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ETHNIC HUMOUR IN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS: AN ANALYSIS OF JAMES MORIER'S *AYESHA, THE MAID OF KARS*

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Abstract: *One of the many fascinating aspects of James Morier's novels is his way of depicting ethnic differences in a humorous way. His 1834 novel Ayesha illustrates an intercultural romantic relationship between a Christian English lord and a Muslim Turkish maiden, in which the author satirizes the stereotypes attributed by Christians to Turkish Muslims and vice-versa, also offering the reader an insight into late 18th century multiculturalism in Turkey. The aim of the present paper is to explore the ways in which James Morier organizes the humorous narrative fragments in order to elicit laughter and the extent to which the current theories of humour can be applied to these particular fragments, in an attempt to understand the cultural pluralism as well as the feelings and concerns of particular groups of people living in the Middle East at the turn of the 18th century.*

Key words: *ethnic humour, theories of humour, joke techniques.*

1. Introduction

Humour represents a key element of our everyday life; it is an aspect which is characteristic of every human being, irrespective of his/her culture, colour of skin or religious beliefs. Gruner (1978:1) stated that

'without laughter, everyday living becomes drab and lifeless; life would seem hardly human at all. Likewise, a sense of humour is generally considered a person's most admirable attribute'.

This may be the reason why the study of humour has such a long history (it started in Antiquity with the contributions of Aristotle and Plato, who laid down the foundation of humour research) and has drawn the attention of people involved in different fields, such as philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and more recently linguists. An important outcome of this is that humour research has become an interdisciplinary field.

The genres of humour that were very frequently subjected to analysis were jokes, comic strips, cartoons, anecdotes and, more recently, stand-up comedies, narrative humour being seldom approached (this is the reason why I intend to focus on

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this particular genre of humour). What researchers aimed to find by investigating humour was basically the functions this serves, as well as the literary techniques (devices) employed to create it.

2. What is 'Ethnic Humour'?

As the analysis of the narrative excerpts from Morier's *Ayesha, the Maid of Kars* focuses on ethnic humour, I consider it appropriate at this point to define the concept 'ethnic humour', which, in turn, demands a definition of both terms that make up the syntagm. But as Rappaport (2005: 3) points out, 'humour and ethnicity are each in themselves slippery concepts'. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, humour is 'that quality in a happening, an action, a situation, or an expression of ideas which appeals to a sense of ludicrous or absurdly incongruous'. If we consider this definition, we may wonder whether humour is an intrinsic characteristic of the situation we observe or whether it is related to the observer's cognitive capacity of perceiving/interpreting a situation as humorous, or whether it is a combination of both. As far as the dictionary definitions of ethnicity are concerned, they seem to be quite vague. The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2006) defines the term as 'the fact that someone belongs to a particular ethnic group', while according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, ethnicity is 'a particular ethnic affiliation or group'. What these two definitions have in common is the concept of a group. Consequently, I would suggest a more encompassing definition according to which an ethnic group may be perceived as sharing a social and cultural heritage that is passed on from generation to generation. The people in such a group are characterized by a national, cultural, religious and racial identification; moreover, they are not the ones to set the dominant style of life or control the privileges and power in the society in which they live. I would say that this description of an ethnic group is closer to our understanding of the concept, and, at the same time, it clearly describes the ethnic situation encountered in Turkey, at the turn of the 18th century, the period of time in which James Morier set the plot of his novel *Ayesha, the Maid of Kars*.

3. Theories of Humour

Various theories have emerged in the long study of humour. 'Of the several orientations to humour, literary and linguistic scholarships seem the oldest because across centuries people of many different cultural backgrounds have recognized that linguistic manipulation and its paralinguistic enhancements were among the most common, yet most sophisticated sources of humour' (Hill and Fitzgerald, 2002: 98). Besides these, three major humour theories have been launched by psychologists in an attempt to explain why people laugh: to reveal the absurdity of certain situations or behaviours (incongruity theory), to release tension (release/relief theory), or to show superiority over others (superiority theory). They will be detailed below and will be employed in the analysis of some fragments taken from an English novel of the early 19th century.

