

# **Le Rire des Vers / Mining the Comic Verse**

## **Layering Annotations on a (Sometimes) Humorous Corpus**

Anne-Sophie Bories  
Digital Romanistics Travelling Seminar  
11.05.2023

# Verse & Humour

- Departure from *bona fide* communication
- Language's shortcomings
- Layering of meanings
- Familiar/monotonous backdrop
- Highly controlled material

c'était au temps où notre espèce  
ne se voilait pas encore la ~~face~~

fesse

*that was back before our kind  
in the sand burried its ~~head~~*

*behind*

R. Queneau, « Evolution », *L'Instant fatal*, 1946.

CYRANO.	Embrasse-moi!	- <i>In my arms!</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Monsieur?	- <i>Sir?</i>
CYRANO.	Brave!	- <i>So brave!</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Ah çà ! mais !...	- <i>Well, now!...</i>
CYRANO.	Très brave. Je préfère.	- <i>So very brave, really.</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Me direz-vous ?...	- <i>May I ask?...</i>
CYRANO.	Embrasse-moi. Je suis son frère.	- <i>In my arms! I am her brother.</i>
CHRISTIAN.	De qui ?	- <i>Whose?</i>
CYRANO.	Mais d'elle !	- <i>Well, hers!</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Hein ?...	- <i>Eh?</i>
CYRANO.	Mais de Roxane !	- <i>Well, Roxane's!</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Ciel !	- <i>Oh dear!</i>
	Vous, son frère ?	<i>You, her brother?</i>
CYRANO.	Ou tout comme : un cousin fraternel.	- <i>Close enough: a brotherly cousin.</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Elle vous a ?...	- <i>And she?...</i>
CYRANO.	Tout dit !	- <i>Told me!</i>
CHRISTIAN.	M'aime-t-elle ?	- <i>Loves me?</i>
CYRANO.	Peut-être.	- <i>She might.</i>
CHRISTIAN.	Comme je suis heureux, Monsieur, de vous connaître !	- <i>How very nice, sir, to meet you!</i>

E. Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, 1897

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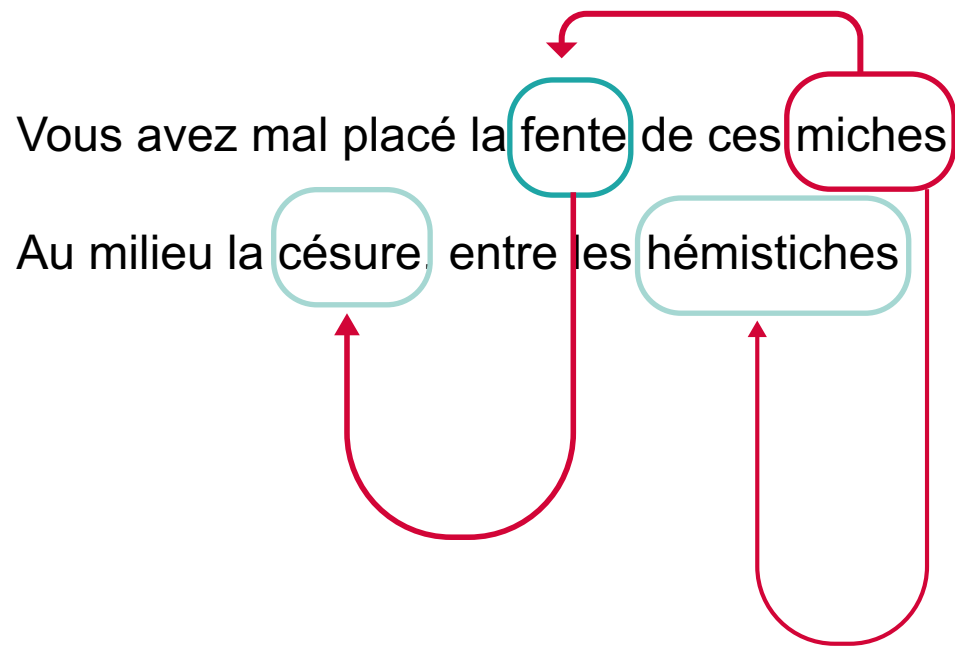
Vous avez mal placé la fente de ces miches

