FORMS OF COMIC IN CALISTRAT HOGAŞ'S WORK

Maria VOINEA *

Abstract*: Hogas*'s *work remains, in the Romanian literature, a creation without imitation. What defines it, on the one hand, is the mixture of classical, romantic and modern elements, and, on the other side, the author*'s *playful spirit that generates charming language and descriptions but also the narrative*'s *dynamism. The expressiveness of Hogas*'s *text is marked by the spontaneity of the language and by the contrast between essence and appearance, a fundamental feature of the comic. In Hogas*'s *work, the comic manifests itself mainly through humour and irony, both in narrating events but also in portraying the characters. It is a classic, irresistible humour, resulting from the association of the scholarly and popular language but also from the author*'s *exaggerations in presenting scenes and shaping portraits.*

Keywords*: playful, parody, comic, humour, irony*

Calistrat Hogaş remains, undoubtedly, in the Romanian literature, thanks to his descriptions, "an artist and a poet of nature", and, on the other hand, due to evoking the happenings and characters encountered in his travels on mountain roads, he remains in the consciousness of his readers, a gifted story-teller and "a creator of situations and vivid typologies" (Botez, O., 1915: 72-74).

Hogaş's travel journal is the fusion of classicism, romanticism and modernism, as well as a fusion between the formal and the colloquial or regional language, thus representing the undeniable proof of the literary talent of the author but also of his scholarship.

From the very beginning, Hogaş's work imposes itself through detailed descriptions and spiced, colourful evocations, situated at the sensitive border between reality and fantasy, between essence and appearance, generating the comic by exaggeration, irony, self irony, parody and cartoon:

> No human soul was yet smart; only a few dogs, too daring maybe, were doing their job making for us, or — better — for our strange road clothes. Anyway, I thought it was my companion's fault since he had the strange idea to combine the sub-lieutenant clothes with the peasant's sandals, the cane and the bundle back; and I tried to make him understand that he was the reason the dog were making all that noise. [...].But the luck belongs to the traveller: at a few steps away, on the porch of a white house, the householder and the housewife were sleeping under a quilt, stuck together in order to face the morning chill, in my opinion; [...] they were soundly asleep and probably deep in happy dreams; but we approached them and I, with no respect for such nothings and without any introduction, removed the quilt with my cane from the householder's face since he was sleeping at the edge of the bed, pushed him softly, awoke him and, without saying at least "Good morning, I briefly asked him about the road to Almaș.[...].What happened then in his soul was,

*University of Pitești, marica_voinea@yahoo.com

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

> certainly, quicker than the lightning; besides his eyes were twice bigger than usual and with his staring and scared face not being able to understand where from and how we appeared out of the blue, he looked at us, analyzing us in surprise, from top to bottom and withdrawing to the wall as he wanted to escape from a very disturbing vision. The poor woman, cornered and frightened, started to move under the quilt and to utter incomprehensible words that could only be firm domestic objections.... (Hogaş, C., 1988: 7-8).

The humour takes a special place in the literary activity of Hogaş, "the tricks and jokes following the serene vision on life of the writer" (Ciopraga, C., 1960: 105). The quick rhythm of the story and the technique of the detail characterizing the travel journal of Hogaş maintain the reader's interest alive, making him to intensely live any described situation and making him laugh when the author exaggerates using parody, cartoon, comparison or hyperbole.

The playful feature of Hogaş's humour is the result of the mixture between the formal and colloquial language but also the result of different artistic techniques, especially those preferred by the author – allegory, hyperbole or hyperbolic comparison.

George Ivaşcu, in *Însemnări ieşene (Notes from Iaşi)***,** emphasized the idea that, during the evolution of our literature, the humour of the mountain road story-teller is special, representing the very essence of Hogaş's lyricism. From this perspective, the literary critics compared Hogaș with Ion Creangă or with George Topîrceanu, determining both similarities and differences, especially in forms of comic used.

For example, Dumitru Micu finds Hogaş's creative technique similar to that of George Topîrceanu, in some parodies or pastiches. In the critic's opinion, parody or, more precisely, "pseudoparody" actually represents a mean of indirect expression of writer's own opinions on human typologies that he describes. Thus, joke becomes a mean of characterizing the characters or a mean of exposing ideas and inner feelings of the writer (Micu, D. 1965: 4-18).

