

### The Components of Carnivalized Literature in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Novelle

**Abstract:** The article focuses on the presence of such carnivalesque components, as festive laughter, elements of grotesque realism, the eccentric carnival behavior of characters inherited from literary traditions, first of all, from Rabelais and Boccaccio, and folklore in some Gabriele D'Annunzio's novelle (*Turlendana ritorna*, *Turlendana ebro*, *La fattura* and *La guerra del Ponte*) collected in *Le novelle della Pescara*. It is argued that the gloomy atmosphere prevailing in D'Annunzio's novelle, is discharged in some of them by comic elements of carnivalized literature.

**Key words:** D'Annunzio, *Le Novelle della Pescara*, carnivalesque

### The Components of Carnivalized Literature in Gabriele D'Annunzio's Novelle

Gabriele D'Annunzio's *novelle* published in 1884-1886 and afterwards collected under the general title of *Le novelle della Pescara* (1902) are closely connected with Naturalism, the literary movement that emerged in France in the second half of the 1880-s and its Italian variant - Verismo. One of the characteristic features of this collection of novelle is that its dominant gloomy and sometimes tragic atmosphere full of the scenes of cruelty and violence in some of them is discharged by laughter of the carnivalized literature and folk culture, by the carnivalesque components in the sense as this concept is developed in Mikhail Bakhtin's works *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*.

The categories of the carnivalesque in D'Annunzio's novelle have a deep literary foundation whose origins can be traced to the works of Rabelais and Boccaccio. It is obvious that the carnivalesque aspects of his novelle is inspired as well by the folklore of D'Annunzio's native Abruzzo, the region, where the life of people, their habits and prejudices were marked by the features of pre-Roman pagan rites.

One of the manifestations of D'Annunzio's deep interest in the folk cult forms and ceremonials is the fact that in 1883 he published a review of Francesco Paolo Michetti's painting *Il Voto* in which he describes his impressions of the feast devoted to Saint Pantaleone: "L'impressione fu a Miglianico, alla festa di San Pantaleone, nella calura soffocante dell'estate, dentro la chiesa..." (D'Annunzio 1995: 460). It should be mentioned as well that in 1886 D'Annunzio published several translations from Gennaro Finamore's *Novelle popolari abruzzesi* (1882)\*.

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\* Among the recent works devoted to the problem of important role of myths and folklore in D'Annunzio's works first of all should be mentioned Angela Tumini's *Il mito nell'anima. Magia e folklore in D'Annunzio*, Rocco Carabba, Lanciano, 2004.

The carnival motifs and images, the eccentric carnival behavior of characters are most clearly visible in D'Annunzio's such novelle as *Turlendana ritorna*, *Turlendana ebbero*, *La fattura* and *La guerra del Ponte*.

*La guerra del Ponte* (first published in 1884, November) telling of a cholera epidemic in Pescara in 1884 and the feud between the inhabitants of Pescara and Castellammare is full of such carnivalesque components as comic situations, eccentric judgments and behavior, mocking the official social system and authoritative figures, grotesque realism and many of the features of what Bakhtin called the "carnavalesque-grotesque".

As M. Bakhtin points on the main sources of carnivalesque in the literature of XVII, XVIII and XIX centuries were the writers of Renaissance period: Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Grimmshausen (Bakhtin 1963: 221). In this regard in *La guerra del Ponte* are most clearly visible the traces of Rabelais's novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. It is noteworthy that according to the letter sent by D'Annunzio to Enrico Nencioni on 1884, September 6 he intended to publish a collection of short stories "forse intitolato *Pantagruelion*" (he means the collection of stories entitled later *San Pantaleone* (Ciani 2001: 26).

Through direct citations D'Annunzio includes his narrative in grotesque carnival intertext of Rabelais's novel. The "military chief" of Castellamarians is mentioned as a direct descendant of Rabelais's character: "È il Gran nimico un degenerare nepote del buon Gargantuasso; enorme, sbuffante, tonante, divorante". The war of the bridge between Pescara and Castellammare is read in such Rabelaisian intertext as a war between Gargantua and Pantagruel.

