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Post-revolutionary humorous representations of Americans in Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787)

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The paper focuses on the analysis of humour as a means of doing American identities in the first American comedy, Royall Tyler's "The Contrast" (1789) (Downer 1960) which introduced to the American stage the archetypal Yankee in the character of Jonathan. I will show that Tyler's stage portrait of the Yankee, as well as other portraits of Americans in the play, are not one-sided caricatures but rather complex and engaging representations. I will follow the General Theory of Verbal Humour (henceforth GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 2001) taking a close look mostly on the target(s) of "jab lines". Other "knowledge resources" will be addressed as well, so that the humour of the selected extracts is fully demonstrated. Among other theoretical tools, the GTVH can prove a valuable tool for the analysis of a comedy in that it will enable me to pronounce clearly the playwright's targets of humour.

Key-words: *American drama*, *Royall Tyler, The Contrast*, *General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), stereotypes*

1. Introduction

1.1. American humour tradition and *The Contrast: A comedy in five acts*

Long before the American Revolution (1765-1783) and the Declaration of American Independence (1776) a sense of humour colours the puritanism of New England. It is not yet expressed in literary genres but imbues the puritan ideology in its course to address the issues of sin and salvation, morality and preaching. In doing so, puritanism reaches a level of self-awareness, ultimately leading to humour (Escarpit 1963, 46). Various types of humour will then emerge, pertinent to the versatility of situations and backgrounds of America. The 'tall story' from the western frontier is a case in point. It is an epic of bravado, a long humorous narrative, as exemplified in Mark Twain's improbable stories. The cool irony found in the sayings of native Americans and the naive folk songs of black American slaves are two more examples. Humorous seeds are

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also found in the unpretentious Christian discourse of the Quakers (Escarpit 1963, 46). What is common in this typology, is the quality of American humour to emerge from its puritan background and teach without preaching.

Arguably this early American discourse can be framed as popular culture using humour purposefully. Interestingly, Mintz (2008, 286) proposes that "[t]he earliest example of popular culture using humour for an important, interesting purpose is the exploration, for the most part in journalism, of 'native' American character of identity and through it, the viability of democracy itself." As Mintz (2008, 286) discusses, the target of popular American humour has constantly been the common man as citizen who is portrayed invariably as "rude, barbaric, ill-mannered and foolish." The Yankee Doodle is the popular humorous example *par excellence* in American folklore. It is not just a patriotic song since it was originally sung by British military officers to mock American soldiers with whom they had fought together in the French and Indian war.[2] Apart from its originally historical use as a parodic or a patriotic song (depending on the speaker, or rather the singer), the Yankee Doodle is an American traditional song which uses extensively nonsense language (a major departure point for absurd humour) and features the silly and ignorant American. Another example of popular culture using humour to explore the American identity (or rather identities) is Royall Tyler's 1789 play *The Contrast*. I will discuss this example from American drama here and will demonstrate that the portraits of Americans in this comedy are engaging and complex representations, potentially less stereotypical than they might seem at first sight.

In the corpus of early American dramatic literature Royall Tyler's (1757-1826) play *The Contrast* is renowned for being the first well-made, native comedy ever to be professionally staged. It combines humour and sentiment, elements of the English Restoration Comedy as well as a long expository prologue in the form of a patriotic dramatic monologue, along with a well-known American song ("The Death Song of the Cherokee Indians") in the beginning of Act I scene 2. Tyler's play explores competition, equality and individualism as its main themes. The play was a theatrical success at its time making a record of 38 performances by the Old American Company only. It was first produced at Thomas Wignell's theatre in John Street, New York, on April 16, 1787 (Downer 1960, 13). Long later in the 20th century and specifically in the era of Watergate (1972), Tyler's play was adapted by Anthony Stimac as a musical (music by Don Pippin and lyrics by Steve Brown), which premiered at New York City's Eastside Playhouse. Imbued by the restorative constitutional air and the American puritan ideology of that era, the play was critically received as a lecture on morals in five acts (Vaughn 1981, 28).