Au milieu la césure, entre les hémistiches

*You haven't placed the slit right, between those buns*

*The caesura right in the middle, parting the hemistichs*

E. Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, 1897



*You haven't placed the slit right, between those buns*

*The caesura right in the middle, parting the hemistichs*

miche = { bun (bread)  
bun (buttock)

fente = { slit (e.g. on bread)  
genitals (vulgar)

E. Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, 1897

Ils crient s'il sait voler qu'on l'appelle voleur

Les anges voltigent autour du joli voltigeur

*They cry that he can fly and that he's called a thief*

*The angels flutter around the pretty soldier*

G. Apollinaire, *Alcools*, 1913.



# SNSF-PRIMA-Project

## Le Rire des vers (Mining the Comic Verse)



Funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation  
(PRIMA Grant) for 5 years



Hosted at the University of Basel (French Studies)

# Team

Anne-Sophie Bories  
*Group Leader*



Nils Couturier  
*Postdoc*



Petr Plecháč  
*Programmer*



Pascaline Loricourt  
*Assistant*



Lara Nugues  
*PhD candidate*



# Objectives

- Most used versification features alongside humour? (metres, enjambments, caesuras, rhymes...)
- Other contexts favouring similar features?
- Other stylistic devices sharing humour's structures
- Mutual influences of humour and verse?

# Corpora

Vaudeville

1830-1835

*Lara Nugues*

Song

19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> C.

*Nils Couturier*

Poetry

19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> C.

*Anne-Sophie Bories*

# Methods

## Distant Reading

- ↓ Digital corpus (obtained or produced)
- ↓ Versification annotation (Malherbe Programme)
- ↓ Linguistic annotation
- ↓ Annotations of humour
- ↓ Database
- ↓ Data analysis and visualisation

## Close Reading

- Text interpretation  
(informed/guided by data)
- Styles and canons
- Poetics



University  
of Basel

# Annotating Humour?

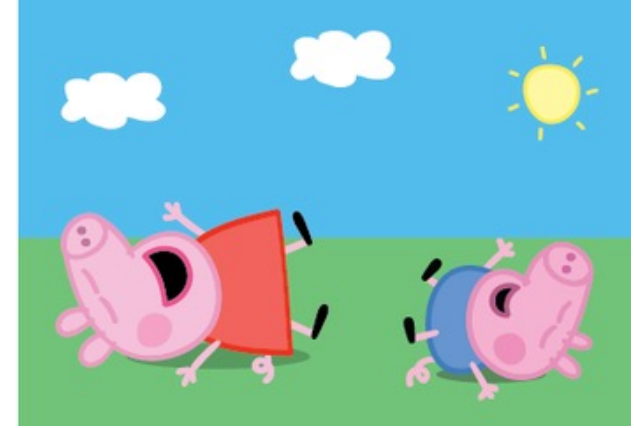
# Theories of Humour

- **Superiority** (Plato, Aristotle, sociology)
- Relief (18th C inheritance of humourism, Freud, Veatch, medicine)
- Incongruity and incongruity-resolution (Schopenhauer, Kant, Bergson, linguistics)



