been going out with a blonde girl, blue eyes?

You got married?

Oh. Well that's a g... a guy, he's a spy.

OK, hey.

You gotta come back right away, because we're waiting on you to... to advance.

No, the captain says either we all go or no one does.

Bueno, entonces, te apartamos lo tuyo y luego lo avanzas solo.

Bueno.

Ha... hasta luego. [cuelga y vuelve a marcar]

Oiga, eh... ¿es... es el enemigo?

¿Ustedes podrían parar la guerra un momento?

Que se nos ha atrancado el cañón.

El sargento, que ha metido la cabeza adentro... para la cosa de la revista, y ahora no la puede sacar.

Sí, ya hemos probado con jabón, pero se le pone el pelo rubio.

Está vivo, porque le oímos.

Sí, di... dice: [voz tapada] “¡Sacarme de aquí!”

A lo mejor disparando se desatasca.

Otra cosa, que ha estado aquí el espía de ustedes.

Agustín, uno bajito, vestido de lagarterana.

Okay, so, we’ll leave your share and you can advance it later on your own.

OK.

See... see you later. [hangs up and dials again]

Hey, uh... is... is this the enemy?

Could you guys stop the war for a second?

Our cannon’s jammed.

A sergeant, he stuck his head in it... to do an inspection, and now it won’t come out.

Yeah, we already tried soap, but it’s turning his hair blond.

He’s alive, we can hear him.

Yeah, he... he says, [muffled] “Get me out of here!”

He’ll probably come unstuck if we fire it off.

Another thing, your spy was over here.

Agustín, a short guy, dressed up as Betty Boop.[20]

---

[20] “Vestirse de lagarterana” literally means to dress up in the traditional dress of women from Lagartera, a small town near Toledo. The dress is impressively colorful and ornate, and so the phrase has acquired a certain sense of irony, suggesting that someone is trying to disguise himself (almost always a male) in the most ostentatious and attention-grabbing manner possible. I considered using what I consider the cultural equivalent: Groucho Marx glasses, the gag disguise consisting of a false nose and mustache attached to thick-rimmed glasses. However, this option was outweighed by the leitmotif of spies dressing in drag, as in the earlier phone conversation with Julito and Gila’s own stint as Mari Pili in “Gila en la guerra.” As a compromise I chose Betty Boop, a famous cartoon character who first appeared in 1930. Her signature outfit, a strapless, backless mini-dress and a single garter, would also be a counterproductive disguise.

Bueno, que se ha llevado los mapas del polvorín.	Yeah, he took our maps for the ammo dump.
Que los traiga, que solo tenemos esos.	Tell him to bring them back, we don’t have any other copies.
Y ¿ustedes han tirado algún cañonazo el jueves?	So, did you guys fire a cannon on Thursday?
Anda, que la que han armado.	Ooh, you’re in big trouble.
Que le han dado a una señora que no era de la guerra.	You hit a woman who wasn’t part of the war.
Pues está con un morro ... que no sé yo...	Well, she’s in a helluva mood, I don’t need to tell you...
Bueno, otra cosa... ¿Qué le iba a decir yo? Ayer cantó el prisionero de ustedes.	Oh, also... What was I going to say? Your guy sang yesterday.
Por fin ha cantado.	Our prisoner, he finally sang.
Dijo que de Santurce a Bilbao viene por toda la orilla.	He said early in the morning you’ll be starting out, and we might as well be coming along, because you’re loading up your “woody” with your “boards” inside and heading out singing your song.[21]
Ah, pues, no sé.	Oh, I don’t know.
¿Y ha... han puesto ustedes alambres con pinchos?	And ha... have you guys strung any barbed wire?

---

[21] This is definitely an anachronism. The title track from the Beach Boys’ debut album, *Surfin’ Safari*, would not be an international hit for another five years after Gila recorded his first album in 1957. But with a little suspension of disbelief, the opening lyrics could be mistaken for a coded message about a military operation, making the song an adequate translation for “Desde Santurce a Bilbao,” the only downsides being the release date and the way the song displaces the dialogue from Spain to Southern California. I welcome suggestions for songs to replace “Surfin’ Safari” if anyone can come up with one that sounds like it’s describing secret military strategy and was well-known in 1950s Spain.

On a separate note, I have considered using a SoCal surf bum accent as the equivalent to Gila’s very non-military, colloquial tone.

Pues, hijo, no ganamos para pantalones...	Aw, man, that’s going ruin my good khakis...
Por fin, ¿cuándo piensan atacar?	One last thing: when were you guys thinking of attacking?
El lunes... Y ¿a qué hora?	Monday... What time?
Anda, a las siete estaremos todos acostados. Y ¿no podrían atacar por la tarde?	Ooh, at seven we’ll all be in bed. Could you maybe attack in the afternoon?
Después del fútbol.	After the game.
Bueno	Okay.
Y, ¿van a venir muchos?	So, there going to be a lot of you?
¡Hala!, qué... qué bestias.	Wow, that... that’s crazy!
Sí, sí, bueno, pues no sé si habrá balas para todos.	Right, right, but I don’t know if we’ll have enough bullets for all of you.
Bueno, ya lo miraremos.[22]	Okay, we’ll find out soon enough.
Bueno, oiga, otra cosa: ¿Ustedes han tirado, mm, gases asfixiantes?	Oh, hey, another thing: Did you guys, uh, use gas on us?
Bueno, pues avise, porque hay un olor aquí que... que.. que no hay quien pare.	Well, let us know, because something over here, it... it... it stinks to high heaven.
Nos hemos tenido que duchar, mm, treinta y seis veces cada uno, y el sargento que huele y que huele y que huele.	We’ve all had to shower, mm, thirty-six times, and our sergeant keeps asking what the smell is.
Bueno, otra cosa, ¿qué le iba a decir?, que... les hemos mandado un ultimátum para que se rindan.	Okay, another thing, what was I going to say? Uh... We sent you an ultimatum for your surrender.

---

[22] Gila would later replace “Bueno, ya lo miraremos” with the following sentence, extending the absurdity and strengthening the war-as-play motif: “Bueno, nosotros las disparamos y ustedes se las reparten [Okay, we’ll shoot everything we’ve got at you and you guys will have to split it up].”

Bueno, se lo iba... se lo íbamos a mandar con una paloma mensajera y se ha puesto mala.

Y lo hemos mandado con una gallina.

Mensajera, pero gallina.

Lo digo para que tengan en cuenta que si tiene huevo adentro, es nuestro, ¿eh?

Que luego no haya líos.

Bueno, pues...

N... nada más.

Bueno, besos al coronel.

A... adiós, que usted lo mate bien.

Adiós, adiós.

Well, we w... we were going to use a carrier pigeon to send it, and then it got sick.

So we used a carrier chicken.

It's a carrier, but a chicken.

I'm just telling you so you know if it has an egg inside it, it's ours, okay?

We don't want any trouble over it.

Okay, then...

Th... that was it.

Okay, give the colonel a hug for me.

G... good-bye, kill a good one.

Good-bye, bye.

"Gila en la guerra"

Les voy a contar a ustedes cómo fui yo a la guerra.

Yo trabajaba de mozo en unos… en unos almacenes de unas farmacias. Y un día se me rompió una aspirina y me echaron.