3.1. The Incongruity Theory

A key element of humour is that of *incongruity*. Thus, the most important explanation of humour is provided by the incongruity theory which suggests 'that

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humorous experiences originate in the perception of an incongruity: a pairing of ideas, images or events that are not ordinarily joined and do not seem to make sense together' (Lewis, 1989: 8). Incongruity is explained in terms of a difference between what a person expects to happen and what actually happens: the beginning and the main part of a joke[1] may trigger in the reader/listener certain expectations with respect to the way things will work out. But the revelation of the punch line makes the expectation disappear and causes a certain discrepancy which brings about laughter. Amusement is a reaction to an unexpected outcome.

According to Lewis (1989), incongruity is indeed an essential feature of humour, but not a sufficient one because in order to appreciate humour, one first needs to perceive an incongruity and then to resolve it, and this depends to a large extent on the 'perceiver's knowledge, expectations, values and norms' (Lewis, 1989:11). This means that people will perceive humour only if they have the ability to solve a problem in a creative way, more exactly if they have the necessary amount of knowledge and also the capacity of (mentally) decoding certain elements (persons or concepts) employed symbolically.

3.2. The Superiority Theory

Deriving from Hobbes (1650/1999) and filtered through Freud (1905/1960), the superiority theory refers to the negative and the aggressive side of humour, which is mainly used to disparage and humiliate specific opponents. Laughter is a means of power and superiority when it is directed against the faults and negative characteristics of other people and it thus expresses their inferiority. As Rappaport (2005:15) puts it, laughter is 'an expression of feeling superior to those who appear uglier, stupider, or more unfortunate than ourselves'. But there are also situations in which the butt of the joke has a high social status. In such a situation, humour is more enjoyed by the observers: the higher the status of the victim, the greater the fun caused by his making a fool of himself.

There seems to be a close link between the two theories of humour mentioned thus far in that the sense of superiority that we sometimes gain from observing the victim of a joke comes from the incongruity of the victim's situation (what we expect it to be and what it really is). According to Suls (1977), the incongruity theory can account for disparagement humour in those situations where the incongruous punch line involves a surprising misfortune.

In brief, the superiority theory of humour explains amusement or even laughter in terms of a sudden glory we enjoy when we perceive ourselves to be superior in comparison with others or with a previous situation of ours.

3.3. The Release Theory

The third psychological theory is the release (or relief) theory, the tenet of which is that humour is employed to release tensions or to make one feel liberated when approaching taboo topics, such as religious beliefs, sex or ridicule of ethnic groups. Humour serves to reduce the frustrations of coping with the society we live in. The most influential proponent of this humour theory was Sigmund Freud,

[1] I employ the term *joke* as an umbrella term for any humorous linguistic structure, in line with Wilson (1979: 2) who defines the joke as 'any stimulation that evokes amusement and that is experienced as being funny'.

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who in 1905 published his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* in which he emphasized that humour is linked to behaviour that is forbidden or socially unacceptable. For him, humour was a substitution mechanism which enabled a person to covert his negative, aggressive impulses that are socially condemned into more acceptable ones.

These three theories presented above do not exhaust the theoretical framework[2]. Moreover, they should not even be considered as rivals, but rather as truly complementary to each other, all contributing to the explanation of ethnic humour.

The following part of the paper will identify, describe and discuss the main ethnic narrative fragments excerpted from Morier's novel *Ayesha, the Maid of Kars*, and will account humour and for culture-specific elements.

4. Ethnic Humour In *Ayesha*: Research Questions And Analysis

In the attempt to explore the way in which James Morier organized the humorous narratives in order to elicit the readers' amusement and the extent to which the theories of humour could be applied to these fragments, the following research questions have guided the analysis:

- to what extent can the three theories presented above account for humour in the fragments under investigation?
- which humour techniques are encountered in the analysed excerpts?
- what linguistic means does Morier employ to create amusement?

