

The Function of Humour in Roman Verse Satire

Laughing and Lying

MARIA PLAZA

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Matri Optimae

Preface

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All the above have helped make this a better book; the remaining imperfections are entirely my own responsibility.

M.P.

A Note on Editions and Translations

The primary Latin texts are quoted from the following editions:

- Lucilius: F. Marx, (ed.), *C. Lucilii Carminum Reliquiae* (Leipzig, 1904).
Horace: D. R. Shackleton Bailey, (ed.), *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Opera, Editio quarta* (Leipzig, 2001).
Persius and Juvenal: W. V. Clausen, (ed.), *A. Persi Flacci et D. Iuni Iuvenalis Saturae* (2nd, rev. edn., Oxford, 1992).

Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of the Latin and Greek quotations are my own, though they are indebted to extant English translations I have consulted, especially Niall Rudd's renderings: *Horace: Satires and Epistles*, *Persius: Satires. A Verse Translation with an Introduction and Notes by Niall Rudd* (London, 1973; repr. with revisions, 1997) and *Juvenal: The Satires. A New Translation by Niall Rudd* (Oxford, 1992). It needs to be stressed that my aim has only been to make literal translations, not literary ones.

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Introduction

THE FUNCTION OF HUMOUR IN ROMAN SATIRE

The present study is about the function of humour in the verse satires of Horace, Juvenal, and Persius, with a glance at the fragments of Lucilius. Humour is generally acknowledged as a major element of Roman verse satire, yet it has not been seriously examined by most scholars. When the satirists themselves make explicit statements about their art, as in their so called programme satires,¹ they describe humour as (1) a means of expressing their main message (moral criticism and teaching), and (2) as a pleasing element, making the moral message more palatable. Trusting the speaker in these satires—the satiric persona—many critics have taken these statements at face value and, as a consequence, seen humour as a separable, ‘entertaining’ ingredient, which the reader would have to see through in order to grasp the serious kernel of the satire.

Yet this is not the whole truth about humour in satire. Humour, in satire as elsewhere, carries with it its own ambivalence. On the understanding adopted here, humour always entails a breach of rules—linguistic, behavioural, aesthetic etc.—and an acknowledgment of the breach. It follows that humour always has at least two possible meanings: on the one hand the joy of breaking the rule, with the suggestion that the rule is oppressive, unacceptable; and on the other hand, the insistence on the rule, with the implication that the breach is ridiculous and unacceptable. At its softest, humour may make a pronouncement less categorical, and give the speaker the excuse of ‘just joking’. At its strongest, it may completely revert the

¹ Hor. S. 1.4, 1.10, 2.1; P. 1; J. 1, cf. also J. 10.

meaning of an utterance, as happens in harsh irony and sarcasm. Humour may lead the eye away from a weak point in the argument, or blacken an antagonist with entirely fictional associations not easily washed off.²

All of this and much more happens in Roman satire. It may perhaps be said to be peripheral. Yet, to paraphrase a memorable claim in a study of inversion: what is statistically peripheral is often symbolically central.³ It is, I believe, no coincidence that readers have found it painfully difficult to agree on the exact overall moral message in Horace's or Juvenal's satires. In these authors the periphery of potentially subversive humour interferes with the central message so much as to blur the contours of this centre and render its shape difficult to grasp.

My main thesis is thus that the Roman satirists do not deliver what they expressly promise to deliver, i.e. well-deserved ridicule of vice and vicious people, but rather give us a much more sprawling and ambiguous product, where humour is in fact more widespread than the criticism it is supposed to sweeten. This is not an accident, but an incongruity built into the very foundation of the genre: while the Roman satirist needs humour for the aesthetic merit of his satire, the ideological message inevitably suffers from the ambivalence that humour brings with it. While acknowledging the importance of social pressures, I argue that there is also an aesthetic ground for the curious, hybrid nature of Roman satire, and that the double mission of criticism combined with humour drives the satirists to build their art on paradox from the very beginning.