Y fui a mi casa y me senté en una silla que teníamos para cuando nos echaran, y vino mi tío Cecilio que traía un periódico con un anuncio de la guerra que decía: "Hace falta un soldado que mate de prisa."

I'm going to tell you the story of how I went to war.

I was working as an errand boy at... at some pharmacy warehouses. And one day I accidently broke an aspirin and they fired me.

And I went home and sat in a chair we had for when we got fired, and my Uncle Cecilio came in with a newspaper with an ad for the war that said, "Wanted: fast-killing soldier." And... and my mom said, Y… y dijo mi mamá: “Apúntate tú, que eres espabilao.”

Y dije: “Yo, ¿por qué tengo que ir a la guerra?”

Dijo: “Pues, porque ya tienes que hacer algo.”

Conque dije: “Si es que yo… yo mato flojo.”

Dijo: “Ya… ya te enseñarán a matar más fuerte.”

Conque dijo mi tía: “Es que ahora tendremos que comprarle un caballo.”

Y dijo… dijo mi mamá: “Ni hablar, esos los dan en el ejército.”

Dijo mi tía: “Ni se te ocurra, sabe Dios quién se habrá montado en él. Es mejor que lleve su caballo propio.”

Conque fuimos a comprar un caballo, y no lo vendían suelto. Tenía que ser con carro y con moscas.

Y dijo mi mamá: “Vas a llenar toda la guerra de moscas. Es mejor que la hagas a pie, pero limpio.”

Conque me hice una tortilla de escabeche y me fui a la guerra. Y llegué el lunes a las 7:00 de la mañana, y estaba la guerra cerrada porque era muy temprano.

“You should apply, you’re quick on the uptake.”

And I said, “Me? Why do I have to go to war?”

She said, “Well you have to work somewhere.”

So I said, “But I... I don’t kill so good.”

She said, “They... they’ll teach you to kill good soon enough.”

So my aunt said, “But now we’ll have to buy him a horse.”

And my... my mom said, “Forget that, the army will give him one.”

My aunt says, “No way, God knows who’s been sitting on that thing. He’s better off bringing his own horse.”

So we went to buy the horse, and you couldn’t buy one separate. You had to get the cart and the flies too.

And my mom said, “You’re going to get the war all nasty with flies. Better just fight on foot, at least you’ll be clean.”

So I packed myself a hot lunch and went off to war. I got there Monday at 7:00 am, and the war was closed because it was too early. And there was a woman

Y había una señora afuera que estaba vendiendo torrijas y bollos y cosas. Y digo: “Oiga, ¿la guerra del ‘14?”

Y dijo: “Esta es la del ‘16, la del ‘14 es más abajo.”

Conque fui a la otra guerra, y cuando abrieron la guerra a las 9:00 entré. Y había un soldado matando. Digo: “Qué… qué tal matas?”

Dice: “Bien, ¿y tú?”

Dije: “Yo, todavía flojo, pero cuando me entrene…”

Dijo: “Espera un momento, que ha ido un capitán a comprar unos tanques y cebollas y eso para el ejército, pero viene enseguida.”

Y me senté allí con un soldado que no mataba porque estaba de luto, y estuvimos allí un rato y cuando vino el capitán, le dije: “Que vengo por lo del anuncio, para matar y eso.”

Y dijo el capitán: “¿Traes cañón?”

Y dije: “Yo creí que la herramienta la ponían ustedes.”

outside selling French toast and rolls and stuff. And I said, “Hey, this the war of ‘14?”

And she said, “This is the war of ‘16; ‘14 is down the street.”

So I went to the other war, and when they opened the war at 9:00 I went in. And there was solder killing there. I said, “How... how you killing?”

He says, “Killing good, how about you?”

I said, “Me, not too good so far, but once I get trained...”

He said, “Just wait a bit, the captain went out to buy tanks and onions and stuff for the army, but he’ll be right back.”

So I sat down next to a soldier who wasn’t killing because he was in mourning, and we sat there a while and when the captain came back, I said, “I’m here about the ad, for killing and all that.”

And the captain said, “You bring a cannon?”

I said, “I though you guys provided the equipment.”

Dijo: “Es mejor cada uno el suyo; así el que rompe, paga.”

Conque dije: “Yo lo que traigo es una bala que me la ha dado un vecino que le sobró de la guerra de Cuba.” Digo: “Está un poco usada, pero lavándola bien…”

Y dijo el capitán: “Y cuando se te acabe la bala, ¿qué?”

Y digo: “Pues voy a por ella, la traigo, la… y vo... la tiro otra vez.”

Dijo: “Es mucho jaleo, no vamos a andar parando la guerra cada dos minutos.”

Y dijo un soldado que era pequeñito por parte del padre, dijo: “¿Y si… y si la atamos con un hilo, y dispara y luego tira del hilo y se la trae otra vez?”

Dijo: “¿Y si se rompe el hilo, qué? Pierdes el hilo y la bala.”

Y dijo el sargento, dice: “Además, esa bala es muy gorda para los fusiles nuestros.”

Y dijo el teniente: “Pero limándola un poco…”

Y el capitán le llamó idiota.

He said, “It’s better if everyone uses their own; that way, you break it, you bought it.”

So I said, “I did bring a bullet my neighbor gave me that he had left over from the Spanish-American War.” I said, “It’s used, but if I wash it good...”

And the captain said, “And once you’ve used up that bullet, then what?”

And I said, “Then I’ll go find it, bring it back, sh... and I’ll g... I’ll shoot it again.”

He said, “Too much hassle, we can’t be stopping the war every couple of minutes.”

And this soldier who was real short like his dad, he said, “What if... what if we tie a string around it, and he shoots it and then grabs the string and pulls it back?”

He said, “And if the string breaks, then what? You lose the string and the bullet.”

And the sergeant said, he goes, “Besides, that bullet’s too big for the rifles we use.”

And the lieutenant said, “But if we file it down a little...”

And the captain called him an idiot.

Conque dijo: “Hala, ponte a matar.”[23]

Me dieron unas balas, y estaba yo matando tan calentito, y dijo el comandante: “Arréglate que vas a ir de espía.”

Y me pusieron una bata de cretona y unos lazos y me fui donde el enemigo y digo: “Hola.”

Y dice un.. un centinela: “¿Qué hay?”

Digo: “Que... que soy Mari Pili.”

Dijo: “¿Y qué querías?”

Digo: “A ver: los planos del polvorín.”[24]

Dijo: “Tú, hace poco que trabajas de espía, ¿no?”

Dije: “Desde las once.”

Dijo: “Te lo hemos notado en el lazo.” Conque me dijeron: “Ni hay planos ni nada. Hala, márchate.”

Y fui adonde mi capitán y le dije: “Que no me han querido dar los planos.”

So he said, “Go on, get killing.”

They gave me some bullets, and I got into a groove, killing good, and the commander said, “Get ready, you’re going to be a spy.”

And they put a dressing gown on me and some ribbons in my hair and I went over to the enemy and said, “Hi.”

And a... a guard says, “What’s going on?”

I said, “I... I’m Mari Pili.”

He said, “And what did you want?”

I said, “Right: hand over the map for the ammo dump.”

He said, “Haven’t been a spy very long, have you?”

I said, “Since 11 o’clock.”

He said, “The ribbons gave it away.” So they said, “No map, no nothing. Go on, get out of here.”