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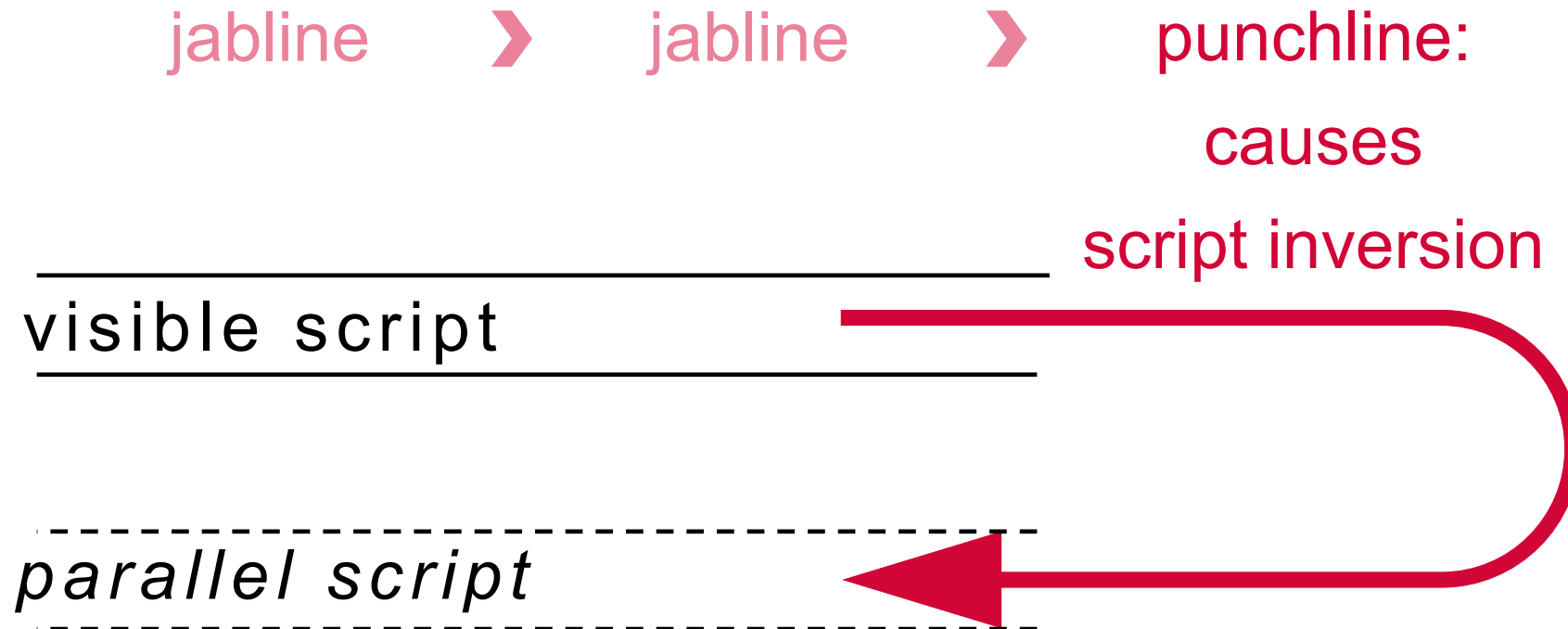


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  - Victor Raskin's script-opposition theories



# Victor Raskin & Salvatore Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour



# The doctor/lover joke

“Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.”

jablines

punchline &  
script inversion

---

Visible script: patient visits doctor

---

*Parallel script: lover visits doctor’s wife*

# GTVH

## (General Theory of Verbal Humour)

### **6 Knowledge Resources (KR):**

- LA: language
- NS: narrative strategy
- TA: target (if any)
- SI: situation
- LM: Logical mechanism
- SO: script opposition

# Annotating humour

## Knowledge Resources:

- Language
- Narrative Strategy
- (Target, if any)
- Situation
- Logical Mechanism
- Script Opposition – concrete
- Script Opposition – abstract
- + Jablines (if any)
- + Punchline

How many Poles does it take to screw in a light bulb? Five. One to hold the light bulb and four to turn the table he's standing on. (Anchor)

LA - language → The number of Polacks needed to screw in a light bulb? Five — one holds the bulb and four turn the table. (LA)

NS - narrative strategy → It takes five Poles to screw in a light bulb: one to hold the light bulb and four to turn the table he's standing on. (NS)

TA - target (if any) → How many Irishmen does it take to screw in a light bulb? Five. One to hold the light bulb and four to turn the table he's standing on. (TA)

SI - situation → How many Poles does it take to wash a car? Two. One to hold the sponge and one to move the car back and forth. (SI)

LM - Logical mechanism → How many Poles does it take to screw in a light bulb? Five. One to hold the light bulb and four to look for the right screwdriver. (LM)

SO - script opposition → How many Poles does it take to screw in a light bulb? Five. One to take his shoes off, get on the table, and screw in the light bulb and four to wave the air deodorants to kill his foot odor. (SO)

Anne-Sophie Bories - D4 Lunch - 20 November 2021

# CHANTRE

Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines

- Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools*, 1917



Poem of the day ☒ | Hold for 1  days

Ig (#6143)

type:  
rhyme:

#44596

Im:12

met:6+6

rg:

rt:

Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines



...