The individuals, as well as the entire population of Pescara, their actions judgments and arguments exhibit exceptional eccentricity violating the logic of a common sense. As a result of fear caused by the cholera unbelievable gossips spread in Pescara: "Poi, a poco a poco, le leggende si formavano e di bocca in bocca variavano, e, se bene recenti, divenivano meravigliose". The people assure each other that the free canteens, arranged for the poor, in fact, are intended to poison the poor. They believe that "a Napoli i cristiani morivano in gran numero. E al nome di Napoli, di quel gran reame lontano dove Ggiunne senza pahure un di trovò fortuna, le immaginazioni si accendavano".

Such components of *La guerra del Ponte* as a sharp journalistic aspect combined with irony ("Ma il grande episodio epico di questa cronaca del cholera è la Guerra del Ponte"), serio-comical tone of the narrative, scandalous scenes and eccentric behavior of its characters remind poetics of a Menippean satire, which is one of the main carriers of the "carnival sense of the world" (Bakhtin 1963: 151).

As a component of a Menippean satire in *La guerra del Ponte* can be regarded the combination of different genre features, a variety of styles and tones, including elements of journalistic chronicles and poeticized prose. At the end of the novella the neutral narrative infused with irony gives way to a passage full of lyricism: "Apparve su una loggia, d'improvviso, la Ciccarina, la bella delle belle, la rosa delle rose, l'amorosa pèsca, colei che tutti han desiato. Per un moto unanime, gli sguardi si volsero verso di lei. Ella, nel trionfo, stava semplicemente sorridendo, come una dogarèssa dinanzi al suo popolo. Il sole le illuminava la piena faccia carnosa, che è simile alla polpa di un frutto succulento. I capelli, di quel color lionato di sotto a cui par trasparisca una fiamma d'oro, le invadevano la fronte, le tempie, il collo, mal frenati. Un natural fascino venereo le emanava da tutta la persona [...]. I merli fischiarono. I madrigali rustici batterono l'ali verso la loggia. La Ciccarina si ritrasse, sorridendo". Thus the mood of the carnival square unites the people who were separated by mutual hatred, prejudices and barriers of different kind.

The paroding of certain styles and texts characteristic for carnivalized literature in *La guerra del Ponte* is achieved by means of ironic use of such stylistic device of historical chronicles as the beginning of the sentence by a conjunction "and" and adverb "then": "E il male...", "E il sindaco...", "E il Gran Nimico", "E al nome di Napoli...", "E poiché oggi è la prima fonte di prosperità la mercatura", "E, poiché su tutte le teste...", "E il delegato di polizia...", "Poi, i vecchi rinnovavano i ricordi delle passate mortalità", "Poi, a poco a poco, le leggende si formavano...", "Poi, a tarda ora...", "Poi [...] sorrisse di meraviglia"...

*Turlendana ritorna* and its continuation *Turlendana ebbero* were first published in 1885 with a pre-title *Le mirabili avventure del gran Turlendana* which was later removed. The pre-title of the humorous

stories with its clearly expressed genre and stylistic connotations refers to the intertext of adventurous literature marked by the components of poetics of carnivalized literature.

Though the plot of *Turlendana ritorna* depends much on Guy de Maupassant's story *Le retour*, in many ways it is quite distinctive and first of all by much more marked presence of carnivalesque components. One can say that D'Annunzio's novella is a carnivalized variant of Maupassant's story.

*Turlendana ritorna* is characterized by abundance of folk festive laughter and language. The action of the story takes place in the space of carnival, in the streets and squares, dominated by a particular form of free familiar contact between people. The creation of a joyful carnival atmosphere is in a great deal conditioned by the inclusion of a camel, a donkey and a monkey in the narrative and participation in the cheerful procession of many people: "Un grido di terrore ruppe dalle donne che stavano su la loggia chine; e il grido si propagò nelle logge prossime. La gente dalla via rideva forte, gridando come in carnevale dietro le maschere: - Viva! Viva! Tutti erano inebriati dalla novità dello spettacolo e dall'aria della primavera".

The final episode of the story, a dialogue between Turlendana and Verdura, is marked by such elements of a carnivalized genre *symposium* as a combination of humor, familiarity, ease and eccentricity (Bakhtin 1963: 161).