So I went to my captain and said, “They won’t give me the map.”

---

[23] By 1968 Gila had added the masterful phrase, “Aquí se mata de nueve a una y de cuatro a siete [Around here we kill hard from 9:00 to 1:00 and 4:00 to 7:00]” (“Mi guerra”), cementing the theme of war as work, with the added absurdity of the regimented *siesta* in the middle of battle.

[24] This phrase might also be transcribed as “A ver... Los planos del polvorín,” where “a ver” is more of a filler phrase that he utters while trying to think of what it was that he wanted. This could be translated as “Uh, let’s see... The map to the ammo dump.”

Dijo: “Déjalos, si arrieros somos.”

Conque, hala, me puse a matar otra vez, y estaba yo matando tan calentito, y otra vez el sargento, dice: “Que vayas allí al enemigo y que te den el avión.” Porque como nos llevábamos bien con el enemigo, pues con un avión nos arreglábamos todos. Nosotros bombardeábamos los lunes, miércoles y viernes; y los martes, jueves y sábado lo usaba el enemigo. Y los domingos se lo alquilábamos a una agencia de viajes para cubrir gastos.

Conque fui donde el enemigo y digo: “Que soy el espía de antes, que vengo a por el avión.”

Dijo: “Le estamos poniendo un grifo para que sea de propulsión a chorro.”

Dije: “Yo me lo llevo como esté.”

Conque me lo llevé y es que lo habían roto… la hélice. Lo habían tenido de ventilador y la habían roto.

Y se lo dije a mi capitán, y dijo: “Con no volvérselo a dejar, arreglado. Y ahora vas y les bombardeas a pie, para que

He said, “Forget it, they’ll get theirs.”

So, bam, I got back to killing, and I was in a groove, killing good, and up comes the sergeant again, he says, “Go tell the enemy to give you the plane.” Because, seeing as how us and the enemy got along so good, we all got by with the same plane. We bombed Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; and Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday the enemy used it. And Sundays we rented it to a travel agency to cover costs.

So I went to the enemy and said, “I’m the spy from earlier, I’m here for the plane.”

He said, “We’re putting a Jacuzzi in the back to make it jet-powered.”[25]

I said, “I’ll take it as-is.”

So I brought it back and it was broken... the propeller. They’d been using it as a fan and they’d broken it.

So I told the captain, and he said, “We just won’t give it back, that’s all. So now you go bomb them on foot, that’ll teach aprendan.” Conque me dieron las bombas debajo del brazo, fui andando, digo: “Que soy el de antes, que vengo a tirar la bomba.”

---

[25] This is another anachronism—probably. The first Jacuzzi hot tub did not hit the market until the 1970s. However, Candido Jacuzzi patented the J-300—a portable hydrotherapy pump that could be used in any bathtub—in 1956 and began selling it soon thereafter; the prize-giveaway TV show *Queen for a Day* (1956-64) started giving the “hydrotherapy apparatus” to contestants who complained of any kind of health problem, and soon Jacuzzi was a household name. Ironically, the previous generation of Jacuzzi brothers had started out designing and building airplanes, a business they only gave up on when one of the brothers died in a crash. See Paulas and https://en.jacuzzi.eu/jacuzzi-world/history.

Y dijo el capitán enemigo: “A ver si vas a dar a alguien, gracioso.”

Y dije: “Yo qué sé, yo soy un mandado, a mí, lo que me mandan.”

Dijo: “Pues tira por otro lado donde no estemos, anda, no seas gracioso.”

Y tiré… les tiré las bombas en un charco y no explotaron y no maté a nadie.

Y me fui otra vez y cuando volví, dijo mi capitán: “A buenas horas vienes, se acabó la guerra.”

Y dije yo: “¿Qué ha pasado?”

Y dijo: “Que hay… que nos han pedido la licencia de armas, y como no teníamos se han llevado los cañones y todo.”

Así que nos repartimos todo: la intendencia, las albóndigas y el perejil y… y todo lo que había allí, y nos fuimos cada uno para su casa. Y ahí se acabó la guerra.

‘em.” So they put a bomb under each of my arms, I walked over, I said, “It’s me, the guy from before, I’m here to do a bombing run.”

And the enemy captain said, “We’ll see if you hit anyone, you joker.”

And I said, “Don’t look at me, I’m a grunt, just following orders.”

He said, “Then drop them somewhere we’re not, go on, quit messing around.”

So I... I dropped the bombs in a puddle and they didn’t explode and I didn’t kill anyone.

And I left again and when I got back, the captain said, “About time you got here, the war’s over.”

I said, “What happened?”

He said, “There’s... they asked to see our weapons permit, and we didn’t have one so they took our cannons and everything.”

So we divided everything up: the supplies, the meatballs and the parsley and... and everything there, and we all went home. And that’s how the war ended.

Conclusion: Joking Truth to Power?

Throughout this study of humor under Franco we have touched on various philosophers, researchers, and humorists who have all tried to answer the same question: What is humor? I have given the most accurate answer I know: It doesn't matter. By this I mean that providing an all-encompassing definition of humor is not important for the purposes of this study. What does matter is, first, that we understand that regardless of how we try to define it, humor matters. It is an essential feature of humanity and a tool that has many uses, for good or for evil. Second, it matters that we understand what humor can do, and what it probably did during Franco's regime. With these principles in mind, we can judge the merit of humor philosophies by their usefulness in understanding public humor under Franco.

It turns out that Plato got a few things right, but he was clearly wrong on a lot of counts when it comes to laughter and humor. Laughter is not always motivated by our scorn at our friends' ignorance and weaknesses—sometimes we laugh at our enemies too. More often, we laugh at incongruities: frustrated expectations, strange juxtapositions, bad translations (and sometimes serendipitous translations), hostile swearwords in the right (i.e., wrong) context, or sex in the wrong (i.e., right) context. Spaniards under Franco laughed at death, at Romans defacing and burying their own sculptures, at missing cannon holes, at three-hour lunch-and-siesta breaks in the middle of a full day of killing, at Cuban Christopher Columbuses, and at the humble *burro* who probably wanted to be called anything else—Antonio, perhaps. And they laughed at mistaken identities in the park, at cyclopean children with trapezoid bodies, at absurd lovers speaking in rapturous tones about gas. Incongruities help explain the absurd, nonsensical humor of Mihura (and supposedly Gila) as well as Álvaro's (and Gila's) more topical attempts at making sense of the absurdities around them.

Plato was only partly wrong about scornful laughter and the powerful. It turns out that we do laugh at the powerful as well as the weak. We laugh at American presidents and Turkish dictators. Spaniards under Franco laughed at censorship of “Ojos verdes,” at nonsensically verbose ministers jailed in “La Cárcel de Papel,” and even at Francisco Franco Bahamonde’s common sense.

But Plato still got a lot of things right. Laughter can ridicule the weak. It can cause pain and express envy and malice. Laughter can divide people and cause social friction. Even Mihura’s purest and most fantastical humor ridiculed an entire nation for its discursive style, its favored tropes, and its regression towards the past. His *Codorniz* set the younger generation laughing at its parents and grandparents, at the plays they liked and the way they talked. Today we laugh at an inexhaustible and ever-expanding selection of online comfort stupidity. We laugh at presidential misspellings, at idiocy caught on Facebook Live, at an unprecedented lack of self-awareness demonstrated by PeopleofWalMart.com, and at ignorance posted on social media. Sometimes Plato’s recommendation that laughter be banned from the Republic does not seem so unreasonable.