The paradox of teaching and joking creates a residue of meaning and opens up for cheating in different ways. One kind of satirical cheating is to pretend to attack one thing (e.g. the ruler) while

² This was well known to the rhetoricians in antiquity, and so Cicero teaches these and other ways to use humour for the orator's aims in his treatise on the laughable, in *De Or.* 2.235–90.

³ Barbara Babcock says in an introductory discussion of the cultural phenomenon of inversion: 'What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central' (B. A. Babcock, *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 32). If we think of 'subversive humour' where she speaks of 'inversion and other forms of cultural negation', the rest of her sentence is relevant to our present context as well: 'and if we ignore or minimize inversion and other forms of cultural negation we often fail to understand the dynamics of symbolic processes generally.'

actually attacking another (e.g. a competing poet). The members of the highly intellectual Russian Decabrist movement of 1825 found Juvenal inspirational reading for their anti-autocratic, revolutionary ideas,⁴ whereas it has recently been argued that Juvenal is flattering the new emperor (Hadrian) by disparaging the old (Domitian).⁵ How can such disparate readings of the same text be at all possible? My answer is that humour makes it possible to make several statements at once. If for instance, Juvenal derides a certain emperor who is safely dead and gone, but does so by dressing him up as a bloodthirsty monster of The Emperor, then he has made a cowardly attack on a dead and disrespected man, but at the same time, the attack *sounded* noble and bold. And since language is the material of literature,⁶ he has, in some sense, also made the bold attack; it is there in the language to be read.⁷ The exaggeration, the grotesque humour of the image, has multiplied the statement's potential mean-

⁴ V. S. Durov, 'La fortuna di Giovenale in Russia', *A&R* 25 (1980), 52-3.

⁵ E. S. Ramage, 'Juvenal and the Establishment. Denigration of Predecessor in the "Satires"', *ANRW* II.33.1 (1989), 640-707; S. H. Braund, 'Paradigms of Power: Roman Emperors in Roman Satire', in K. Cameron (ed.), *Humour and history* (Oxford: Intellect, 1993); A. Hardie, 'Juvenal, Domitian, and the Accession of Hadrian (*Satire* 4)', *BICS* 42 (1997-8), 117-44.

⁶ See Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, ed. and trans. D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1976), esp. the chapter entitled 'Language as the Matériel of Literature'.

⁷ I have found it instructive to compare Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), a feminist analysis of romantic consumer's literature. Radway begins her study by setting up, side by side, the contrasting utterances of on the one hand women who enjoy reading the romances under discussion, and on the other hand, feminist critics of the same romances: the former group tends to say that they find themselves morally improved (kinder, more understanding etc.) after the reading, while the latter group says that readers of these books will be brainwashed by patriarchal propaganda and induced to participate in their own humiliation. After a thorough and illuminating analysis Radway basically subscribes to the verdict of her feminist colleagues, though after having suggested an explanation to why the women who read these romances see them so differently. Another feminist critic, Lisbeth Larsson, has taken the issue further, arguing that there is even more to the readers' positive response than Radway acknowledges—that they do in fact see a utopian possibility in their reading, which they invest with real emotional energy in favour of the utopia (L. Larsson, *En annan historia: om kvinnors läsning och svensk veckopress. ('Another Story: on Women's Reading and the Swedish Weekly Press')* (Stockholm: Symposion, 1989)). This real energy is not, Larsson argues, ultimately reducible to connivance in their own humiliation, but potentially goes in another direction, and could be channelled into revolutionary energy.

ings and made it ambivalent, in a way that a serious statement would not have been.

Another kind of cheating is to undercut the speaker by irony, or other humorous devices, so as to avoid taking responsibility for what he is saying—that way the satirist can both say ‘the speaker’s statement’ and un-say it. This may be used when the utterance is prejudiced and banal, but the poet still wants it said, or—in *bonam partem*—to present several points of view and criticize even those with which he basically agrees.