Before embarking on the analysis of a couple of humorous fragments, a brief summary of the plot of the novel would be in order here, so that the reader could get an image of the many ethnicities that appear in Morier's *Ayesha, the Maid of Kars*. After a long stay in Persia, a young English lord decides to return to Britain through Turkey only that on entering Kars, he suffers an accident which prevents him from travelling for a while. When the accident occurred, he had the chance of seeing an extremely beautiful Muslim girl, Ayesha and, instantaneously, both fell in love with each other. But since such a love affair was forbidden on religious grounds, they had to wait a long time and go through all kinds of (mis)adventures until they found out that the girl was actually of English birth and that they could marry. In Kars, Osmond, the English lord, who is accompanied by two friends, the Greek Stasso and the Christian-turned-Muslim Mustafa, is offered lodging by an Orthodox Armenian, Bogos. There he finds out that Ayesha was the daughter of a Muslim Turk, Suleiman Aga and of his Greek wife, Zabetta. So, we already have a number of ethnicities. Later on in the novel, people of other ethnicities appear: Russian soldiers, Georgian people, and the Jewish dentist in the prison in Rhodes. From among them only a few are ridiculed, as we shall see shortly.

One of the most enjoyable chapters of the book is chapter XV, whose title is actually a quotation from Robert Burns: 'As glowr'd the *louts*, amaz'd and curious/The mirth and fun grew fast and furious', warning the reader that something

[2] Raskin (1985) lauched the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH), which later developed into the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo and Raskin, 1991).

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funny is going to happen. The humour in the following fragment stems from the Muslim Turks' unfamiliarity with things of common use in the Western countries. The context is the following: Lord Osmond and his two friends have to flee Kars, leaving their belongings in the Armenian's house. The Muslim heads of Kars (the Pasha, the Mufti, and Suleiman Aga) decide that it is their right to have access to them and choose whichever article they desire. In turn, they rummage through Osmond portmanteau, medicine chest, and artefacts, discovering things which perplex them. After inspecting all the clothes, the three Muslim heads of Kars come across a pair of leather trousers, described below:

> *'but when they came to inspect a pair of leather pantaloons, the ingenuity of the most learned amongst them could not devise for what purpose they could possibly be used. For, let it be known, that a Turk's trousers, when extended, look like the largest of sacks used by millers, with a hole at each corner for the insertion of legs, and when drawn together and tied in front, generally extend from the hips to ankles. Will it then be thought as extraordinary that the comprehension of the present company was at fault as to the pantaloons? They were turned about in all directions, inside out, before and behind. The Mufti submitted that they might perhaps be an article of dress, and he called upon a bearded chokhadar, who stood by wrapped in doubt and astonishment, to try them on. The view which the Mufti took of them, was that they were to be worn as head-dress, and accordingly, that part which tailors call the seat, was fitted over the turban of the chokhadar, while the legs fell in serpent-like folds down the grave man's back and shoulders, making him look like Hercules with the lion skin thrown over his head.*
>
> *'Barikallah- praise be to Allah!' said the Mufti, 'I have found it; perhaps this is the dress of an English Pasha of two tails[3]!' 'Aferim – well done!' cried all the adherents of the law. But the Pasha was of another opinion; he viewed the pantaloons in a totally different light, inspecting them with the eye of one who thought upon the good things of which he was fond. 'For what else can this be used' exclaimed the chief, his dull eye brightening as he spoke – 'what else but for wine? This is perhaps the skin of some European animal. Franks drink wine, and they carry their wine about in skins, as our infidels do. Is it not so?' said he, addressing himself to Bogos the Armenian. 'So it is,' answered the dyer, 'it is even as your kindness has commanded.' – 'Well, then, this skin has contained wine,' continued the Pasha, pleased with the discovery, 'and, by the blessing of Allah! It shall serve us again.' – 'Here,' said he to one of his servants, 'here, take this, let the Saka sew up the holes and let it be well filled; instead of wine it shall hold water.' And true enough, in a few days after, the pantaloons were seen in parading the town on a water carrier's back, doing the duty of mesheks. But it was secretly reported that, not long after, they were converted to the use for which the Pasha intended them, and actually were appointed for the conveyance of his highness's favourite wine'* (*Ayesha*, pp.158-159).