[2] Wikipedia "Yankee Doodle" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yankee_Doodle [Accessed July 24, 2019]

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Tyler composes the dramatic world of his play through opposites and contrasts, thus emphasizing social critique, which is a salient feature of the comedic genres mentioned above. In the expository prologue of the comedy he targets human behaviour ('the graces', 'the faults, the virtues', '[t]he fashions or the follies of the times'). Moreover, right from the opening scene he builds a connection with his native American audience through the use of pronouns and phrases, such as 'we', 'our', 'ours', 'our free-born ancestors', 'my friends', 'our play', the all-inclusive 'we are all mortals, and as mortals err'. Set in contemporary New York, the comedy's myth addresses the influx of European affectation and refinement as corrupting the 'genuine sincerity' and the good, just, 'homespun habits' of those who struggled for American independence. The thematic contrast of the dramatic idea is primarily mirrored in the representation of the *dramatis personae*. To be more specific, there is virtuous and genuine Colonel Manly, on the one hand, and deceitful Billy Dimple with his imported affectation of European etiquette and "a volume of the divine Chesterfield" (*The Contrast*, Act II scene 2) on his fingertips, on the other. There is also the comic double of servants. Namely, Dimple's servant Jessamy and Manly's waiter Jonathan both mirroring their masters' manners and perceptions. Furthermore, regarding the female characters, there are the youthful libertines Charlotte and Maria. Contrasting characters though they might be, they are female portraits of the more independent American women coming out of the Puritan age in the post-revolutionary era. They share some interesting ideas about marriage and friendship. Letitia is Charlotte's friend and one target of Dimple's flirting. Like other female characters in the play she is also a gendered stereotype, often contributing to the satire of the play. Finally, there is Jenny, Maria's servant, herself a gendered stereotype, who rebuffs Jonathan's awkward flirting advances.

1.2. Aim and scope of the paper. Theoretical implications

Humorous characterisation (i.e. humorous portrayal of dramatic characters) is a key technique in the genre of comedy, with exaggeration often employed as a standard mechanism. Depending on the intentions of the playwright exaggeration can lead to either serious (bitter) or comic (humorous or grotesque) satire. In my paper I will attempt to show that Tyler uses a bitter, sarcastic or witty satire in *The Contrast* to debunk the values, ideals and behaviour of the characters. By contrast, Tyler employs a rather funny, comic and light-hearted satire to make fools of various characters. More specifically, his seriocomic intentions are evidenced in Act II scene 1 in Charlotte and Letitia's banter about high-minded subjects (such as friendship, values and sentiments). It appears that in the characters of Charlotte, Letitia, Maria, and Dimple the playwright is interested in developing a critical discourse about the ideals and the behaviour of young Americans after the

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Revolution. On the other hand, through the subplot of the stereotypical comic double of the servants, Tyler's satire is meant to come across as more playful and less deadpan. As I will examine in my paper, Jonathan and Jessamy imitate the behaviour, lifestyle and actions of their masters Manly and Dimple respectively. Particularly, Jonathan's inexperience in theatre and in city life amusement in Act II, III and V lends to his representation as the archetypal Yankee soldier. Tyler builds a humorous portrait of the American Yankee, foregrounding and mocking cultural and religious (rather than geographical) features pertinent to this qualification.

The paper focuses on the analysis of humour as a means of doing American identities in the first American comedy, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1789) (Downer 1960). As stated above, the dramatic plot offers witty, humorous portrayals of American people and aspects of the American culture and society in terms of amusing contrasts. *The Contrast* introduced to the American stage the archetypal Yankee in the character of Jonathan. In reviewing the portrait of the Yankee on the American stage Richard M. Dorson (1940, 467) addresses the idea that "[t]he stage Yankee was never an individualized character; he was always a stereotype" and goes on to argue that "[i]n the first plays only brief glimpses were afforded of him". Nevertheless, as I will show, Tyler's stage portrait of the Yankee, along with other portraits of Americans in the play, cannot be considered one-sided caricatures. Far from that, as I will discuss the stage representations in this early American play are rather complex and engaging.