Still another way of cheating is to speak of something different altogether, which is not directly relevant to either the target (object) of the satire nor to the speaking subject. This kind of humour occurs when the satirist as if inadvertently reveals that he is not really all that interested in straightforward moral teaching. He lets slip that he is more interested in describing the human condition—comically, and in purely human terms. In this, he comes near to hijacking the ambition of epic (to speak of man’s place in the universe), just as satire has hijacked the metre of epic, the hexameter.⁸ Here the fact that Roman satire was to epic what comedy was to tragedy, i.e. a kind of comic double,⁹ is at its clearest. From this point of view it becomes tempting to toy with the idea that Roman satire, with its personal perspective, its interest in moral questions, and its centrifugal humour, served as a link in the chain from antiquity’s broadest genre, epic, to the broadest modern genre, the novel.

It is further my contention that the authors are far from unconscious of an intrinsic twist in satire’s essence, brought about by the element of humour. This is, I argue, expressed in their own statements about their writing; only not in the official, main part of their programmes, but in casually dropped lines, e.g. in what I shall call the

The problem of this gap between benevolent and critical readers is, *mutatis mutandis*, similar to the one I speak of in reading the Roman satire. It can probably not be hidden that I stand closer to Larsson’s solution than to Radway’s.

⁸ S. H. Braund, *Roman Verse Satire*. Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

⁹ For this ‘ratio’, see e.g. W. S. Anderson, ‘The Roman Socrates: Horace and his Satires’, in J. P. Sullivan (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Satire* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 12.

'programmatic jokes', the jokes that round off Horace's, Persius', and Juvenal's programme satires. These meta-literary statements will receive particular attention.

It may be seen that I have been selective in my analysis, concentrating on cheating humour and not looking in much detail at the (apparently) straight joking in line with the moral message of the satire in which it is found. I have done this for three reasons. First, straight joking can fight for itself, having been defended and explained by the poets themselves and generations of critics; second, to show that straight joking is not as dominant as one might be tempted to think; and third, because by looking at the cheating joking we shall also learn something about the straight kind.

My method is literary, and all my analyses take their beginning in close readings of a humorous passage (or several humorous passages). The method has a Formalist slant to it in that I take the original texts themselves as my primary, and main, material. In consequence, I see everything in the text as *textual realities* of the same dignity—thus metaphors, flights of fancy, and even downright lies in the texts are considered just as substantial as, for instance, historical facts recounted by the satirists. When necessary, I will move between different planes (such as the plane of narrated events and the metaphorical plane), since I deem them to be united by their common textuality.

After this introduction, my study is arranged in three chapters around the orientation of the satirists' humour: (1) humour directed at an object (a person, a quality, an era); (2) humour directed at the persona, including self-irony; (3) non-aligned humour, where the target is not obvious, as when the satirist puts on a side show which has no direct bearing on the main subject matter. Since I am more interested in the similarities than the differences between the satirists' use of humour, the main stress will be put on the overarching themes, though the authors will be treated consecutively within each theme.

The approach by the orientation of humour, instead of by different kinds of humour, has been dictated by the question I pose: I am asking *how* satiric humour works, not *what* it is. Humour is here regarded as a process rather than as a stable ingredient, and so I begin with the question of its direction.

SURVEY OF HUMOUR THEORIES

The present study is not concerned to make statements about humour as such, nor to give an exhaustive description of humour in Roman satire—my aim is to investigate how humour is used in this genre. The study is not dependent on any one humour theory, and observations will be eclectically evoked from different theories along the way of the analyses. Nevertheless, my basic view of humour is in accord with the so called Incongruity theory, especially with the model developed by Susan Purdie in her book of 1993. Thus, I will only give a very brief survey of the wide field of humour studies, placing more emphasis on Purdie's model, treated last.¹⁰ Since this is a literary study, laughter as a physical act, and humour as a psychological trait ('he has a sense of humour') fall outside my focus, but will enter in the theories recounted below, as laughter and humour have often been studied together, and even—unfortunately—treated synonymously.