On the other side, the same literary critic compares Calistrat Hogaș with Ion Creangă, considering that the expressiveness of the humour of the latter can be found in the work of "Hălăuca's evoker". The critic considers that Creangă's creative power is much higher than that of Hogaş, being equally enhanced by the "verbal savour", "spiritual gracefulness" or the "verbal ingenuity", but also by the spontaneity and the fine observation sense of the writer from Humulești. Joking and caricaturing, the writer actually tries to avoid ridicule and sentimentalism (*ibidem*). An adequate example is the burlesque portrait, with exaggerations, of the old nun with "ghost" appearance, from Agapia:

> I haven't seen an uglier old nun face... From that ghost face of that nun, her little, black sparkling eyes remained engraved into my mind; even today, her grey hair strands, hanging from all side of her head like snakes twisted in thousands of fantastic shapes whip my soul; and that teasel with yellowish, rare and rusted teeth among which a flock of rams could have passed running grins to my terrified mind...(Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 36-37).

From the perspective of the same comparison, Tudor Vianu notes the difference between the two Moldavian writers in terms of humour, and he agrees that the "organic, moody joy" of Hogaş "is not similar to that of Creangă. As to the aspects differentiating the

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

two writers, he introduces culture, which he uses as the element of a humour contrast [...]. Hogaş is another Creangă imprinted with culture", "he is a classicist, an academic writer" (Vianu, T., 1973: 277), a "scholar writer" (*ibidem*: 281).

The comic feature of Hogaş's work is undeniable and it expresses through a variety of types or forms: comic of situation, of language, of character, of name and even of intention.

It was found that Hogaş's humour defines itself through "obvious grotesque or burlesque traits" and it triggers itself "only towards people" (Constantinescu, P., 1942), being obvious that the writer finds pleasure in making jokes, parodies, like a classicist, but also in making ironies, like a romantic.

Constantin Ciopraga underlined the fact that, when using parody, Hogaş is inspired by ancient classicism, constantly realising a comparison between monumental and common, between appearance and essence (*op.cit.*: 197). A good example, in this respect, is the traveller discovering the sleeping in the straw, and even Horaţiu would have exclaimed enthusiastically "Sententia compos voti!" (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 174).

Among the comic situations experienced and described by the author in his work, there are his mythological allusions stirring up laughter, especially when his contemporaries are compared with the ancient writers (Ciopraga, C., *op.cit.*: 197), as coming out from the following fragment:

> We sat on the soft and flowery grass like the ancient people and we began our great feast. The teacher Alecu was prouder than a king and I expected him to tell me that Lucullus was a beggar and Labdacus a bad cook; but it was obvious that in Arghir or Tilu Buhoglindă that formed his entire literary education, as he himself said, nothing could be traced back to these famous faces of Antiquity.(Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 28)

The same situational comic also comes out from the "great and dreadful epic" depicting the "huge fight" of a little Cat with a fly:

> I couldn't however stop from amusing watching the huge fight started with a big fly with a green shiny back that wanted to take shelter from the sun's scorching heat in the wet shade of one of her nostrils; and one could hardly decide which of the two was wittier in strategy, the fly of the little Cat? For, if the Cat defends its nose, shaking its head in all directions, the fly, no less, with the precision worthy of the perfect ballistics, aimed and caught the little Cat's nose on the fly and plunged in one of the nostrils as quick as an arrow; then the Cat took a deep breath and inhaling in his strong chest half the Earth atmosphere; and when the air thus inhaled was returned to the sky under the form of a noisy broken trombone note, the fly was blown out from the Cat's nostril and it took a while until it got back and escaped from the knotty herbs where it had been thrown, in order to regain battle balance... For a while, the fly had changed its plan of attack and started to assault the weaker parts of the citadel as if the little Cat didn't have legs, tail or teeth and especially the priceless gift to shake its back so powerfully that the strategic genius of all flies from the universe would be helpless against the devastating earthquake of its back and flanks... And, even I was convinced that finally the victory will belong to the Cat, I

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

decided to intervene in this great and atrocious epic taking place before my very eyes [...]. (*ibidem*: 224-225)

A scene also expressing the comic of situation is the fight between the little Cat and the dogs from a sheepfold, a moment reminding the author of the epic-heroic story of Ludovico Ariosto (Ciopraga, C., *op.cit.*: 198):

> I definitely used to strike right and left but only perfunctory or at most to comfort myself in my imagination that my strike was not lower than the spear of Rinaldo, that the little Cat is, at least, the granddaughter in direct line of some Baiardo and that I myself rated myself at least twice that any Orlando furioso!... things for which I have always had a great weakness... (Hogaş, C., *op.cit*: 232)

Hogaş's comic is an intellectual one delighting the reader's mined, resting its spirit (Micu, D., *op.cit.*: 4-18). Ciopraga (*op.cit.*: 206-209) insisted on Hogaş's well-known fame among his acquaintances of gifted oral storyteller, making a comparison between the author traveller and Ion Creangă in terms of language especially. So the reader is amused by Hogaş's language rich in aphorisms – quotes from existing books or invented by himself – : "great ideas lean on small things almost always... " (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 159) or "the woman is, undoubtedly, the riddle the most difficult to solve" (*ibidem*: 143), in paradoxical antithesis – "Cherish more a moment of brightness than an eternity of darkness..." (*ibidem*: 184), in comic analogies, in exaggerations or hyperboles with comic effect, in expressions and allusions reminding, inevitably, of the writer from Humuleşti – such as the confession of the author's pleasure to travel, starting with "I don't pretend to know what other people are like", (*ibidem*: 162), just like Creangă started telling childhood memories.