Freud got a lot of things wrong about humor. He and Herbert Spencer were way off when they described laughter in terms of psychical and hydraulic forces. And, among a long list of erroneous proclamations, Freud was wrong about “economies of expenditure.” Our laughter at sexual jokes is not fueled by the energy we would otherwise use to repress the desired expressed in the jokes.

However, Freud did get some things right about humor, albeit obliquely. While just about everything he wrote about the internal workings of laughter was wrong, his ideas about humor in society are useful. *La Codorniz* and its readers seem to demonstrate that “every joke calls for a public of its own," though Freud is referring to "tendentious jokes"—jokes that mask either physical aggression or sexual desire—and the only kind of attack perpetrated by Mihura's *Codorniz,* as noted above, is against *lo cursi* (185).

Freud also takes superiority and hostility in humor to social strata where Plato argued they could not go, attacking classes normally immune to "serious" criticism. Álvaro's *Codorniz* had the courage to do this, and Spaniards looked to "la revista más audaz" for the kind of "tendentious jokes [that] are so highly suitable for attacks on the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by internal inhibitions and external circumstances"—by self- and state-imposed censorship—"from direct disparagement" (125).

The three major theories of humor—Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity—have given us useful tools for examining public humor in Spain's postwar period, specifically *La Codorniz* and Gila's war monologues. As we saw in Chapter 3, the stated purposes of Mihura and Laiglesia did not prevent them from using all of the humoristic tools at their disposal. Mihura may have been a card-carrying escapist searching for his "mundo aparte" in the finest tradition of Relief theorists, but his abstract, avant-garde methods used absurd incongruities to attack comedic and theatrical tropes as well as those who perpetuated them. And Laiglesia may have declared himself a Don Quixote who used his pen-lance to fight for "un mundo real más limpio, más bueno y más confortable," but he exploited incongruities—just as Mihura had taught him to do—in order to circumvent censorship in his attacks on otherwise unassailable figures (as noted above). If we apply the classic "fight or flight" dichotomy to these two legendary directors of *La Codorniz*, we might say that Mihura fought while fleeing (ironically, the function of the rearguard) and Laiglesia fought *by* fleeing (guerrilla-style).

Mihura's and Laiglesia's stewardship over *La Codorniz* carried *el humor nuevo español* through its most dizzying heights of abstract humor and into the next phase of its evolution, where real-world absurdities were given the same treatment as theatrical and comedic *cursilerías*. Along with Laiglesia, the greatest representative—and certainly one of the most popular—of this "new" *humor nuevo español* is Miguel Gila, whom Álvaro once called "un producto de *La Codorniz*" (Ortega and Lobato 118). Although Gila balked at this label, his humor was indeed a sublime hybrid of the two *Codornices*, mocking with a fantastical "guerra de mentiras" the absurdity of the Civil War and the arrogance of the victors.

Given the widely-accepted interpretation of Gila as "el flagelo de la prepotencia" (to use Vázquez Montalbán's phrase), the most intriguing moment of Gila's professional career—in terms of the intersection of humor and politics—is his personal performance of the war monologue to Francisco Franco Bahamonde. With no first-hand testimony of the Caudillo's reaction,[1] we are left to wonder what effect Gila's monologue may have had on Franco. Did the Generalísimo's *prepotencia* feel the bite of the humorist's *flagelo*? Did Gila actually manage to joke truth to power? Even if we set aside Michel Foucault's declaration that *parrhesia*—speaking truth to power—cannot be couched in irony or ambiguity (2-3), there are other strong arguments that push the answer towards no.

I include in those arguments Hannah Arendt's thoughts on idealism, thoughtlessness, and philosophy. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the introduction to the *Thinking* volume of *The Life of the Mind*, she famously profiles Adolf Eichmann as a bureaucrat whose unexamined idealism and thoughtlessness left him completely unaware of the evil acts that he was facilitating. She portrays him almost as a comical character in a play that Mihura would have skewered: a man who "repeated word for word the same stock phrases" and who was "genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché" (*Eichmann* 49). And although Arendt actually describes Eichmann's testimony as comical (48-49), the man himself comes off as an anti-humorist, with "his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view" (*ibid.*)—the opposite of Ramon's ideal of "ver el doble de toda cosa" and the translator-humorist's "empathic accuracy." "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else" (*Eichmann* 49, italics in original). One has to wonder if Eichmann would have been incapable of following Victor Frankl's example in using humor to survive the camps.

---

[1] Gila writes in his memoir that he could not see or hear Franco to gauge the latter's reaction (329). In an *ABC* opinion piece written a month after Gila's death (*ABC* August 24, 2001, p 13), Jaime Campmany relates second- or third-hand testimony of Franco's reaction, which we will discuss below.

Arendt's observations on Eichmann's lazy thought and language are what spur her famous exploration of the banality of evil. "Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. [...] Eichmann differed from the rest of us only in that he clearly knew of no such claim at all" (*Life of the Mind* 4). The *Thinking* volume of *The Life of the Mind* is Arendt's search for an answer to her own question regarding the power of thinking to "make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually [to] 'condition' them against it" (5). Her quest leads her to Socrates and a comparison of his nicknames: the midwife, the gadfly, and the electric ray. The gadfly's sting arouses his dialoguers "to thinking and examination" (172). The ray paralyzes himself and others, and according to Arendt,

> the paralysis induced by thinking is twofold: it is inherent in the *stop* and think, the interruption of all other activities [...] and it also may have a dazing after-effect, when you come out of it, feeling unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt while you were unthinkingly engaged in whatever you were doing. If what you were doing consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, you will find yourself paralyzed because no such rules can withstand the wind of thought. (175)

As we saw in Chapter 2, there are many proponents of the Incongruity Theory who tout the power of humor to pull us out of the trap of thoughtlessly "applying general rules of conduct to particular cases." Schopenhauer and Jonathan Miller especially have lots to say about the "incongruity of sensuous and abstract knowledge" and "rules of thumb which enable us to go on 'automatic pilot,'" respectively. If they are right, we can substitute *humor* for *thought* in Arendt's statement: "If what you were doing consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, you will find yourself paralyzed because no such rules can withstand the wind of *humor*."

And so we return to the dictator taking in the live performance of the humorist—supposedly the former's *flagelo,* and potentially his gadfly and electric ray. Did Gila's "guerra de mentira" rouse Franco to "thinking and examination," with the after-effect of "feeling unsure of what seemed to [him] beyond doubt while [he was] unthinkingly engaged in whatever [he was] doing"? Given Franco's reputation as "un señor con escaso sentido del humor" (Cardona 11) and his own propensity for cliché—a propensity impetuously skewered in Robles Piquer's "El sentido común"—we have to doubt that the Caudillo saw anything but an absurdly unrealistic portrayal of war. We are left to wonder if he too lacked the capacity "to think from the standpoint of somebody else" or to notice "the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence." And we are left to wonder if, lacking these capacities so essential to amateur and professional humorists alike, it ever occurred to him that Gila's audiences were laughing at anything more than the absurdity of sharing a bomber with the enemy, ordering replacement cannon holes, or tying a string around a pre-owned bullet so that it could be retrieved and shot again like the cork of a child's pop-gun.