The first part of this fragment starts a chain of jokes. One amusing segment in it

[3] A pasha of two tails is a governor of provinces

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is the description of the Turkish trousers, which the writer presents the reader with so as to account for the Muslim Turks' unfamiliarity with western clothing. By comparing them with the 'largest of sacks used by millers', Morier introduces an element of incongruity: you cannot use a sack as a pair of trousers! At this point, the reader cannot predict how the story will go on. The surprise effect is created by the absurdity of having the sack provided with holes in the corners for the wearer to insert his legs and which, when pulled and tied in the front, will produce the piece of clothing typical of Turkish people.

Next, amusement is caused by the different purposes attributed by the 'most learned' Muslim Turks to the leather trousers of the English lord. Thus, the Mufti[4] concluded that they were a 'head-dress' which should be worn with the seat placed over the turban, with the trouser-legs hanging like serpents. Humour is produced in this part both by the image of the chokhadar (i.e. private watchman) entertained by the reader on the basis of the description made by Morier, but also by the comparison of the chokhadar's looks with those of Hercules, which required the reader's ability to decode the features of this mythical person employed symbolically[5].

As for the humour theories mentioned in section 2 above, the ones employed in the amusing fragment under investigation are the superiority and the incongruity theories. First and foremost, the amusing parts are the result of incongruous situations. At the same time, elements of the superiority theory are encountered: the Pasha does not want to be considered less intelligent than the Mufti, consequently he comes up with another suggestion for the use of the pantaloons, which he assumes is the *only* correct one, stating: '*For what else can this be used (....) but for wine?'* and asking for confirmation from Bogos, the Armenian who, in his response, indicates his lower social position in saying 'it is even as your kindness has commanded'. This statement of his, which could be interpreted as criticism against the Turks (they are the majority ethnicity, ergo they have the right to give orders to all the minority ethnicities), also delivers an incongruous punch line: things cannot be in a certain way just because somebody ordered them to be like that! Having decided that the leather trousers were used to carry liquids, the Pasha orders that they should be handed over to the Saka (water carrier) to carry water in them. When the reader thought the fun was over, Morier considered it appropriate to deliver the last punch line (or unexpected resolution) which brings about laughter: the Pasha actually employed the English trousers to transport his favourite liquid, wine, which Muslims are not allowed to drink.

From among the literary techniques employed to create humour, the most frequent in this excerpt is the comparison. Thus, the private watchman of the Pasha is compared to Hercules, the Turkish trousers

[4] Islamic legal authority

[5] Hercules is known to have been expected to perform 12 important tasks, known as the 'Twelve Labours', the first of which was to kill the Nemean lion, a vicious monster whose golden fur was impenetrable and who used to take women as hostages and to lure warriors to its lair, to save the captives, only that none of them managed to come out alive from the lair. Hercules seems to have been able to kill the monster by stunning it with his club and then by strangling it to death. Then, with the help of Athena's advice, he managed to skin the pelt of the lion using one of its claws and then threw the lion's skin over his shoulders.

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are described in terms of the largest miller's sack, while the trouser legs of the English leather pantaloons are considered to look like serpents. A second device which Morier seems to make diplomatic use of is word choice. He undermines the high position of the Muslim heads of Kars, whom he calls 'the most learned' by later pointing out that they were 'wrapped in doubt and astonishment' at the sight of the leather trousers. Irony is also encountered at the beginning of the fragment where the author tries to make the reader be gentler on the stupidity (or lack of familiarity) of the Turkish Muslims concerning the use of this piece of clothing by giving us the reason for it: they do not resemble in any way the Turkish style.

