

THE COMIC OF WORDS IN THE ARAB AND FRENCH PICARESQUE NARRATIVE; CASE STUDY: THE "MAQÂMAT" OF AL-HAMADHÂNI AND "THE COMICAL HISTORY OF FRANCION" BY CHARLES SOREL

IBTISSEM KHALDI

Abou Bakr Belkaïd University, Tlemcen
ALGERIA

ABSTRACT

This work aims to determine the comic discourse in the Maqâmat as a writing strategy specific to the Arabic picaresque genre and to analyze the discursive figures as an essential support in the French picaresque novel to show how the comic discourse, as a process of writing, allows us to forge relationships between literary discourse and the criticism of society. Due to pioneering situation of the picaresque genre in the two literatures that Charles Sorel and Al-Hamadhâni are worthy to be studied. The Maqâmat and the adventures of the young Francion offer us the possibility to determine the different types of comic that are manifested massively in the corpus. A study such as the one which presents itself has, on the one hand, as its primary objective: -the study of comic discourse and the analysis of linguistic tools mobilized in the service of literature. And on the other hand, a second objective is the comparison.

Keywords: Comparative approach, French picaresque narrative, comic discourse, Maqâmat.

INTRODUCTION

Personally very attracted by the Maqâmat of Arab tradition, this literary genre that upsets, bathes in the world of extravagance and imagination. Through an extremely rich biography of the literary events of the two authors (Al-Hamadhâni and Charles Sorel) that the choice of the corpus was made. Al-Hamadhani¹ is the inventor of the "Novella" in Arabic literature, in the modern sense that Giovanni Boccaccio² will later lend to this word.

The Maqâmat is more a literary genre than a mere title of the book. It depicts the encounter of two imaginary characters: a narrator, who represents in general, the author, and a picturesque hero who takes different aspects to each meeting, wise or robber, ascetic or good living, and to which he happens all kinds of adventures. Each of these meetings is a subject of Maqâmat. Full with different aesthetic forms, sessions open a rich field of thematic studies, narratological or other studies. The Maqâmat constitute a set of brief and independent narratives that cover almost all the rules of Arabic literature. It is the teaching of refined and well-organized expressions, while giving a symbolic representation of the real world. This representation contains comic aspects for more frankness and clarity.

¹ Abu Al-Fadl Ahmad Al-Hamadhani, nicknamed Badi 'al-Zaman, "the Prodigy of the Century" (968 Hamadhan- 1008 Herat) is the inventor of the Arabic literary genre Maqama in the 10th century.

² Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) was the first Italian writer who gave the Novella its current meaning and form with its collection of short stories The Decameron (1348) and which was a great success after 1353.

For his part, Charles Sorel³ offers a true novel of manners with his "The Comical History of Francion". He is clearly accused of picturing society as it is, of stigmatizing ridiculous and contemporary vices. The author has succeeded to get all strata of French society, although the novel owes as much to the French tradition as in the Spanish picaresque novel. With a cautious attitude, the author was concerned to expurgate the scandalous scenes of his novel with the rewriting work to which he gives many reissues. In this article, we emphasize on the need for a linguistic tool that provides more precision to the level of comparison and that manifests itself in the form of an analysis of comic speech via a discursive approach. In this perspective, we establish our problematic by asking why and how the two authors use the different processes of the comic of words to criticize and correct the vices of society? We will first have to stop at the notion of comic speech, then the comic of words and finally the different points that surround it. Our corpus consists of, as it is already mentioned above, of "Maqâmat"⁴ of Al-hamadhânî (tenth century) and of the novel by Charles Sorel entitled "The Comical History of Francion"⁵ (seventeenth century). The analyzed corpus⁶ can be summarized only in two selected sessions (Maqâma of Baghdâd⁷ and Maqâma of Holouan⁸) and selected fragments of Charles Sorel's novel based on the analysis. We assume from the beginning that both authors use the same strategy to criticize both societies. They rely much more on comic words and ironic words to present the bitter reality to the public without being bored. The Muslim society of the tenth century lived in the same critical situation as France in the seventeenth century. Both authors sensitize their people, appealing to a fun and attractive discourse.