The paper aims at teasing out the dramatic representation of American identities in early American drama. Consequently, the generic features of American humour in terms of grotesque exaggeration, ridicule and laughter (Sklar 1970, Wilder 1911, Escarpit 1963) will be addressed in the play. I will follow the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (henceforth GTVH; see Attardo and Raskin 1991, Attardo 1994, 2001) taking a close look mostly on the target(s) of humorous lines (called "jab lines" in this theory). Other *knowledge resources* (KRs), i.e. elements which inform the humorous potential of each such line will be addressed as well, so that the humour of the selected extracts is fully demonstrated. According to Attardo (2001: 22-27) the KRs are as following: the *script opposition* (SO), the *logical mechanism* (LM), the *situation* (SI), the *target* (TA), the *narrative strategy* (NS) and the *language* (LA). Among other theoretical tools, the GTVH can prove a valuable tool for my work in that it will enable me to pronounce clearly Tyler's targets of humour. In addition, the theory's emphasis on the *script opposition* (SO) can also offer a clear model for spelling out the incongruity (thus the humorous potential) of the play. Finally, the knowledge resource of the *logical mechanism* (LM) may inform characterisation in the drama, thus potentially illuminating the playwright's playful, satirical, farcical, ironic or other approach to the character pronouncing the jab line.

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2. Discussion. The construction of (gendered) identities in *The Contrast*

2.1. Humour and dramatic irony: Charlotte

Dramatic irony usually depends on the fact that a character or more in a play regard themselves as superior in knowledge and capable of free choice, but, are, actually, subject to the control of the playwright, and the audience, in that they are more powerful and knowledgeable than themselves. "This may be reinforced by the playwright's finding ways to address the audience directly and commenting on the action and its interpretation as it unfolds" (Pickering 2010, 26). According to Pavis (1998, 189) dramatic irony is often related to the dramatic situation and functions as an alienation effect breaking the theatrical illusion and inviting the audience to distance themselves from the dramatic situation and critically view it. As a rhetorical device it is the basis of comedy and farce, since the audience often witness dramatic characters making gaffes, which make them look rather ridiculous and hopeless. Such a character in *The Contrast* is Charlotte, who despite her considering herself liberal, she is shown to be much less so. To be more specific, in Act V Charlotte puts herself into trouble despite her over-confidence as to her abilities with coping with prospective suitors.

In his play Tyler uses dramatic irony to exploit ways of playing on the audience's expectations about the dramatic personae and make spectators reflect on grave matters, such as right and wrong conduct, liberal or conservative attitude. Specifically, Charlotte, who is Colonel Manly's young sister, is the witty heroine of the play. Apparently liberal but actually a coquette, Charlotte is depicted as eloquent, witty, and playful. The representation of the female character builds to Tyler's use of dramatic irony overall in the play, particularly if we consider that the heroine's liberal discourse and behaviour almost bring her to serious harm, in the last act of the play, as I will explain promptly. To begin with, the heroine's anti-puritan affectations bring her close to situations inappropriate even for the most emancipated young women. Specifically, in Act V scene 2 Charlotte almost finds herself prey to Dimple's rude behaviour. There the profligate Dimple tries to manipulate her into believing that he is genuinely "blessed with the good opinion of [his] Charlotte". More specifically, while talking to her Dimple underrates Letitia's looks and fortune, proposes a liaison to Charlotte even after his marriage to his fianceé Maria, admits that a marriage could not "be any bar to [their] happiness", and makes indecent advances to Charlotte by kissing her. In this way the heroine finds herself in trouble due to her immodest mannerisms. The scene ends up with Charlotte screaming and trying to repulse him and the double entrance of her brother Colonel Manly and Maria's father Van Rough who enter just on time to rescue her from promiscuous Dimple. With this theatrical bawdy

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climax scene Tyler may be not just interested in exposing the characters' insincere and foolish behaviours in order to satirize them. Rather he may be targeting any excessive behaviour and extreme values adopted by pseudo-sophisticated elites like Charlotte. Thus, through the characterisation of Charlotte (and Dimple) the playwright seems to warn the audience: "Extremes are no good thing".