The originality and the uniqueness of Hogaş's language were also insisted upon, being seen as an association of popular words and expressions and neologisms creating an undeniable comic effect: "gad about-Tănasă" (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 182), "set the table in roars" (*ibidem*: 145) or "huge broom" (*ibidem*: 33) etc. In Tudor Vianu's opinion (*op.cit.*: 280), this language originality of Hogaş "came from his courage to persevere in older stylistic forms, to maintain himself in the sphere of academic classicism means, in a time when, through artistic and lyrical realism, through aesthetics and intellectualism, the traditional art of writing was undergoing great changes".

On the other hand, the comic of language also emerges from self-persiflage, as well as from expressions and witty words abounding in Hogaş's work. To this purpose, the following quotes are suggestive: "Fear is born out of imagination, manhood out of reason ... The first was always with me, the second one …from time to time" (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 217) or "The luck belongs to the traveller" (*op.cit.*: 8).

Another source of the comic of language is the "lexical distortion" (Ciopraga, C., *op.cit.*: 208) or mispronunciation of some words: for example, a countryman expressing his fear: "– [...] the forester (*sivlicultoru)* must arrive any minute now and bless our souls if he doesn's find us cutting trees", and the speaker does not hesitate to parody: "– What? Is the forester (*sivlicultoru*) supposed to come here?" (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.*: 280), in order to underline the comic effect resulting from his mispronunciation.

Another type of comic well-illustrated in Calistrat Hogaş's work is the comic of proper nouns, combined with the comic the character and intention.

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

In his wanderings, across the mountains, Hogaş encounters various people, each one falling into a human typology. In order to make their portraits, the author uses the detail – both physical and moral – underlining in a realistic manner, through gestures and language and in some situations through proper nouns, different human characters. The examples that could be invoked, to this purpose, can be found everywhere in the work of the memorialistic writer, impossible to exhaust, to the reader's delight.

Constantin Ciopraga, in his book, dedicated to Calistrat Hogaş, captures sequentially the essence of several portraits representative for the work of the author from Tecuci – Axinia, Magda, Halunga, Mr. Georges, Ioniţă Hrisanti, Mrs. Marieta, priest Ghermănuţă, friar Glicherie, sheperds Sgribincea and Huţan etc. – underlining the fact that the portraitist "aims at the consistency between the physiognomy, personality and name of a character" (*op.cit.*: 170).

Thus, Axinia is "nimble as a goat" and "quick as a spool" (Hogaş, C., *op. cit.*:77), Magda is "inflamed with false and playful melancholy arising laughter" (*ibidem*: 154) , Halunga "was the man the most monosyllabic on Earth; in his case, a syllabus had the value of an entire phrase, and a gesture of his index with a golden ring reflected, several times, his entire mind..." (*ibidem*: 124-125).

Nevertheless, among all Hogaş's portraits, a very special one singles out, that of Mr. Georges, "the candidate to marriage from the short story *Floricica*", as defined by Ciopraga (*op.cit.* : 158). In achieving this, the author's satirical attitude is obvious:

> Without the usual curtsy, I strongly joined hands with and shook strong, with my countrified right hand, the right hand of Mr. Georges, a hand fattish and puffy like that of a coquettish woman... It seemed to me that he grimaced a little: but he heroically suffered the direct Romanian way of my strong hand shake... [...] But anyway, Mr. Georges was "flawless": short, fat and almost bald, he had his hair behind his ears skilfully combed as to cover his temples; his round and plump face had at the bottom of each ear a small band of brown hair, relic of once complete whiskers, later tortured by the merry scissors of some Parisian barber. The yellowish and pointed tip of his whiskers, scattered on his lips, arched symmetrically above the large nostrils of a curved nose; the fleshy, moist and red lips seemed to call fat food and warm kisses; the pale and lazy eyes denoted a sleepy mind; under his chin with freshly razed and powdered creases, a red knot dazzled the lookers' eyes; on his round full underbelly, a vest sat beautifully and roundly without crinkles; at the bottom of his trousers tight at the ankle, one could see Mr. Georges' red, long and narrow duck booties; and from the polished horizon of his bald crown, his eye was glided into the air as from the desolate and void glare of a dormant water... (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.* : 143-144)