The cultural elements hinted at in the fragment are stupidity, greed, hostility towards other ethnicities: stupidity is revealed by the fact that none of the three Muslims, though they were considered the 'most learned', can figure out what the trousers are meant for; greed in shown in their desire to have each the piece of clothing for himself; they all show hostility both to the Christian Armenian, who is somehow forced to agree with the Muslims' suggestions, and to the Chokhadar, who becomes the butt of the humorous comparison with Hercules.

The following fragment brings together people of two different cultures and religious beliefs: Omar Reis, a Turkish Muslim, commander of a ship bound for Constantinople, and an English Christian, lord Osmond. The latter, who has been under Russian care in a garrison in Poti, is supposed to leave for Sinope by ship. The dialogue below takes place after Osmond discovers that there is no hour-glass, charts or log-line on the ship.

'Are we likely to have a good passage?' inquired Osmond.

'What can I say?' answered the other. Kismet! – fate! We are in God's hands! The wind is fair; please God it will last.'

'Whither are you steering now?' inquired Osmond, finding that they were nearly out of sight of land.

'To Sinope, Inshallah!' said the old man, extending his hand right a-head.

'By what point are you steering?'

'By what point!' inquired Omar; 'what do I know? By the way I have always gone. Don't I know that there lies Trebisond?' pointing with his left hand on the larboard beam; 'and don't I know that Caffa is there?' pointing with his right hand. 'Besides, have I not got my compass?'

'Ah, the compass! Do you ever steer by compass?' said Osmond.

'Evallah! – to be sure!' said the old main in great exultation, expecting to surprise the Frank by his knowledge; then, calling for the compass, which was kept in a square box, he placed it before them, and pointed to the fleur-de-lis on the index, 'There, that is north; here is south; on this side is east, and on that, west. This is the direction of the blessed Mecca. We – praise be to the Prophet! – we know many things!'

'But have you no chart?'

'We have no chart,' said the old man.

'Then what is the use of a compass?' replied Osmond.

'Of what use is it!' said Omar. 'I have always done very well without a chart: my father did very well before me; and my grandfather before him. After that, what can you want more. Give me only wind – I want nothing more; after all, that is the father and mother of sailors; charts are bosh – nothing!' (*Ayesha*, p. 298)

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The first idea that emerges from this fragment is that the Turkish ship-commander considers himself superior to the English passenger, at least in what concerns navigation skills. By pointing with his hand to all cardinal points according to the compass, the only navigation instrument he has, he is convinced that he has surprised the Frank with his knowledge, concluding that 'we now many things'. The dialogue gradually builds tension between the two: one gets frustrated to find out that the voyage is at the mercy of nature, while the other becomes more and more furious when questioned on navigation skills. Some cultural issues are also worth considering. First, the dialog highlights a strong reliance of the Muslims on *Kismet* (fate). On the other hand, the English lord favours the use of devices indicating the exact direction for their voyage. Secondly, the direction towards Mecca is sacred in Islam: all mosques are oriented to Mecca. Thirdly, the fragment is also a good illustration of the importance attributed by Muslims to the past, in general and to their ancestors, in particular. In this line of reasoning, the ship commander mentions an old sailing tradition in his family: his father had been a sailor, just like his grandfather. In the Muslim cultures, what matters most is the past experiences, while for the Western Franks what is of utmost relevance is what happens now and what the future brings. This may also be the reason for the accumulating tension between the two discussants.

As far as humour is concerned, it is constructed step by step, on a series of incongruous situations, as the tension in the characters increases: Osmond's questions seem to hurt the captain's feelings and as a consequence, he becomes more and more infuriated, while on the other hand, his answers perplex the English passenger (causing amusement) and make him worry. A first such example appears at the beginning of the excerpt, when Osmond asks Omar Reis by what point he was steering, the latter's reply showing indignation: *'By what point! (...) what do I know? By the way I have always gone'*. The first incongruous situation appears in connection with the ship steering: this is usually performed in accordance with exact points, while Omar's reply indicates vagueness, if not absurdity. Another contrast appears between the content of the question 'what do I know?' and what he states later, 'we – we know many things', the reader inferring that his navigations skills cannot be relied on. This is also confirmed by the fact that the compass, which he mentions in support of his knowledge, should be used in combination with a chart, but he totally disregards the latter on grounds of being '*bosh* – nothing'.