BASIC ELEMENTS

Establishing a definition of the concept requires its division into two important terms in modern linguistics. It is about the discourse since it consists of words and comedy. Discourse

³ Charles Sorel, Sieur de Souvigny born in 1599 or in 1602 because the exact date of his birth is unknown for ambiguous reasons, but historians and literary men consider the year 1602 as the official date of his birth. The novelist and historiographer of France lived painfully, when his office was abolished, and died in 1674. He published his masterpiece "Histoire Comique de Francion" at the age of twenty-one.

⁴ The "Maqamat d'al-Hamadhani" is a collection of four hundred novella or short stories which relate the adventures of the hero Abu Alfath Iskandari and only fifty-two of them reached us. The sessions deal with almost the same theme with different tendencies, it is around begging, fraud, the meeting of two old friends and greed that turned sessions.

⁵ "Histoire Comique de Francion" is a novel published in stages from 1622 to 1633. Under the name of Nicolas Moulinet, Charles Sorel published the first version in 1622 with the title of "The Vraye comic story of Francion" which included seven books. However, in the following editions, the number of books continues to increase to finally reach twelve books in the editions of 1633. The novel relates the youth of a Breton gentleman who was sent to college in Paris to become a poet but he follows his love affairs to a trip to Italy where he married the woman of his dreams.

⁶ We rely on the translation of Régis Blachère and Pierre Masnou, Al-Hamadhânî Choix de Maqâma, Klincksieck Bookstore, Paris, 1957.

⁷ The story of this maqama takes place in a restaurant in Baghdad souk. The narrator meets the disguised hero who uses cunning to achieve his ends.

⁸ The meeting scene is done in an Arab bath (Hamam). The comic appears from the beginning, with the characters, the events and cunning used.

as Charaudeau Patric conceives it is only the language itself in its social context⁹. This leads us to say that the linguistic indices used by each author must be analyzed according to each social context. The socio-political conditions in France in the seventeenth century pushed Charles Sorel to select a lexicon less complicated than that used before by its precursors to thus allow a wider audience to read the novel. Similarly, al-Hamadhânî took into consideration the socio-political conditions and the decline of Muslim society in the tenth century, during the writing of his sessions. His writing is marked by an essential stylistic virtuosity and then the literary and artistic world knew, at that time, its apogee.

Very important is the comic character in the picaresque narrative. An aspect that allows the reader enjoys the story and eagerly follows the adventure. Despite the nature of the events, which are sometimes aggressive, the reader feels pity and love for the picaro. This mixture of naivety and cunning creates the originality of the picaresque novel in the different literatures (Spanish, French, English, German and Arabic). Seeking to define comedy is a very difficult to undertake. Psychologists, sociologists, historians, philosophers and linguists agree on the difficulty of defining comedy. Contemporary research in the field is based on the works of Henri Bergson, the philosopher who, in 1899, writes three articles on laughter in the Paris review, which will be joined, later, in his book "Laughter" ("Le rire") in 1901. Henri Bergson 1899, speaks of different comic registers. The theory of Henri Bergson still represents a reference in the field today because its strength lies in its general purpose: a theory that applies to all types of comic (words, gestures, characters, actions). A reflection of Henri Bergson will take the status of general law. He always says in "Laughter" that the laughable is "something mechanical encrusted on the living."¹⁰. Thus, there are two representations of socially adapted life and life pushed to the limits, where, it is an amplification of its mechanisms. If he opposes the comic of words to comic gestures and other forms, he does not seek the general meaning of laughter: "laughter is based on exaggeration and deformity, on no mechanical and artificial resemblance of life"¹¹. The mechanical aspects of the comic are there, a little of all: in the words of a person, in unexpected situations, when a person does not understand what is happening around her, in the characters of the individuals. Henri Bergson states that: "the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable to the exact proportion as that body remind us of a mere machine."¹².

The comic is there, it is realized through laughter: we laugh at people who repeat gestures or words, we laugh at a person falling in spite of herself: "is comic any arrangement of acts and events, which gives us, inserted into one another, the illusion of life and the clear sensation of a mechanical arrangement"¹³. The novel and the theatrical play probably develop certain comic situations, which later can be classified in various categories. to summarize, Henri Bergson offers an analysis through the classification of types of comic. This is done, first, by identifying the repetition of actions until the dissolution of one. Then, by the similarity of the

⁹ This is the reformulation of the definition proposed in the Dictionary of Discourse Analysis, in collaboration with Mangueneau Dominique in 2002, ed. Threshold.