¹⁰ For more comprehensive surveys, see P. Keith-Spiegel, 'Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues', in J. H. Goldstein and P. E. McGhee (eds.), *The Psychology of Humor* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1972); A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot, *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Application* (London: Wiley, 1976); M. L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) (from the point of view of anthropology); J. Morreall (ed.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987) (philosophy); F. Ceccarelli, *Sorriso e riso. Saggio di antropologia biosociale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988); P. Santarcangeli, *Homo ridens: estetica, filologia, psicologia, storia del comico* (Firenze: Olschki, 1989); S. Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994) (linguistics). For humour in antiquity in particular, see M. Grant, *The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable*. University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature 21 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1924); W. Preisendanz and R. Warning (eds.), *Das Komische. Poetik und Hermeneutik 7*. (Munich: Fink, 1976); W. Schindler 'Komik-Theorien—komische Theorien? Eine Skizze über die Deutung des Lachens von der Antike bis Heute', *AU* 29 (1986), 4–19; S. Halliwell, 'The Uses of Laughter in Greek Culture', *CQ* 41 (1991), 279–96; and M.-L. Declos (ed.), *Le rire des Grecs: Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne* (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 2000)—the last two are on Greece, but are also instructive for the student of Latin literature and Roman culture. I have also drawn on my own exposition of humour theories in the introduction to my study on Petronius (M. Plaza, *Laughter and Derision in Petronius' Satyricon: A Literary Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000), 3–10).

Today the field of humour studies is a fertile one and there are currently more than a hundred humour theories used in different disciplines, such as biology, psychology, cognitive science, anthropology, linguistics, and literary criticism. There are, however, substantial overlaps between the various theories, and they can well be grouped, as e.g. in the common and useful tripartite grouping into Superiority theory, Relief theory, and Incongruity theory.

All humour theories which have come down to us from antiquity belong to the Superiority category, characterized by the belief that we laugh at what is ugly and/or bad. The first proponent of such an explanation is Plato, who in *Philebus* 48–50 claims that the laughable is a kind of vice, more specifically a lack of self-knowledge, and amusement a kind of malice, as we take pleasure in others' faults. Interestingly, he hints at the ambivalent nature of humour in concluding that the pleasure from laughing is mixed with the pain of malice. He also suggests that the amusing is a neighbour of the hateful, in saying that weak self-ignorance is funny while strong self-ignorance is hateworthy—a thought which will echo down the history of the thinking about humour. Plato's suspicion of laughter is also evident in another passage, *Republic* 388e, where he stresses that the guardians of the ideal state should avoid laughter because of its tendency to provoke violent reactions and that literature should be censored so as not to show respectable characters laughing.

The next version of the Superiority theory is sketched by Aristotle in his *Poetics* 5.1449^a, where he defines the laughable as that which is ugly without being painful. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.8 Aristotle discusses how far humour should be carried by a well-bred and educated man, and dismisses excessive humour as a feature of vulgar buffoons. The latter passage, often termed Aristotle's description of 'the liberal jest', was early seen to have been a major impulse for Horace's theory of satiric humour as expressed primarily in his *S.* 1.4 and 1.10.¹¹

On Roman ground, Aristotle's consideration of the decorum of humour was taken up and developed in some detail by Cicero (*De Or.* 2.235–90, *Orat.* 26. 87–9), who was later followed by Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.3). In his extensive discussion of the laughable in

¹¹ More on this in the survey of critical literature below.

De Oratore, Cicero shows himself as an adherent of the Superiority theory in saying that the ridiculous is a kind of the ugly which is not worthy of either great hate or great compassion, censored in no ugly way:

haec enim ridentur vel sola vel maxime, quae notant et signant turpitudinem aliquam non turpiter. (*de Or.* 2.236)¹²

people laugh mostly, or only, at that which censures and points out something offensive in an inoffensive manner.