2.2. Charlotte: a liberal female portrait

Charlotte is a gendered stereotype in the play. Her discourse and manners are a contrast to those of her rigid, conservative and genuine brother. For example, in Act I scene 1 Charlotte finds delight in exposing her ankle to a group of young men as she passes them on the platform. Upon seeing her naked ankle, one of them shouts in rapture: "Demme, Jack, what a delicate foot!" (*The Contrast*, Act I scene 1) In Act II scene 1 (see below, example 1), Charlotte's banter about New York City's beaux is not only indelicate and amusing but also daring according to the social norms of her time.

(1) CHARLOTTE. And then, brother, the faces of the beaux are of such a lily-white hue! None of that horrid robustness of constitution, that vulgar corn-fed glow of health, which can only serve to alarm an unmarried lady with apprehension, and *prove a melancholy momento to a married one, that she can never hope for the happiness of being a widow* (**jab line 1**[3]). I will say this to the credit of our city beaux, that such is the delicacy of their complexion, dress, and address, that, *even had I no reliance upon the honour of the dear Adonises, I would trust myself in any possible situation with them, without the least apprehensions of rudeness* (**jab line 2**).

MANLY. Sister Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE. Now, now, now, brother [*interrupting him*], now don't go to spoil my mirth with a dash of gravity;

The Contrast, Act II scene 1, p. 24

I will use the GTVH to analyse two jab lines (1 and 2) in the above extract.

Jab line 1

SO KR: a wife should never be happy for being a widow / a wife can hope for the happiness of being a widow.

LM KR: faulty reasoning

SI KR: brother and sister talk about the relationships between men and women

[3] The jab lines are marked in italics and referred to with numbers from 1 to 10.

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TA KR: what a woman, either married or unmarried, should prefer to look for in a man; women's flirting
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: -

Jab line 2

SO KR: no decent middle class unmarried young woman should trust herself in any possible situation with young men, particularly when she has no grounds to trust their honour / a decent middle class unmarried young woman should trust herself in any situation with young men, even if she has no grounds to trust their honour
LM KR: faulty reasoning
SI KR: brother and sister talk about the relationships between men and women
TA KR: women's relationships with men; rules of conduct
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: -

The example shows how humour is employed by the playwright in the construction of female identities. In this extract Charlotte is portrayed as a liberal, self-confident female of post-revolutionary America. Charlotte's discourse appears to be incongruous with the moral conventions of her time. As analysed above, jab line 1 generally aims at the mores of married life and the rules of fidelity, while jab line 2 specifically addresses the limits of trust and politeness in mixed gender social encounters. Besides, Tyler might also be targeting here the honour and the virility of city men. By adopting a liberal predisposition Charlotte drives her conservative brother mad. Colonel Manly's shocked exclamation at his sister's indelicacy ("Sister Charlotte!") shows his disapproval of Charlotte's stance. His regretful stance aligns the male character with the perceptions of the audience and helps to reassure them that 'the moral code has not been entirely discarded' (Siebert 1978, 7). By contrast, it is interesting that Tyler represents the female character as more playful and mirthful than the male one ("Now, now, now, brother [*interrupting him*], now don't go to spoil my mirth with a dash of gravity").

2.3. The comic double of servants: Jessamy and Jonathan

Jessamy and Jonathan are the stereotypical comic double of servants, a most familiar staple of comedy since Aristophanes and Menander. They develop the themes of the comedy (i.e. competition, equality, individualism) and produce laughter in the play. They are both foils to their respective masters in that they accentuate the characters' traits within a satirical framework; Jessamy is a foil to Billy Dimple and Jonathan to Colonel Manly. Like his master, Jessamy is not honest in his intentions since he plays upon other characters and he uses language to show

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off. In the eyes of poor uncultivated Jonathan, Jessamy is a nuisance both to understand and to appreciate. The following extract is a characteristic one.

(2) JESSAMY. *Votre très-humble serviteur, Monsieur* (**jab line 3**). I understand Colonel Manly, the Yankee officer, has the honour of your services.

JONATHAN. Sir! -

JESSAMY. I say, Sir, I understand that Colonel Manly has the honour of having you for a servant.