¹⁰ BERGSON, Laughter, Essay on the meaning of the comic, PUF, "quadriga", 10th ed. Paris, 1999, P29, online: [<https://en.wikisource.org/wiki> Accessed 21-06-2016].

¹¹ MEYER, "The comic and the tragic", PUF, Quadriga, Paris, 2003, P66.

¹² Ibid, P23.

¹³ Ibid, P53.

situations where he emphasizes on the importance of a surprise effect as a trigger of laughter and pleasure. Also, by the manipulation of a character, who thinks himself intelligent, by another. Or, by the dependence of different situations on the initial situation that makes the characters at the starting point. Or even, by reversing situations. And finally, by the interference of series, where the same situation belongs to two separate events and can be interpreted in two different ways with two different meanings.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

With regard to this present study, we take into consideration only this distinction between the different types of comic, since we are interested in the comic of words as an element of convergence of the two picaresque narratives (Arabic and French). This type of comic is also called the comic of words; it concerns language and plays on words. It manifests itself through several processes such as voluntary repetitions of expression. It can give a deformed pronunciations or a language invented or spoken in an unusual way. We can briefly see the dynamics of the comic discourse peculiar to each of the two works through the table below which presents sequences of the comic discourse extracts from *Maqâmat: Holouan* and *Baghdâd* and the *Comical History of Francion*. We distinguish the most important in our analysis:

Comic discourse of <i>Maqâmat</i>	Comic speech of the <i>C.H.F</i>
<p>* M. of Holouan or The barbers: -Select a bath where to go and a barber to resort to. Let this bath be spacious [...] We set sail on this bath that we could have not seen [as long as it was small] (P: 104)¹⁴. -Follow a man who grabbed a piece of clay which he smeared my forehead and that he put on my head. The man went out and another entered. (Ibidem). "Wretch," he shouted, "what have you to do with that head! She's mine ". [...] " Not at all ! this head is my possession, my property, my thing held. " (P: 105). -Take me the one to whom this head belongs! Said the master of the bath, so that I ask him whether this head is yours or to that other "(ibidem). -God bless you! I replied. It is my head, she accompanied me on the road of pilgrimage, and she performed at the same time as me the ritual tours around the Kaaba. (Ibidem). -And we have never seen this goat. (P: 106). - At these words, [...] I put my clothes back, and quickly swam away from the bath. With</p>	<p>* Book II: -Eh! How can you not remember having held me so long in your arms, said the old woman, smiling, and showing two teeth that remained in her mouth like the crenels of an old woman who had been beaten in ruins. (P: 71). -Do not glorify what I did, [...] for a withdrawal of the dirtiest, and having the desire to vomit I wanted to approach it to spoil anything of this room. (P: 82) * Book III: I opened the gullet wider than that of this cantor who swallowed a mouse while drinking the wine. (P: 101). -My God! How happy you are to spend the night amid so much daydreaming! If I were like you, I would spend three quarters of my life sleeping. (P: 106). -If the god Morpheus visits me a few times, it is not that he is called to me by artifice: he stands near my bed by his will. (P: 107) * Book IV:</p>

¹⁴ The French translation of the sessions is taken from: Blachère and Masnou, *Al-Hamadânî choice of Maqâmat (sessions)*, Paris, Librairie Klincksieck, 1957. Therefore, the reference and the page numbers included in the table are those of the version French of Blachère.

<p>all kinds of insults, I overwhelmed my slave and beat him like plaster (ibidem). * M. of Baghdad¹⁵: -I thought, oh! My god, we had a game. -Let of greed without knowing that he was done. -I have eaten as a guest. -Well, since when have we invited you! Give twenty (Dinard), O brother of insolence. -Very fast I put my hand on my tunic. The negro was crying and began to untie his pouch with his teeth. He mumbled: how much I said to this little monkey: I am Abu Oubied and he answered me: you are Abu Zayd!</p>	<p>-Figure yourself then to see entering Francion in class, the underpants passing out of his high-slouch up to his shoes, the dress put all the wrong and the wallet under the arm trying to give a flick to the one and one nasarde to another. (P: 158). The courage not being then much increased, I sighed in myself that I was at the age when the knights errant had already defeated an infinity of their enemies, and I cannot express to you the regret that I had to see that my power did not answer my will. (Ibidem).</p>
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The comic of words used in both picaresque stories is rich and different at the same time. This is due to the social context of each story. We find in the sessions a purely Arabic lexicon which reflects the Arab-Muslim traditions, as we find expressions proper to Western society at Sorel.