- ☐ so\_actual\_non
- ☒ so\_normal\_abnormal
- ☐ so\_possible\_impossible
- ☐ so\_good\_bad
- ☐ so\_life\_death
- ☐ so\_obscenity
- ☐ so\_money
- ☐ so\_high\_low\_stature
- ☒ so\_human\_non

s1\_s2

Chantre Et l' (liste)  
Chanterelle (définition)

si

ta

la

- ☐ la\_argot
- ☐ la\_cacography

comment

alexandrin monostiche



Im\_type

homophony

juxtaposition

+ new value

ta\_label

+ new value

ns

other\_list

+ new value

versification\_mechanism

alexandrinne

+ new value





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homophony -

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+ new value

ta\_label

+ new value

ns

other\_list -

+ new value

versification\_mechanism

alexandrinne -

+ new value

...

les trompettes n'ont pas de cordes

SAVE



Poem of the day ☒ | Hold for 1 days

Envoyer

Ig (#6143)

type:  
rhyme:

#44596

Im:12

met:6+6

rg:

rt:

Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines

...

- ☐ so\_actual\_non
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+ new value

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alexandrinne -

+ new value

les trompettes n'ont pas de cordes

trompettes marines = instrument à  
une corde (la chanterelle)

SAVE

# Difficulties with GTVH:

## - Long, open lists of known Logical Mechanisms

role-reversals  
vacuous reversal  
garden-path  
almost situations  
inferring consequences  
coincidence  
proportion  
exaggeration  
meta-humor

role exchanges  
juxtaposition  
figure-ground reversal  
analogy  
reas. from false prem.  
parallelism  
ignoring the obvious  
field restriction  
vicious circle

potency mappings  
chiasmus  
faulty reasoning  
self-undermining  
missing link  
implicit parall.  
false analogy  
cratylism  
referential ambiguity

(e.g., one of many lists and taxonomies, by Attardo, *Humorous Texts: A semantic and pragmatic analysis*)

# Difficulties with GTVH:

## - Levels of abstraction for Script Oppositions


Highly abstract:      actual/non-actual      normal/abnormal      possible/impossible

Moderately

abstract:      life/death      sex/non-sex      money/no-money      high/low status

Concrete:      hand/spoon      face/fesse      doctor/lover      etc.

# APOLLINAIRE, Guillaume: Le Lapin (#6)

 Poem of the day ☒ | Hold for  days

lg (#6)  
type: quatrain  
rhyme: abab

#22 lm:8 met:8 rg:m rt:a  
Je connais un autre connin  
██████████ ██████████

#23 lm:8 met:8 rg:f rt:a  
Que tout vivant je voudrais prendre.  
██████████ ██████████ ██████████

#24 lm:8 met:8 rg:m rt:e  
Sa garenne est parmi le thym  
██████████ ██████████ ██████████ ██████████

#25 lm:8 met:8 rg:f rt:e  
Des vallons du pays de Tendre.  
██████████ ██████████ ██████████ ██████████ ██████████

- ☒ so\_actual\_non
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s1\_s2

si

ta

la

- ☐ la\_argot
- ☐ la\_cacography

comment

lm\_type

ta\_label

ns

versification\_mechanism

d'une femme qui ment, et là, bercé par le

#104858 lm:71 met: rg: rt:

dynamitées d'alcool, échouées dans la bo

#104859 lm:124 met: rg: rt:

menteusement souriante, ses lèvres ouve

silencieusement ; un vieux silence crevant

#104860 lm:12 met: rg: rt:

l'affreuse inanité de notre raison d'être.

#104861 lm:92 met: rg: rt:

Anne-Sophie Bories – Digital Romanistics – 11 May 2023

quand la canine molle on mordra la poussière  
que font les os des morts

*when with a floppy tooth we shall bite the dust  
from the bones of the dead*

des bouchons dans l'oreille et le bec dans la bière  
abreuvoir pour les morts

*with buildup in our ears, and mouths dipped in a beer/coffin  
a trough for the dead*

- Raymond Queneau, «L'Instant fatal», 1948

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Our website:

<https://slw-comicverse.dslw.unibas.ch>