This satirical portrait is intentionally deformed by the author in order to make it a caricature: "[...] can't you see what a curved nose he has? — And such pale eyes?! And such a big underbelly?! His mouth!... his lips!... ugh!... like two sausages shadowed by the nostrils such as two eagle wings spread into the air!..." (*ibidem* : 145). Of course, the road-traveller Hogaş continues with the ironies at the knowledge of Mr. Georges, a "truly brilliant man", "flawless", "a treasure of virtues", aiming at mocking at "the skilled autumnal knight", as Ciopraga calls him. (*op.cit.* : 160):

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

My poor mother — God forgive her — slapped me so many time with the spoon over my hand and mouth to make me eat properly!... Nix!... like heck!... Even today, when I eat soft-boiled eggs, I get dirty up to my ears!... Well!... Mr. Georges used to eat them so masterly!... his white, fat and pointed at the top fingers handled the fork or the knife so masterly when performing an egg's autopsy that, at the end, the egg shell was as bright inside as outside... and no stain on the napkin, on the plate, on the knife, fork or on Mr. Georges' whiskers!... And if I regret something in my life, it was that I couldn't stay in Paris at least twelve years to learn how to eat eggs!... (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.* : 146)

The sharp irony of the writer can also be noted in the portrait of Lady Marieta, who Constantin Ciopraga finds "frivolous, insidious and superficial – the feminine equivalent of Mr. Georges" (*op.cit.* : 162):

Dressed in a short dress [...], tight at the waist with a black belt with silver clasps in the front part; with the breasts suggestively pushed up by a corset, once in fashion; with black-red curly hair, but recently entirely dyed; with a few black-red hair strands let loose in the back in the soft blowing wind; with small morocco black-golden shoes in her fattish legs; with a hand bag full of womanish trifles on one hand, with the umbrella in the other; with a little almost male hat on her head, Lady Marieta was ready to go... Seen from behind, she seemed to be fifteen years old, the age she must have had during Kiseleff's Russians. (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.* : 276-277)

As stated before, the examples illustrating Hogaş's portrait gallery are so many, quite difficult to exhaust, scattered among the journal, but we make one last stop on the portrait of friar Glicherie who, in Ciopraga's opinion, "deserves his name of Greek etymology: *glukeros – the sweet one*" (*op.cit.* : 170):

I don't know how it happened but in that monastery, all the names matched each person, for example, Varsanufie, was crusty and shaggy: Glicherie, instead, was simply tacky... Honey, butter, sugar, fat, sweets and all greasy and sweet things he handled every day and for a long time as being part of his job as a monk, contributed with something of their nature to the sticky appearance of devout Glicherie. When speaking, his tongue seemed to difficultly detach from the hard palate of his mouth and one could say he does not speak but he rather tried to utter each word that he literally had to detach with his tongue... (Hogaş, C., *op.cit.* : 290)

Many things can be said about Hogaş's humour and numerous examples are easy to find in the author's travel journal, being difficult to select the most adequate ones and not to identify some. To illustrate each type of comic, more examples can be offered but the purpose of this work is to review the types of comic and the ways and methods to express them in Hogaş's work.

Finally, it is proper to emphasize once more, according to the literary critic, the importance of the writer from Tecuci, who, together with other writers, contributed to the development of the national literature: "Among the writers who, in their attempt to enrich (...) the Romanian prose, who made the humorist and ironist group, Calistrat Hogaş is undoubtedly one of the most vigorous personalities" (Vianu, T., op. cit. : 277).

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)

Bibliography

Botez, O., *Romanian Life*, 1915, X, no. 10-11-12, (Oct.-Nov.-Dec);
Călinescu, G., *The History of Romanian Literature from its origins till present day*, Foundation for Literature and Art, Bucureşti, 1941;
Ciopraga, C., *Calistrat Hogaş*, Literature and Art State Publishing House, București, 1960;
Hogaş, C., *On Mountain Roads*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucureşti, 1988;
Ivaşcu, G.: *Notes from Iaşi*, 1937, II, no.17-18, vol.IV;
Micu, D., *Calistrat Hogaş*: *The History of Romanian Literature*, vol.2 [1900-1918], Didactical and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucureşti, 1965;
Streinu, V., *Calistrat Hogaş*, Youth Publishing House, București, 1968;
Vianu, T., *Romanian Prose Writers Art*, Lider Publishing House, București, 1973.

BDD-A29808 © 2016 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:18 UTC)