In fact, this well-intended use. It is a symbolic representation with several purposes. First, Al-Hamadhânî wanted to denounce social phenomena implicitly and to do not really attract the attention of the authorities to avoid any conflict with the Abbasid regime. He sought to awaken the sense of responsibility among readers, of high class, in the first place. With his eloquent style, he created a new space of writing where he treats the social scourges without proposing solutions. The use of both comic and refined expressions allows him to focus on two important points: to prove the richness of the Arabic language and its ability to persuade, and to teach his successors the standards of this language and instill in them customs and Arab culture. As for Sorel, his recourse to these comic expressions is for almost the same reasons as Al-Hamadhânî, except that his speech is more frank in presenting a model of each social class. He mocked magicians and sorcerers, he questioned the role of the French woman of his century, and so on. The author took pains to say what he wanted to denounce. He exposes, from the beginning of the adventure, his reasons for writing this work:

"WE have enough tragic stories that only sadden us; we must now see one that is quite comical, and that can bring delectation to the most bored minds. But nevertheless it must still have something useful, and all the treacheries that we find there will teach you how to protect yourself from similar ones, and the misfortunes that we shall see to have arrived at those who have lived badly will be able to turn us away from vices."¹⁶

However, one need only read the beginning of these two works, to provoke laughter among readers. It is the mixture of the discourse employed, the well-described scenes and the gestures of the characters that animate this joking sensation. In the Maqâma of Holouan for example, The lexicon used to advance events pushes the interlocutor to laugh as in: "two

¹⁵ The text in French is the personal translation, verified by Professor Zoubir DERRAGUI, teacher in the Department of Translation at the University of Tlemcen.

¹⁶ Ibid : P20.

masseurs who dispute my body"¹⁷. Moreover, the pride of Al-Hamadhani is clearly seen through his style, while taking into consideration the flexibility and ease of speech presented. We thus find comic, rhyme, choice and the appropriateness of terms and rhetoric to achieve an impressive stylistic homogeneity as in the expression that describes the massage that the hero has undergone: "to massage me to the point of use my bones to knead [...] them until I break my joints." Beyond this remarkable stylistic production, we can exemplify the extension of his ideas that concretize the sociocultural realities denounced, while making the cultural discourse uniform as the expression: "a piece of clay"¹⁸ that refers to natural products used at that time to bathe. The lexicon is very rich in socio-cultural clues as in the *Maqâma* of Baghdâd which symbolizes the rituals of the "souk" or the market, with the presence of rotisseries, confectioners and sellers along the boulevards.

Leaving nothing to chance, Al-Hamadhânî attributed to his hero the character of an unprincipled beggar to denounce the begging that emerged in the Muslim society at the time of the Abbasids, and the harmful character of literary men who put their talents to the service material good.

In parallel, the novel by Charles Sorel is very rich in comic words. Irony, satire or humor is omnipresent in the adventure. To express a bland taste, to enjoy a drink from the hand of a pretty woman, to make fun of dreams, or to express the hero's contempt for certain trades, comic and figures of style are present: "this drink does not can be compared better than donkey milk for its sweetness"¹⁹ (book III). Sorel's comic discourse is interrupted from time to time by a fantastic speech of fictional stories inserted, since it is a novel with drawers²⁰, the following expression is a good example of this speech which, too, very refined with figures of speech: "six trees in the among others, which instead of leaves had small tongues attached to the branches with very loose threads"²¹.

This alliance between the comic and the fantastic speech is the crucial place of Sorel's text. The major challenge of the author is the renewal of the novelistic form. His ambition was to find a new relationship to the real and to install a likelihood in the presentation of the actors' words. A readability of dialogue and a likelihood that are based on a balance between referential realism and stylistic harmony in the narrative. The comic forms are related to the discourse by the rarity of the interactional exchange. They really express the otherness, as it is defined by Charaudeau who: "defines the act of language as an act of exchange between two partners who are in this case the communicating subject (I) and the interpreting subject (you)"²². Hence results the predominance of direct discourse as an important discursive unit in the comical history of Francion.