Franco may have sat stone-faced through Gila's performances. Or perhaps *el Jefe del Gobierno del estado* joined Plato's list of gods and great men who were "overpowered by laughter," as one second-hand account attests. In an ABC opinion piece written a month after Gila's death, Jaime Campmany relays the word of people who were supposedly present at Gila's Eighteenth-of-July performances: "dicen los que allí lo vieron actuar que Franco se desternillaba de risa con sus chistes de teléfono. «Oiga, ¿es el enemigo?», etcétera. Hacer reír a Franco, un mérito, eh" ("Los curricula").[2] Campmany, an accomplished journalist, does not name his sources. They have likely passed on, like Franco, Gila, and Campmany. We may never know for certain if Franco laughed at Gila's wars.

What we do know is that Miguel Gila Cuesta was never sanctioned for performing his soldier monologues—to Franco or to anyone—and that the *Generalísimo* "invited" him back several more times to perform at subsequent 18th of July galas. If Franco had ever sniffed a hint of criticism, Gila would probably have been fined or even imprisoned, and he certainly would have talked up his badge of honor in his memoirs. If Franco did smell a rat among Gila's *disparates*, he responded with uncharacteristic magnanimity. More likely *el victorioso Caudillo de los Ejércitos de Tierra, Mar, y Aire* never suspected that the "dislocated," colloquial Spanish of Gila's monologues might be a subversive foil for the official militaristic discourse that articulated Spain's return to imperial glory. And, apparently, he never considered that when Gila placed those ridiculous phone calls that made all of postwar Spain laugh *una, grande, y libre*, the real enemy was not the humble soldier on the other end of the line but the men who had started that fratricidal "guerra de mentira" in the first place. He never considered the possibility that in Gila's war, Francisco Franco Bahamonde *es el enemigo.*

---

[2] Campmany is one of two prominent dissenters from the mythologizing tributes published after Gila's death. The other is Ángel Palomino, a close friend of Gila's who also wrote the prologue to Gila's first published book, *Gila y sus gentes* (1957), cited in this work. Palomino and Campmany insist that the press and public should praise Gila for his humor without sacralizing Gila's stories of miraculous survival and heroic resistance and thus creating "un Gila tan virtual como las guerras, las operaciones quirúrgicas o los diálogos telefónicos que nos contaba" ("Gila"). Palomino's main points of contention: "A Gila nadie—ni borracho ni sereno—lo fusiló, nunca estuvo en la cárcel y nunca fue exiliado político" (*ibid.*)

WORKS CITED

Acevedo, Evaristo. *Teoría e interpretación del humor español*. Editora Nacional, 1966.

---. *Un Humorista En La España de Franco: 1951-1975*. 1. ed, Editorial Planeta, 1976.

Aguirre Sierra, José Luis. "Antonio de Lara Gavilán, «TONO»." Burguera and Fortuño, pp. 37–50.

Akenside, Mark. *The Pleasures of Imagination*. London, Printed for T. Cadell, and W. Davies by W. Flint, 1806. *Internet Archive*, http://archive.org/details/pleasuresofimagi00aken.

Álamo Felices, Francisco. *La novela social española: conformación ideológica, teoría y crítica*. Universidad Almería, 1996.

Apte, Mahadev L. *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*. Cornell University Press, 1985.

Arendt, Hannah. "Communicative Power." *Power*, edited by Steven Lukes, Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 59–74.

---. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin, 1984.

---. *The Life of the Mind*. Edited by Mary McCarthy, 1 edition, Mariner Books, 1981.

Aristotle. *Aristotle, Rhetoric, Book 3, Chapter 11*. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0060:book=3:chapter=11&highlight=chilblains. Accessed 26 Apr. 2018.

---. "Poetics, Nicomachean Ethics." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 14–16.

¡Arriba ese ánimo!: Gala homenaje a Miguel Gila. 2012. *www.rtve.es*, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/arriba-ese-animo/arriba-ese-animo-ok-20120518-2230-169/1412585/.

Attardo, Salvatore. “A Primer for the Linguistics of Humor.” *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 101–56.

---. *Humorous Texts: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Mouton de Gruyter, 2001.

Azúa, Félix de. “‘La Codorniz’, según Félix de Azúa.” *El País*, 26 Jan. 2012. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/cultura/2012/01/26/actualidad/1327610303_655739.html.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 2009.

Barreiro Gómez, Núria. “El monólogo de la guerra de Gila.” *La mitad invisible*, 12 Nov. 2011. *www.rtve.es*, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/la-mitad-invisible/mitad-invisible-monologo-guerra-gila/1247702/.

Beattie, James. *Essays. On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind. On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition. On the Utility of Classical Learning*. E. and C. Dilly; and W. Creech, Edinburgh, 1779.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1986.

Bergson, Henri Louis. *Laughter - An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Translated by Cloudesley Shovell Henry Brereton, Arc Manor, 2008.

Bonhams: A Typed Carbon of Preston Sturges' Screenplay of Sullivan's Travels. https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/22196/lot/8/. Accessed 19 Apr. 2018.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Edited by John Willett, 20. print, Methuen u.a, 1988.

Burguera Nadal, María Luisa, and Santiago Fortuño Llorens, editors. *Vanguardia y humorismo: la otra generación del 27*. Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 1998.

Campmany, Jaime. “Los Curricula.” *ABC*, 24 Aug. 2001, p. 13. hemeroteca.abc.es.

Cardona, Gabriel. *Cuando Nos Reíamos de Miedo: Crónica Desenfadada de Un Régimen Que No Tenía Ni Pizca de Gracia*. Ediciones Destino, 2010.

Carroll, Noel. *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*. 1 edition, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Catalá-Carrasco, Jorge L. *Vanguardia y humorismo gráfico en crisis: la Guerra Civil Española (1936-1939) y la Revolución Cubana (1958-1961)*. University of Nottingham, Feb. 2011. *Open WorldCat*, http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/14400/1/546521.pdf.

---. *Vanguardia Y Humorismo Gráfico en Crisis: La Guerra Civil Española (1936-1939) Y la Revolución Cubana (1959-1961)*. Boydell & Brewer, 2015.

Chiaro, Delia, editor. *Translation, Humour and the Media. Volume 2, Translationand Humour*. Continuum, 2010.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *Cicero on Oratory and Orators; with His Letters to Quintus and Brutus. Translated and Edited by J. S. Watson*. Edited by John Selby WATSON, Henry G. Bohn, 1855.

Cogan, Rosemary, et al. "Effects of Laughter and Relaxation on Discomfort Thresholds." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 1987, pp. 139–44. *Springer Link*, doi:10.1007/BF00846422.

Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. Routledge, 2004.

Critchley, Simon. *On Humour*. Routledge, 2002.

"... Da un gustirrinín!" *Catalunya Press*, https://www.catalunyapress.es/texto-diario/mostrar/623424/-da-gustirrinin. Accessed 25 May 2018.

Davies, Mark. (2002-) *Corpus del Español: 100 million words, 1200s-1900s*. Available online at http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/hist-gen/. (Historical / Genres)

---. (2016-) *Corpus del Español: Two billion words, 21 countries*. Available online at http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/web-dial/. (Web / Dialects)

de Laiglesia, Álvaro. "Si Los Políticos Hablaran Como En Sus Discursos." Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

de Lara Gavilán, Antonio. "Amor y Realidad." Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. "Apaches." *Gutiérrez*, no. 2, 14 May 1927, p. 5.