Cicero's is also the first extant discussion to introduce the difference between verbal and thematic jokes. In general, however, his treatment is a practical guide to the effective use of humour by the orator rather than a theoretical contribution, and he even explicitly refuses to deal with the question of what laughter is (*De Or.* 2.235). Like Aristotle, Cicero discusses what kind of humour becomes a gentleman (both in *De Oratore* and in *De Officiis* 1.104), but he allows that the illiberal kind, unbefitting for the orator, may nevertheless be very funny.

In the modern era, important advocates of the Superiority theory have been Thomas Hobbes, who offered a very drastic formulation,¹³ and Henri Bergson (1900), who offered a mild version, arguing that ultimately laughter has a positive purpose, as it is used to remove mechanical encrustations from life and so promote free and well-adapted behaviour.¹⁴ The latter also paid close attention to incongruity, and his model may in fact be regarded as a mixture of Superiority- and Incongruity theory.

Within the frame of the Superiority theory, Umberto Eco has added an interesting twist to the definition of humour in his article

¹² For a full discussion of Cicero's views on humour, see A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 1.

¹³ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1651), ch. 6: 'Sudden glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men.' This definition will be further discussed in Ch.1 below.

¹⁴ H. Bergson, *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (1900; 17th edn. Paris: Alcan, 1919).

'Il comico e la regola', 1981.¹⁵ To the customary claim that we laugh at what is a breach of rules, ultimately in order to expel it from society, Eco adds that the rule broken in such cases needs to be left unuttered, merely implied—if the rule is spelled out the breach becomes tragic rather than comic. This has a certain bearing on Roman satire, since the rules of right behaviour are often explicitly spelled out in the 'preaching' passages, especially in the earlier satirists (Lucilius, Horace). This does indeed have a cooling effect on the derision of those who break these rules. To avoid it various strategies are employed, such as not joking at exactly the same vice that has been seriously chided—we shall encounter this in our analyses below.

Today the Superiority theory is much used in anthropology and, in its Bergsonian version, in some literary studies.¹⁶ For the reason that Graeco-Roman antiquity offers this view of laughter and humour in its theoretical discussions, the Superiority theory is also popular among classicists. As will be seen in the survey of secondary literature below, this is not least the case among those who study Roman satire.

The Relief theory, popular in the field of psychology, stresses the physiological and psychological aspects of laughter and humour. First presented by Herbert Spencer (*The Physiology of Laughter*, 1860) and receiving its most famous formulation in Sigmund Freud's *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, 1905 (a work perhaps indirectly influenced by Spencer's ideas),¹⁷ the Relief theory regards the perception of something ludicrous as leading to a saving of psychic energy, and laughter as the release of that energy. Apart from being the choice of psychologists, the Relief theory is also used by Freudians in literary criticism. No thoroughly Freudian readings of humour in Roman verse satire are known to me. However, Amy Richlin's 'Priapic model', mainly a Superiority theory, certainly has traits of Relief theory, such as the claim that the Roman humorists

¹⁵ Republished in Eco, *Sette anni di desiderio*, 1983: 253–60.

¹⁶ Within classics, a rightly celebrated example is E. Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), a Bergsonian discussion on the humour in Plautus.

¹⁷ G. B. Milner, 'Homo Ridens: Towards a Semiotic Theory of Humour and Laughter', *Semiotica* 5 (1972), 7.

use humour as a pretext for the expression of violent sexual and aggressive impulses.¹⁸