¹⁷ we do not find it necessary to reference these remarks because they are the same examples already mentioned in the table.

¹⁸ *Maqâma* of Holouan.

¹⁹ *Op. cit* : 110.

²⁰ The notion means that the author moves from the main story to other stories told by secondary characters who do not necessarily have an essential role in the adventure. Besides, the picaresque narrative is characterized by the drawer stories.

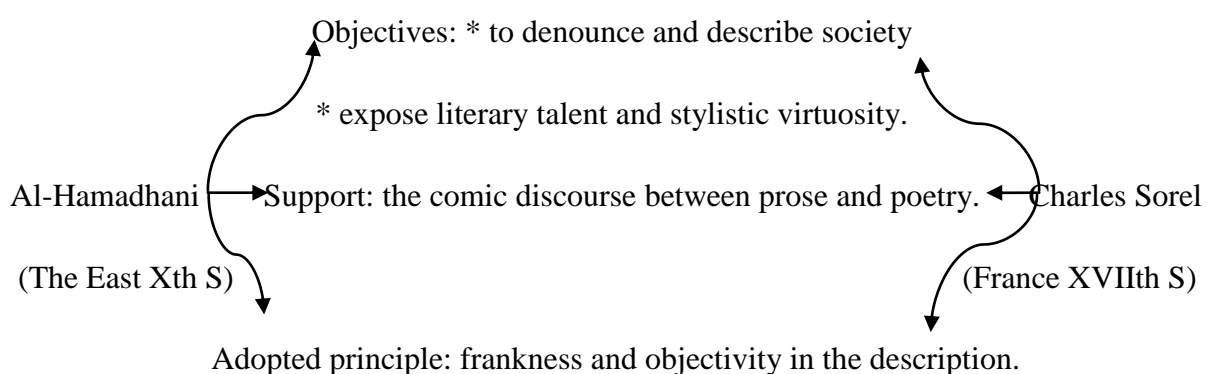
²¹ *Ibid* : 158.

²² CHARAUDEAU and MANGUENEAU, *Dictionary of Discourse Analysis*, 2002, ed. Seuil, Paris, P117.

RESULTS OF THE COMPARISON

Unlike Al-Hamadhâni, who was more interested in describing all the details, Sorel prefers a detailed description of the events that drives the story. Moreover, we find more events than description. The discourse arises when the ironic dimension is inherent to the comic story, this parodic dimension is extended in a dramatic mimesis. The discourse of the characters inherits the harangue of the discursive form of the monologue.

The course of social and cultural facts and their effects on the individual has allowed us to note that these two works convey mainly messages of social conformity, which manifests itself inter alia through an invitation to a freer life at Sorel, where desire, pleasure and satire present forms of entertainment, whereas in Al-Hamadhâni, it is an invitation to respect moreover the religion and the Arabic language. But behind the entertaining facet of most messages is an incentive for social conditioning, searching to invite the individual to think about any questioning about his own reality. Both authors used the comic speech as a medium to express the same principle that is frank, in order to achieve their goals:



Thus, the diagram above clearly summarizes the link between the two chosen narratives, stating that the comic of words remains, through the centuries, an excellent support for transmitting the messages of the authors without offending the reader.

CONCLUSION

The choice of the two works studied is not at random, it is progressively collecting information that we detected a strong resemblance of the two stories and a probable influence of the two authors who belong to both two different centuries and societies (the West and the East). With different literatures in content and support language (French and Arabic), these authors, revolted, no longer supporting the atmosphere that reigns in each of their societies, protesting through the extremely refined and trimmed writing, appealing to an undeniably expressive support: it is the comic speech and more exactly the comic of words. The obtained results validate our hypotheses which insist on the fact that the comedy of words has the power to correct the social vices as it has the ability to convince the reader without annoying him. However, what is presented in this analysis is only an assumption that can be challenged, as it can feed other perspectives that confirm that the strength to convince the reader lies in all types of comic (gestures, situations, manners) and not only recourse to the comic of words.

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