JONATHAN. *Servant! Sir, do you take me for a neger, - I am Colonel Manly's waiter* (**jab line 4**).

JESSAMY. A true Yankee distinction, egad, without a difference. Why, Sir, do you not perform all the offices of a servant? *Do you not even blacken his boots?*

JONATHAN. *Yes; I do grease them a bit sometimes* (**jab line 5**); But I am a true blue son of liberty, for all that. Father said I should come as Colonel Manly's waiter, to see the world, and all that; But no man shall master me. My father has as good a farm as the colonel.

JESSAMY. Well, Sir, we will not quarrel about terms, upon the eve of an acquaintance from which I promise myself so much satisfaction; - *therefore, sans ceremonie* (**jab line 6**) -

JONATHAN. What? -

The Contrast, Act II scene 2, p. 26

In GTVH terms, (2) could be analysed as follows:

Jab lines 3 and 6

SO KR: making one's point clear (getting one's point across, making sense) in order to make a satisfying acquaintance / not making one's point clear (getting one's point across, making sense) in order to make a satisfying acquaintance; using a standard dialect to introduce oneself and make an acquaintance / mixing registers to introduce oneself and make an acquaintance

LM KR: ignoring the obvious, exaggeration

SI KR: two strangers meet for the first time and introduce themselves

TA KR**:** the assumed superiority of a servant; the affected manners and snobbery of a European-bred post-revolutionary American (servant)

NS KR: dialogue (in a play)

LA KR: use of a foreign language (i.e. French)

Jab line 4

SO KR: a servant or a waiter may be White or Black / servants can only be Black, waiters can be White

LM KR: faulty reasoning

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SI KR: two strangers upon meeting for the first time and introducing themselves share some professional details
TA KR: the assumed superiority of a waiter over a servant; the apparent superiority of White over Black domestic staff in post-revolutionary America
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: subjective understandings of the terms *servant* and *waiter*

Jab line 5

SO KR: to blacken their master's boots is a humiliating task for a waiter to perform / to grease their master's boots is not a humiliating task for a waiter to perform
LM KR: exaggeration
SI KR: two strangers upon meeting for the first time and introducing themselves share some professional details
TA KR: the assumed superiority of a White servant; the assumed independence of a White servant
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: subjective understandings of the different nuances of the terms *blacken* or *grease*

This example shows how humour can be employed in the construction of identities. As already pointed out, the identities of the dramatic characters are built through contrasts. On the one hand, there is Jessamy the prototype of the sophisticated servant, influenced by European culture in much the same way as his master. On the other, there is Jonathan- the naïf, ignorant American-bred servant. Jessamy's use of French (jab line 3 and 6) is a linguistic headache for the 'true son of liberty' Jonathan, who speaks and understands only pure American, as the exclamations 'Sir!' and 'What?' demonstrate in the extract above. The analysis of the KRs in jab lines 3 and 6 foregrounds issues of self-identification and roles, as I will proceed to discuss. Jonathan introduces himself as "Colonel Manly's waiter" and defies the characterisation 'servant', a title more appropriate to a 'neger' than to himself (jab line 4), as he implies. As a servant (or rather a waiter as he prefers) he only occasionally performs humiliating tasks, such as to 'grease' (but not 'blacken') his master's boots (jab line 5). In the dialogue Jonathan acknowledges that his role is to see the world and not to be mastered by anyone. He also stresses that his father owns a farm like Colonel Manly. Consequently, Jonathan can be taken as the representation of the 'true blue son of liberty', a free spirit, bold and without the ostentation and affected manners of Europeanised Americans. This image is a good representation of the Yankee stereotype of post-revolutionary America. As Siebert (1978: 3) explains: "Jonathan is a significant creation of the Yankee type, perhaps even a prototypical Uncle Sam, speaking a language reflecting an authentic American dialect". Interestingly, Tyler debunks this Yankee portrait in his play. Not only does he assign the Yankee's legendary innocence,

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virtue and sincerity both to the expected hero of the play (Colonel Manly) and to a secondary *dramatis persona* (i.e. Jonathan, Manly's servant), but he also mocks the Yankee's positive characteristics, in that Jonathan's innocence, virtue and sincerity often make him the butt of the joke. Consequently, Royall Tyler creates a very suitable stage stereotype in early American theatre (Patsalidis 2010: 79-80).