---. "Intentemos una defensa del burro, si somos hombres." *La Codorniz: Antología, 1941-1944*, edited by José Manuel Salcedo, Arnao, 1988, pp. 43–44.

---. "¡Patatas!" Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. "Primera Tarde (Novelaza de Amor)." Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

de Miguel Martínez, Emilio. "El humor de Miguel Mihura y el teatro del absurdo." Burguera and Fortuño, pp. 121–42.

del Cerro, Mamen. "La Ley de Prensa de 1966. La libertad vigilada." *Documentos RNE*, 5 Nov. 2016, http://www.rtve.es/radio/20160311/50-anos-ley-fraga-documentos-rne/1316504.shtml.

Dennett, D. C. "Cognitive Wheels: The Frame Problem of AI." *Philosophy of Psychology: Contemporary Readings*, edited by José Luis Bermúdez, 2006, pp. 433–54.

Descartes, René. "The Passions of the Soul." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 21–25.

Durant, John R., and Jonathan Miller, editors. *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*. Longman Scientific & Technical; Wiley, 1988.

Dynel, Marta. *Developments in Linguistic Humour Theory*. John Benjamins Publishing, 2013.

Eco, Umberto. *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. Phoenix, 2004.

“El ‘soso’ Franco, El Mayor Generador de Chistes de La Historia de España | España | Elmundo.Es.” *El Mundo*, 5 May 2010, https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/12/05/espana/1291566449.html.

Esteban, Alberto. “Gila Nunca Fue Serio.” *Imprescindibles*, RTVE 2, 29 Jan. 2018.

Fernández Flórez, Wenceslao. “El fantasma en peligro.” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. *El humor en la literatura española*. http://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Discurso_de_ingreso_Wenceslao_Fernandez_Florez.pdf. Real Academia Española, Madrid, Spain.

Flamson, Thomas, et al. “Prosody in Spontaneous Humor: Evidence for Encryption.” *Pragmatics & Cognition*, vol. 19, no. 2, Jan. 2011, pp. 248–67. *www.jbe-platform.com*, doi:10.1075/pc.19.2.04fla.

Flamson, Thomas, and H. Clark Barrett. “The Encryption Theory of Humor: A Knowledge-Based Mechanism of Honest Signaling.” *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2008, pp. 261–281.

Flamson, Thomas J., and Bryant. “Signals of Humor: Encryption and Laughter in Social Interaction.” *Developments in Linguistic Humour Theory*, edited by Marta Dynel, John Benjamins Publishing, 2013, pp. 49–73.

Foucault, Michel. *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*. Edited by Joseph Pearson, 1999, http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/index.html.

“Francisco Franco, el mayor generador de chistes de la historia de España según Gabriel Cardona.” *RTVE.es*, 5 Dec. 2010, http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20101205/francisco-franco-mayor-generador-chistes-historia-espana-segun-gabriel-cardona/381177.shtml.

Franco Bahamonde, Francisco. “Mensaje de Su Excelencia El Jefe del Estado.” *La Vanguardia Española*, 31 Dec. 1972, pp. 5–6.

Frankl, Viktor E. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Revised and updated, Pocket Books, 1985.

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Edited by James Strachey, Norton, 1989.

Fundéu, Seminario Internacional Lengua y Periodismo 2016. https://www.fundeu.es/san-millan-2016/#noticias. Accessed 25 Sept. 2018.

Galán, Diego. *Reirse en España?: (el humor español en el banquillo)*. F. Torres, 1974.

García Garreta, Fernando. *La censura en el franquismo y la revista de humor “La Codorniz.”* Alkymya, 2012.

García, Pablo San José. “Diálogo.” *La Codorniz*, no. 1624, 7 Jan. 1973, n. pag. http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/.

Gil. “Informaciones y Noticias Teatrales y Cinematográficas.” *ABC*, Andalucía, 12 May 1953, p. 25.

Gila Cuesta, Miguel. “Deme Usted Una Peseta de Balas...” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. “¿Es el enemigo?” *Gila... y su teléfono*. Odeon, 1957.

---. *Gila - Es El Enemigo*. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcP6cQy7YTg. Accessed 18 Mar. 2016.

---. “Gila en la Guerra.” *Gila en la guerra*. Hispavox, 1959.

---. *Gila y sus gentes*. Taurus, 1957.

---. “Mi guerra.” *Historias de mí*. AMB Discográfica, 1968.

---. “¡Munición, Munición!” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. “Para Ir a La Guerra...” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. *Siempre Gila: Antología de sus mejores monólogos.* Aguilar, 2001.

---. *Y entonces nací yo*. Temas de Hoy, 1995.

Gómez de la Serna, Ramón. *Greguerías*. Edited by Rodolfo Cardona, Cátedra, 1979.

---. *Humorismo*. Edited by Pedro Aullón de Haro, Casimiro libros, 2014.

González-Grano de Oro, Emilio. *La "Otra" Generación Del 27: El "Humor Nuevo" Español y "La Codorniz" Primera*. Ediciones Polifemo, 2004.

---. *Ocho humoristas en busca de un humor*. Madrid: Polifemo, 2005. *search.lib.byu.edu*, https://search.lib.byu.edu/byu/record/lee.3722052?holding=xhzqdssgq0ssnl43.

Gorman, David. "Russian Formalism." *A Companion to Literary Theory*, edited by David H. Richter, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2018, pp. 36–47. *Crossref*, doi:10.1002/9781118958933.ch3.

Grijelmo, Álex. "Forges, las viñetas que se reconocen." *El País*, 10 Mar. 2014. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/03/06/eps/1394133801_099349.html.

Guardia Civil. "Con el gustirrinín que da cuando regalas un buen #zaska no te rebajes a insultar o amenazar al que piensa diferente a tipic.twitter.com/WJHsQ70oTo." *@guardiacivil*, 8 Apr. 2018, https://twitter.com/guardiacivil/status/983041791363551232.

Hague, Daryl R. "Empathic Accuracy and Translator Training: Helping Students Imagine Other Minds." *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 20–29. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/1750399X.2015.1010359.

Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22*. 1st Simon & Schuster pbk. ed, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004.

Herrero López, Luis José. "Cartas al director | Recordando a Gila." *El País*, 10 July 2010. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/2010/07/10/opinion/1278712806_850215.html.

Hidalgo, Susana. "'Hola, ¿está El Enemigo?'" *El País*, Madrid, 5 Sept. 2001, https://elpais.com/diario/2001/09/05/madrid/999689066_850215.html.

Hobbes, Thomas. "Human Nature." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 19–20.

---. "Leviathan." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 19.

Hollywood83. http://www.profilesinhistory.com/flipbooks/Hollywood83/files/basic-html/page139.html. Accessed 18 Apr. 2018.

HoyCinema. "Sesenta años desde que se viera la primera minifalda en la pantalla de un cine." *Hoycinema*, 18 Mar. 2016, http://hoycinema.abc.es/noticias/20160315/abci-sesenta-anos-desde-viera-201603142056.html.

Huidobro, Vicente. "El arte del sugerimiento." Osorio, pp. 38–41.

---. "El futurismo." Osorio, pp. 42–45.