A bit later in the chapter, James Morier delivers the punch line: we find out how the captain actually steered the ship:

> *'The Reis kept his vessel as close to the shore as possible, and cared for little else to direct his course, the headlands standing him in lieu of all science of navigation*' (*Ayesha*, p. 298-99).

Humour is created again out of an incongruous situation: after assuring his passenger of the use of (at least) the compass and despite the navigation knowledge boasted by the Turkish captain, this steered his ship according to the headlands, which somehow releases the tension that has built up.

In terms of the linguistic techniques employed, worth mentioning is the figurative language based on implication and allusion. James Morier made use of implication because it allowed him to

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present a certain socially sensitive feature (i.e. assertiveness) of the Turkish captain in an indirect way. By means of allusion, he suggests that, in general, you cannot rely on Turks, something he would not have mentioned straightforwardly.

The last fragment to be analysed focuses on an important ethnic group present in Turkey at the beginning of the 19th century, namely the Jews. The excerpt comes from the end of the novel, when lord Osmond is convicted to imprisonment on the island of Rhodes. On the ship carrying some other convicts, some Muslim passengers ask a Jewish dentist to pull out a tooth of the chief officer (the Nostruomo), also a Muslim. The Jew refuses to do that, pretending not to be a dentist, but the story of his previous misfortune, told to Osmond, describes the actual reason why he does not want to help the officer. The Jew's refusal is the cause of riot on the ship:

'What has happened?' said Osmond.

'What has happened! do you ask?' said one. 'Why, here is a chifout, a Jew - pig – dog that he is, who is a tooth-drawer and who asserts that he is not!'

'But in the name of Allah, why strike him?' said Osmond. 'Is it a crime not to be a dentist?'

'A Jew not to be what a Mahomedan wishes, not a crime! say you?' said another. We will make mince-meat of his father. But he is a dentist. He refuses to take out a tooth for our Noustromo' – so they called the chief officer.

He was, in truth, a tooth-drawer and a leech by profession. Having been called upon to draw a tooth for Bostangi Boshi, unfortunately he extracted a sound instead of a decayed one. Discovering his mistake, he secreted himself for several weeks, fearful of the vengeance that might be wreaked upon him and, when at length, he ventured to leave his house, he always kept clear of the thoroughfares, and skulked about at night-fall. Some six months have elapsed, when, hoping that all was forgotten, to his dismay, one day crossing the Bosphorus in a boat with a pair of oars, he saw the great barge of Bostangi Boshi rowing towards him. He lay down in the bottom of the boat, occasionally turning his eye over the gunnel. To his horror, the barge still followed, and ere he could look round, it darted alongside, and immediately two men seized him, and dragged him before the comptroller of the Bosphorus in person. 'Dog of a Jew!, said he, 'Do you think I have forgotten? Look at this,' shaking his tooth at him at the same time. 'I will pay you in your own coin! Here, men, draw out all this wretch's teeth!' – 'Upon which', added the Jew, 'I was thrown upon my back, and a ruffian, strong as a lion, drew his dagger, and by thrusts, knocks, and tugs succeeded in pulling the few teeth – and God be praised that there were only a few! – out of my devoted mouth' (*Ayesha,* p. 398-399).