I will now focus on Jessamy's stage representation, another source of humour (Example 3). In Jessamy's portrait the playwright's humour seems to be targeting dandyism or at least extravagant elegance, which may be interpreted as an oddity when attached to a servant. Thus, the rhetoric of the assumed contrast in the following example can be explained as following: on the one hand, there is the exterior (i.e. superficial) perfection and pompousness of pre-European Americans embodied in Jessamy; on the other hand, there is the interior genuineness and simplicity of Revolutionary officers ('Massachusetts men', 'true blue Bunker Hill sons of liberty') embodied in Jonathan. These two contrasted identities are humorously exploited in the comic duet of servants.

(3) JONATHAN. Well, and I vow, too, I am pretty considerably glad to see you; But what the dogs need of all this outlandish lingo? Who may you be, Sir, if I may be so bold?
JESSAMY. I have the honour to be Mr. Dimple's servant, or, if you please, waiter. [...]
JONATHAN. You a waiter! *By the living jingo, you look so topping, I took you for one of the agents to Congress* (**jab line 7**).
The Contrast, Act II scene 2, p. 26-27

I will now proceed to the analysis of (3) according to the GTVH. Jab line 7 in the above example can be interpreted as follows:

Jab line 7

SO KR: to look topping implies you are a Congressman / to look topping implies you are a waiter (or servant) [Notice, however, that waiters in posh restaurants and servants in posh households of the era were (and still are on occasion) dressed as distinguished gentlemen on a formal occasion. So this may be an additional target of this jab line.]
LM KR: false analogy
SI KR: two strangers meet for the first time and introduce themselves
TA KR: the extravagant looks of Europeanised Americans; the extravagant looks of lower class people; the overformal attire of posh households' servants of the time and waiters of chic restaurants (even to the present time)
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: -

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As shown above, the playwright's humour targets Jessamy's movement, expression, costume and language use, which are far from those pertinent to a person in his position. Upon seeing Jessamy, Jonathan admires his clothes and looks. He is also confused by his language manners. As a result, he concludes that Jessamy is a congressman. The theatrical portrait of a post-revolutionary servant is hilariously compared to an American statesman. Thus, in Example 3 Tyler offers to his immediate audience (and to subsequent audiences as well) a cultural picture of post-revolutionary American culture and politics. In doing so he responds to the discourse of the time which pleaded for national values and symbols in a nation which was being born.

2.4. The portrait of the post-revolutionary Yankee: Jonathan, the Puritan American soldier

I will now proceed to discuss some more critical overtones in Jonathan's representation which enhance Tyler's satire of revolutionary and post-revolutionary American politics. In Example 4 (see below) Jonathan narrates an incident from his sightseeing experience in New York, in which he was a witness of vandalism, apparently without realizing it. The vandalism refers to the damage of a statue in which a marble male figure appears to have been decapitated and another one stolen. Jonathan offers an extremely humorous account of what he has seen, employing a number of incongruous descriptive funny details about the statue ('two marble-stone men and a leaden horse that stands out in doors in all weathers', 'one had got no head, and t'other weren't there', 'a damn'd tory... he took wit in his anger') and amusing metaphors ('a power of fine sights', 'the leaden man') in the typical Yankee register he uses ('t'other weren't there'). Nevertheless, the account becomes even more humorous if the reader (or the audience) does not fail to realize that Jonathan regards the stone figures as animate beings.[4]

(4) JESSAMY. Bravo!- Well, have you been abroad in the city since your arrival? What have you seen that is curious and entertaining?

JONATHAN. Oh! I have seen a power of fine sights. I went to see two marble-stone men and a leaden horse that stands out in doors in all weathers; And when I came where they was, one had got no head, and t'other weren't there. They said as how *the leaden man was a damn'd tory, and that he took wit in his anger and rode off in the time of the troubles* (**jab line 8**).