Different versions of the Incongruity theory share the core idea that humour is born out of a mismatch—an incongruity—between two or more components of an object, event, idea, social expectation etc. This group, too, may be traced back to Aristotle, to a passage in the *Rhetoric* (3.2), where it is said that a speaker can raise a laugh by flouting certain expectations which he has built up in his audience. The principle of incongruity can also be said to be approached in Cicero's description of the most common type of joke: 'sed scitis esse notissimum ridiculi genus, cum aliud expectamus, aliud dicitur.' ('but you know that the best known kind of joke is when a saying goes against our expectations' *De Or.* 2.255). Fuller versions of the Incongruity theory, however, were not developed until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notably by Kant and Schopenhauer.¹⁹ A later influential exponent of an incongruity-based view has been Arthur Koestler with his 'bisociation theory'.²⁰ He maintains that humour is experienced when two essentially different elements are yoked together in the same situation and bring about a rapid oscillation of thought from one associative realm to another. Our feelings cannot move as quickly, and the resulting emotional tension is resolved in laughter.

The Incongruity theory is most widespread in humour studies today, as its basic tenets have the advantages of viewing humour as value neutral, and of being easily adaptable to different cultural or literary contents, since 'incongruity' is so vague a concept. On the other hand, while these tenets seem to present a necessary condition of humour (it is difficult to find examples of the laughable that do not contain some kind of incongruity), they have to be further qualified in order to become a sufficient condition (it is easy to imagine other reactions than humour to incongruity), and no agreement has been reached on such further qualifications. It should also be pointed out

¹⁸ A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (1983; 2nd, rev. edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57–70; see also the survey of critical literature below.

¹⁹ I. Kant, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (1790; 4th edn. Leipzig: P. Reclam, 1878), Part I, Div. 1.54; A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819; 3rd edn. Leipzig, 1859), Book I and Supplement to Book I, ch. 8.

²⁰ A. Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1964).

that the Incongruity theory is compatible with both Superiority- and Relief theory, and that different blends of these are not uncommon.²¹

As has already been mentioned, a variant of the Incongruity theory which I have found particularly persuasive is that presented by Susan Purdie in her study *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, 1993. Bringing in Jacques Lacan's concept 'Symbolic order',²² which in a strongly simplified explanation may be described as the sphere a human being first enters when s/he acquires a language (complete with the basic rules of social behaviour) and in which s/he lives from then on, Purdie argues that what is funny is always a trespassing of the rules of the Symbolic order. At the linguistic level, for instance, one rule of communication requires that a word mean only one thing at a time. A pun will transgress this rule by making us think of two meanings at the same time. It is crucial, Purdie further points out, that in humour the break is conscious, and marked as such by the joker. According to this model, humour requires a minimum of two actors: joker and audience. (A third actor, the butt, is optional.) As the joker makes a marked break of the Symbolic order, the audience understands both moves, and acknowledges them. Both actors sense that they know the rules so well as to be able to play with them—they master the discourse. They congratulate themselves and each other on this mastery; this *feels* good. Since the arrangement of the Symbolic order varies with time, culture, social group etc., this becomes a

²¹ I do not treat Mikhail Bakhtin here, since his theory is one of *laughter* (understood in a very special sense), not *humour*, as he expressly says (M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*. Russian original 1965, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), 11). This is often not understood, and misreadings spring from the treatment of 'humour' and 'laughter' as synonyms. A recent study of humour in the Middle Ages oddly makes the opposite misreading, taking Bakhtin to mean that what he terms 'the culture of folk laughter' somehow *excludes* humour (O. Ferm, *Abboten, bonden och hōlasset: skrätt och humor under medeltiden*. [The Abbot, the Peasant, and the Hay-cart: Laughter and Humour in the Middle Ages] (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2002), 14). Bakhtin's ideas on laughter's regenerative force and on the grotesque body will be used in my analyses below, and will be summarized when this is needed.

²² S. Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993). Purdie spends much of her first chapter ('Joking as Discourse', 3–70) unravelling the obscure psychoanalytic/ linguistic model of Lacan; she then corrects his concepts at several points. (She draws especially on J. Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) and id., 'Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse', in *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*, xi (Paris: Seuil, 1973).) It seems to me, however, that her model of the comic may stand very well on its own.