This narrative passage shows the discord that existed between Muslims and Jews, the former considering the latter inferior. Actually, among the ethnicities living in Kars, the Jews enjoyed the lowest status. This is the reason why the Jewish dentist is called by the Mohammedans *chifout*, pig, and dog, without showing any intention of answering back. Just like in the first fragment that was analysed, here we witness again the Muslims' idea that everything should be just like they order it to be. Thus, for a Jew not to be what a Muslim wishes him to be is considered a

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crime. On the other hand, the fragment also hints at a feature that characterises Jews, namely cowardice. Jonassohn and Solveig Björnson (1998: 89) account for this as follows: 'Historically, Jews were not allowed to bear arms in the most of the countries of the diaspora. Therefore, when they were attacked, they were not able to defend themselves. In some situations, their protector would defend them. If not, they only had a choice between hiding and fleeing. This is the origin of the anti-Semitic canard that Jews are cowards'. And this is exactly what our Jewish dentist did: he attempted to make himself invisible to the person who was to punish him for his mistake. Much to the reader's amusement, the Jew tried to hide in a 'boat with oars'! Incongruity steps in again: how much protection can an open means of transportation offer in the middle of a large surface of water?! Further on, we learn about the revenge taken by the Turkish comptroller, which is a clear illustration of the second part of the Romanian saying *ochi pentru ochi şi dinte pentru dinte* which translates as 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. The poor Jew had all his teeth removed in a very sadistic way. The punch line makes us sympathize with him: he was grateful to God for having got only a few of them, so the torture was not too long. In terms of the theories of humour, the one that accounts for amusement at the end of the fragment is the release theory: it seems that for our Jew, making fun of himself (with his decayed teeth) represents a means of defense which enables him to enjoy the pleasure of knowing he had wronged a Muslim Turk. The fact that he told Lord Osmond the story of how he came to be convicted made him feel liberated of a burden he has been carrying in his soul.

As regards the linguistic techniques employed by Morier to create humour, worth mentioning is self-ridicule: the use of self-deprecation by the Jew in presenting his own shortcomings is an attempt to amuse his interlocutor and to express solidarity with him. At the same time, by ridiculing himself, the Jewish dentist actually tried to express his hostility towards the Bostangi Boshi, indirectly criticizing the Muslim's cruel behaviour towards him. By employing self-deprecating humour, the Jew's aim was to exaggerate his personal experience and make himself look funny, rather than criticize himself or place himself at a disadvantage.

This last fragment could be considered proof that even human suffering could be considered a source of humour, though as Keith-Spiegel (1972:12/13, 30) pointed out, 'situations which would cause a sort of suffering are given less significance from a humorous standpoint'.

5. Conclusions

As the analysis has shown, ethnic humour in *Ayesha* is built on a combination of elements that pertain to the three basic theories of humour. Incongruity is expressed in most of the cases by the writer's skill to lead the reader to something unexpected (the use of trousers as a head-wear), that results from the punch line, and very seldom by the absurdity of the story (the sailing method of Oman Reis). Elements of the superiority theory appear in all fragments, hostility towards the opponents being milder or stronger, depending on the ethnicity these belonged to. Thus, when the three Muslim heads of Kars wanted to show their superiority one over the other, hostility had a milder form than either in the fragment

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with the Jewish dentist or in the encounter between the English lord and the Turkish captain. Elements of the release theory were also encountered, but they seemed to play a lesser role as compared to incongruity or superiority. In terms of the joke techniques employed by Morier, worth mentioning is ridicule which, in most of the cases, is shared by the writer with his readers. This is the case of the first fragment, where ridicule was focused on the group of three wise Muslim Turks who turned into the butt of the joke. The last excerpt is an example of self-deprecation of the Jewish dentist, who becomes himself the butt of the joke, emphasizing in this way his inferiority with respect to the Turks. This form of ridicule makes the readers sympathize with him and with his problems. As far as the linguistic means of creating humour are concerned, the analysis has shown that Morier employs implication, allusions, comparisons and sometimes exaggerations to enhance the humorous effect of the narrative fragments under investigation. As for the cultural features that were hinted humorously at by Morier were greed, stupidity, willingness to break the Muslim laws, boastfulness (Muslim Turks), cowardice, cunningness and maybe lack of personal hygiene (Jews), and servility (the Armenians).

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