In *Turlendana ebro*, a continuation of *Turlendana ritorna*, first published in 1885, a spirit of carnival is created by a humorous plot: Binchi-Banche, a character described in the previous novella as "l'omiciattolo dal viso giallognolo e rugoso come un limone senza succo", with the help of his companion lays down drunk Turlendana beside a dead camel portraying a love hug.

The humorous story *La Fattura* (first published in 1884 under the title *L'incantesimo*) whose plot is borrowed from the sixth novel of the eighth day of Boccaccio's *The Decameron* contains a number of carnivalesque features which are most clearly manifested in the grotesque conception of the body. While Boccaccio concentrates his attention on the narrative D'Annunzio focuses on the portraits of his characters. First of all, in the grotesque, exaggerated details of the portraits in *La Fattura* are felt the echoes of Maupassant's story *L'Âne* (1884).

*La Fattura* is permeated with a mood of cheerful carnivalesque sense of the world. The behavior of the characters, the depiction of their portraits promotes creation of an intertextual relationship between D'Annunzio's story and carnivalized literature and folklore. The carnivalesque intertext of *La Fattura* can be traced in the fact that La Bravetta, one of the protagonists of the story, is characterized as a kind of an immortal folk hero: "Ancóra tra il buon volgo la memoria n'è viva e, fermata in un proverbio, durerà lungamente nei tempi a venire".

It should be noted that La Bravetta by his big belly is reminiscent of the famous characters of carnivalized literature. In the description of his appearance are felt echoes of Rabelais's Gargantua: "Mastro Pepe La Bravetta era un plebeo di qualche corpulenza, tozzo, con la faccia piena di una prospera stupidizza, con li occhi simili a quelli d'un vitello poppante, con mani e piedi di straordinaria espansione. E come aveva un naso molto lungo e carnoso e singolarmente mobile, e come aveva le mascelle forti, egli nel ridere e nello starnutare pareva una di quelle foche a proboscide, che in conseguenza della pinguedine tremano tutte come una gelatina, secondo narrano i marinai. Anche di quelle foche egli aveva la pigrizia, la lentezza dei movimenti, la ridicolezza delle attitudini, l'amore del sonno. Non poteva passare dall'ombra al sole o dal sole all'ombra, senza che un irresistibile impeto d'aria gli rompesse per la bocca e per le narici. Lo strepito, in ispecie nelle ore tranquille, udivasi a gran distanza; e poichè si produceva in periodi determinati, serviva d'orario a quasi tutti i cittadini".

The use of a motif of a grotesque nose and a motif of a sneeze is characteristic for many works of carnivalized literature; let us remember an interpretation of a sneeze by Pantagruel in Rabelais's novel and Pantalone of Commedia dell'arte who continuously sneezes and blows his nose and whose mask exaggerated his long, pointy nose.

It should be noted as well that in *La fattura* some characters form a popular-festive comic couple built on contrasts: thick and thin, old and young, high and low. "Matteo Puriello, detto Ciávola, era un uomo in su i quarant'anni; cacciatore clandestino; alto e segaligno, con i capelli biondastri, la pelle del viso giallognola, i baffi duri e tagliati come una spazzola, tutta la testa avente l'aspetto di una effigie di legno su cui fosse rimasta una traccia lievissima dell'antica doratura. I suoi occhi, tondi, vivi e mobili quasi per inquietudine come quelli delle bestie corritrici, lucevano simili a due monete nuove. In tutta la persona, vestita quasi sempre di un certo panno di

color terrigno, egli aveva le attitudini, i movimenti, il passo dondolante di quei lunghi cani barbareschi che pigliano le lepri a corsa per le pianure”.

Unlike his friend Biagio Quaglia is younger, lower and with a face of different color: “Biagio Quaglia, detto il Ristabilito, era in vece di statura mediocre, d'alcuni anni più giovine, rubicondo nella faccia e tutto gemmante come un mandorlo a primavera”.

Thus we can conclude that some stories of *Le novelle della Pescara* are marked by different components of carnivalized literature.

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