---. "Non serviam." Osorio, pp. 33–34.

---. "Yo." Osorio, pp. 35–37.

Hurley, Matthew M., et al. *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*. MIT Press, 2011.

Hutcheson, Francis. "Reflections upon Laughter." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 26–40.

"Informaciones y Noticias Teatrales y Cinematográficas." *ABC*, Morning, 25 July 1952, p. 25.

Kant, Immanuel. "Critique of Judgment." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, translated by J.H. Bernard, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 45–50.

Keltner, Dacher, and George A. Bonanno. “A Study of Laughter and Dissociation: Distinct Correlates of Laughter and Smiling During Bereavement.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1997, pp. 687–702.

King, Don Roy. “What Even Matters Anymore.” *Saturday Night Live*, 13, NBC, 20 Jan. 2018. *www.nbc.com*, https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/what-even-matters-anymore/3654019.

Laín Entralgo, Pedro. *La Guerra Civil y Las Generaciones Españolas*. 1978.

---. “Tribuna | Los del 27.” *El País*, 27 Nov. 1985. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/1985/11/27/opinion/501894006_850215.html.

Lapuente, Luis. “Canciones prohibidas - ‘Ojos verdes’ Concha Piquer - 23/08/15.” *RTVE.es*, 23 Aug. 2015, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/audios/canciones-prohibidas/canciones-prohibidas-ojos-verdes-concha-piquer-23-08-15/3254452/.

Leibold, Anne. “The Translation of Humor; Who Says It Can’t Be Done?” *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs/Meta: Translators’ Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1989, pp. 109–111.

Llera, José Antonio. *El humor verbal y visual de* La Codorniz. Editorial CSIC - CSIC Press, 2003.

---. “Poéticas del humor: desde el novecentismo hasta la época contemporánea.” *Revista de literatura*, vol. 63, no. 126, 20011201, pp. 461–76.

López Rubio, José. *Cuentos inverosímiles*. Edited by Fernando Valls, Menoscuarto Ediciones, 2007.

---. “El suicida.” *Gutiérrez*, no. 2, 14 May 1927, p. 18.

---. *La otra generación del 27*. http://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Discurso_de_ingreso_Jose_Lopez_Rubio.pdf. Madrid, Spain.

Luca de Tena, Torcuato. "La Nochevieja En Sidi Ifni." *ABC*, Andalucía, 2 Jan. 1958, p. 17.

Lugones, Leopoldo. "Prólogo a Lunario Sentimental." Osorio, pp. 14-18.

Marchese, David. "John Cleese on Political Correctness and the Funniest Joke He Ever Told." *Vulture*, 12 Sept. 2017, http://www.vulture.com/2017/09/john-cleese-monty-python-in-conversation.html.

Marías, Javier. "El país que perdió el humor." *EL PAÍS SEMANAL*, Weekly, 4 Apr. 2010, http://elpais.com/diario/2010/04/04/eps/1270362420_850215.html.

McKay, Douglas R. *Miguel Mihura*. Twayne Publishers, 1977.

Mihura Santos, Miguel. "Alicia y Roberto." *Gutiérrez*, no. 76, 10 Nov. 1928, pp. 8–9. http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/.

---. *Mis memorias*. Temas de Hoy, 1998.

---. "Niña Inmunda." Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. "Nuestra Página de Polémica. Carta Al Director." *La Codorniz*, no. 267, Dec. 1946, n. pag. http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/.

---. "Periodismo de Humor." *Enciclopedia del periodismo*, edited by Nicolás Gonzáles Ruiz, Noguer, 1966, pp. 435–49.

---. "¡Primavera!" Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. "Primavera." Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

---. "Solos, Sin Camba." *ABC*, Morning, 1 Mar. 1962, p. 38.

Miller, Jonathan. “Jokes and Joking: A Serious Laughing Matter.” *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*, edited by John R. Durant and Jonathan Miller, Longman Scientific & Technical ; Wiley, 1988, pp. 5–16.

Mingote, Antonio. *Dos momentos del humor español: “Madrid Cómico,” “La Codorniz.”* http://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Discurso_de_ingreso_Antonio_Mingote.pdf. Real Academia Española, Madrid, Spain.

---. “La Codorniz.” Burguera and Fortuño, pp. 151–60.

---. “La Codorniz, Siempre.” *La Codorniz: Antologia, 1941-1978*, edited by Melquíades Prieto Santiago and Julián Moreiro, 2. ed, EDAF, 1998, pp. 9–10.

Minsky, Marvin. “Jokes and the Logic of the Cognitive Unconscious.” *Cognitive Constraints on Communication*, Springer, 1980, pp. 175–200.

Modell, Arnold H. *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain*. MIT Press, 2003. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/byu/detail.action?docID=3338500.

Moix, Ana Maria. “Entrevista: Miguel Gila.” *El País*, 23 Aug. 1993. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/1993/08/23/opinion/746056802_850215.html.

Molino, Sergio del. “El asesino Miguel Gila.” *ctxt.es | Contexto y Acción*, http://ctxt.es/es/20170201/Firmas/10955/gila-machismo-la-sexta-humor-sergio-del-molino.htm. Accessed 29 May 2018.

Monólogo: La historia de mi vida - El Mundo de Gila. http://www.miguelgila.com/blog/monologos/monologo-la-historia-de-mi-vida/. Accessed 29 May 2018.

Moreiro Prieto, Julián. *Miguel Mihura: humor y melancolía*. EDAF, 2004.

Moreno, Fidel. *¿Qué me estás cantando?: Memoria de un siglo de canciones*. Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial España, 2018.

Morreall, John. “A New Theory of Laughter.” *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 128–38.

---. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. 1st edition, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

---. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. State University of New York Press, 1987.

Neville, Édgar. “De Actualidad: Nacionalidad de Colón.” *Gutiérrez,* no. 2, 14 May 1927, p. 20.

---. “Dirección General de Cuentas Atrasadas: Negociado de Incobrables.” *Gutiérrez*, no. 2, 14 May 1927, p. 3.

---. “Los romanos en España.” *Gutiérrez*, no. 2, 14 May 1927, p. 8.

---. “Paisaje.” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

O’Neil, Chuck. “Al Franken.” *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, Comedy Central, 1 June 2017. *www.imdb.com*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt6875986/.

Ortega, Javier. “Forges: «Tenemos un pensamiento que nos une a todos los íberos: «No, si ya verás tú como. . .».” *dialogados.com*, 9 Mar. 2016, http://dialogados.com/entrevista-dibujante-antonio-fraguas-forges/.

Ortega, Juan Carlos. “Columna | Gila nunca fue serio.” *El País*, 31 Aug. 2006. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/2006/08/31/revistaverano/1156975222_850215.html.

Ortega, Juan Carlos, and Marc Lobato. *Miguel Gila, Vida y Obra de Un Genio*. 1. ed. en Libros del Silencio, Ediciones Libros del Silencio, 2011.

Ortega y Gasset, José. *La Deshumanización Del Arte*. Porrúa, 1986.

Osorio, Nelson. *Manifiestos, proclamas y polémicas de la vanguardia literaria hispanoamericana*. Fundacion Biblioteca Ayacuch, 1988.

Owen, David. “Taking Humor Seriously.” *The New Yorker*, no. March 13, 2000, pp. 64–75.

Palmer, Charlie. “Oxygen.” *Doctor Who*, 13 May 2017. *www.imdb.com*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt6250146/.

Palomino, Ángel. Prólogo. *GILA Y SUS GENTES*, by Palomino, Taurus, 1957, n. pag.

---. “Gila.” *ABC*, 28 July 2001, p. 58. hemeroteca.abc.es.

Paz, Octavio. *Los hijos del limo: de romanticismo a la vanguardia*. 4. ed, Seix Barral, 1993.

Pécker, José Luis. *Miguel Gila, ¿Es el humorista?* https://www.podiumpodcast.com/grandes-entrevistas/temporada-3/miguel-gila-es-el-humorista/. Accessed 31 Oct. 2018.

Perdiguero Camps, Fernando. “Otro Plebiscito Alemán: Todos Los Listos Dicen Que Sí y Todos Los Idiotas, Que No.” *Gutiérrez*, no. 369, 25 Aug. 1934, p. 6. http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/.

Pérez González, José María. “El humor negro y la caricatura contemporánea española con su origen en los clásicos españoles.” *Essays on Luso-Hispanic Humor*, edited by Paul W. Seaver, E. Mellen Press, 2004.

Picó López, José María. “Impaciencia.” Prieto and Moreiro, n. pag.

Piña, Raúl. “Llamada a Miguel Gila en medio de la ‘guerra.’” *El Mundo*, 22 Dec. 2011, http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/12/21/comunicacion/1324501998.html.

Plato. “Philebus 48-50.” *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 10–13.

---. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Translated by Harold N. Fowler and Paul Shorey, Harvard University Press, 1925, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhileb.%3Asection%3D12c.

---. “Republic.” *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987.

---. *The Internet Classics Archive | Philebus by Plato*. http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/philebus.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

Prieto Santiago, Melquíades, and Julián Moreiro, editors. *La Codorniz: Antologia, 1941-1978*. 2. ed, EDAF, 1998.

Provine, Robert R. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Pym, Anthony. *Exploring Translation Theories*. Routledge, 2009. *Google Scholar*, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=AGaPAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=E280Fo8igN&sig=EGg2_R8K9kjbmwWh-n8WtfqAVhE.

---. “Redefining Translation Competence in an Electronic Age. In Defence of a Minimalist Approach.” *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs / Meta: Translators’ Journal*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2003, pp. 481–97. *www.erudit.org*, doi:https://doi.org/10.7202/008533ar.

Raskin, Jonathan D., and Salvatore Attardo. “Non-Literalness and Non-Bona-Fîde in Language: An Approach to Formal and Computational Treatments of Humor.” *Pragmatics & Cognition*, vol. 2, no. 1, Jan. 1994, pp. 31–69. *www.jbe-platform.com*, doi:10.1075/pc.2.1.02ras.

Raskin, Victor. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. D. Reidel Pub. Co.; Sold and distributed in the U.S.A. and Canada by Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, 1985.

---, editor. *The Primer of Humor Research*. Mouton de Gruyter, 2008.

Robinson, Douglas. *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason*. State University of New York Press, 2001.

Robles Piquer, Carlos. "¡Oh, Qué Tiempos! El Sentido Común." *La Codorniz*, no. 1627, Jan. 28, 1973, n. pag. http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Russell, Peter E. "'Don Quixote' as a Funny Book." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1969, pp. 312–26.

Sáenz de Heredia, José Luis. *Raza (1941) - RTVE.es*. 1942. *www.rtve.es*, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/filmoteca/raza-1941/3336985/.

Salcedo, José Manuel. *La Codorniz: Antología, 1941-1944*. Arnao, 1988.

Salem, Carlos. "Alguien Ha Matado a Alguien." *El País*, 15 Feb. 2014. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/cultura/2014/02/15/elemental/1392422400_139242.html.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. "The World as Will and Idea." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, translated by R.B. Haldane and John Kemp, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 51–64.

Scott III, Swinton O. "Realty Bites." *The Simpsons*, 7 Dec. 1997. *www.imdb.com*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0779673/.

Selander, Lesley. *Flight to Mars*. 1951. *www.imdb.com*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0043545/.

Semprún, Jorge. *La escritura o la vida*. Translated by Thomas Kauf, Tusquets, 1995.

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper. *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour. In a Letter to a Friend*. printed for Egbert Sanger, 1709. *antpac.lib.uci.edu Library Catalog*, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?c=1&stp=Author&ste=11&af=BN&ae=T047455&tiPG=1&dd=0&dc=flc&docNum=CW116109411&vrsn=1.0&srchtp=a&d4=0.33&n=10&SU=0LRK.

Smith, C. S. *The Parameter of Aspect*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2013.

Spencer, Herbert. “The Physiology of Laughter.” *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, edited by John Morreall, State University of New York Press, 1987, pp. 99–110.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “The Politics of Translation.” *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2004, pp. 369–88.

Sturges, Preston. *Five Screenplays*. Edited by Brian Henderson, Univ. of Calif. Pr, 1986.

Taylor, Ben. *Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory*. University of Nottingham, 1995.

TEDx Talks. *Pooping Unicorns and the Power of Comedy | Dave Vance | TEDxBYU*. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B10w2slsok0. Accessed 24 Apr. 2018.

Telfer, Elizabeth. “Hutcheson’s Reflections upon Laughter.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1995, pp. 359–69. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/430971.

The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. *Dave Chappelle Spoke Up at A Town Hall in Ohio*. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLTNwPoX1Qo.

---. *Eddie Izzard Believes Comedy Is “Human and Not National.” YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ON0rtQyNS20.

---. *Finally, Stephen’s Tolkien Geekdom Pays Off*. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3Sv0O_6noI. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.

Torrente Ballester, Gonzalo. *Don Juan*. 5a ed., Ed. Destino, 1989.

Torres, David. *Todos los buenos soldados*. Primera edción, Planeta, 2014.

Torrijos, José María. “El humor inverosímil de José López Rubio.” Burguera and Fortuño, pp. 143–50.

Umbral, Francisco. “El Absurdo o Miguel Mihura.” *El Cultural*, June 2000, https://www.elcultural.com/revista/letras/El-absurdo-o-Miguel-Mihura/3465.

---. "'La Codorniz.'" *El País*, 28 Oct. 1985. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/1985/10/28/sociedad/499302002_850215.html.

---. "Ramón, Jardiel, Mihura." *El País*, 29 Oct. 1977. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/diario/1977/10/29/cultura/246927602_850215.html.

Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel. "El flagelo de la prepotencia." *El País*, 13 July 2001. *elpais.com*, https://elpais.com/cultura/2001/07/13/actualidad/994975202_850215.html.

Vermeer, Hans. "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action." *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, Routledge, 2004, pp. 227–38.

VerTele.ElDiario.es. "Jordi Évole: 'Que te saque el New York Times da gustirrinín.'" *vertele*, 26 Oct. 2013, http://vertele.eldiario.es/verteletv/actualidad/Jordi-Evole-New-York-Times_0_1513948594.html.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *A Man Without a Country*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007.

Yūsuf, Bāsim. *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing through the Arab Spring*. First edition, Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow, 2017.

Zaragoza, Lorenzo. *Gracias, Miguel*. 2001. *www.rtve.es*, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/programas-y-concursos-en-el-archivo-de-rtve/gracias-miguel-2001/4354839/.