The Contrast, Act II scene 2, p. 27

[4] Shaun May's (2016, 117) phenomenological discussion of "anthropic objects" and the "amusing" effect of "the transition from inanimate to anthropic" might lead to illuminating discursive paths here.

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Consider now the following highlights in GTVH terms:

Jab line 8

SO KR: a statue is inanimate and therefore cannot be attributed an identity, nor can it experience feelings or perform actions/a statue is animate and therefore can be attributed an identity, experience feelings, and perform actions
LM KR: animation; reasoning from false premises
SI KR: a tourist narrates his sightseeing experience
TA KR: conservative American officers during the Revolution
NS KR: dialogue (in a play)
LA KR: -

Despite the paradoxical explanation about the statue's damaged appearance, Jonathan's absurd appreciation has a political implicature involving a conservative officer's becoming so upset that he flees during the revolution. Apparently, Tyler aims here at the conservative followers of monarchy who were not in favour of America's independence from England. Therefore, the playwright uses mild political satire to distinguish between patriots and non-patriots, the former being represented by Jonathan who fought in the war of independence, whereas the latter being represented by conservative statesmen who as we infer shared a pro-European attitude. Consequently, the extract shows that Jonathan's is a complex dramatic representation. He is more than a mere portrait of the naive American stereotype, but a representation of the true American Yankee.

I will now proceed to analyse more aspects of Jonathan's representation. Particularly, in example 5 (see below) I will discuss the construction of Jonathan's religious identity. The discussion will add to my overall argument that the playwright uses humour to provide the audience with various aspects of post-revolutionary America as well as multifarious portraits of Americans.

(5) JESSAMY. But this was not the end of your excursion?
JONATHAN. Oh no*; I went to a place they call Holy Ground.* Now I counted this was a place where folks go to meeting; so I put my hymn-book in my pocket, and walked softly and grave as a minister; and when I came there, the dogs a bit of a meeting-house could I see. At last I spied a young gentlewoman standing by one of the seats which they have here at the doors. I took her to be the deacon's daughter, and she looked so kind, and so obliging, that I thought I would go and ask her the way to lecture, and – would you think it? - she called me dear, and sweeting, and honey, just as if we were married: by the living jingo, I had a month's mind to buss her.
JESSAMY. Well, but how did it end?
JONATHAN. Why, as I was standing talking with her, a parcel of sailor men and boys got round me, the snarl-headed curs fell a –kicking and cursing

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of me at such a tarnal rate, that I vow I was glad to take to my heels and split home, right off, tail on end, like a stream of chalk.

JESSAMY. Why, my dear friend, you are not acquainted with the city; that girl you say was a – [*Whispers*.]

JONATHAN. Mercy on my soul! Was that young woman a harlot! Well! *If this is New-York Holy Ground, what must be the Holy-day Ground be!* (**jab line 9**)

The Contrast, Act II scene 2, p. 27-28

Let me now highlight the KRs of the jab line 9 in GTVH terms:

Jab line 9

SO KR: Holy Ground is the area on Mount Sinai in which God met Moses /Holy Ground is the red-light district of New York

LM KR: reasoning from false premises

SI KR: a tourist narrates of his sightseeing experience

TA KR: the naivety of American puritans; the dumbness of the American Yankee soldier

NS KR: dialogue (in a play)

LA KR: pragmatically ambiguous expression, euphemism (Holy Ground referring to a disreputable area); pun (Holy-day Ground)

In revolutionary America the expression 'Holy Ground' meant the indecent side of revolutionary era New York City, notorious for the number of brothels, disreputable taverns and shops that filled the area on Manhattan Island (Schenawolf 2015). However, Jonathan is unaware of this and considers Holy Ground to be a holy place worth visiting in New York. And indeed Jonathan on his sightseeing tour does visit the area in all graveness and, as he thinks, rightly equipped (he carries with him the hymn book). But his unwelcome treatment by the 'sailor men and boys round' him proves that he reasons from false premises and that the 'kind, and so obliging' lady he met was not the deacon's daughter as he thought but a prostitute, as Jessamy explains to him later. In this way Jonathan becomes the target of the joke. Ridicule and laughter ensue from the character's lack of pragmatic knowledge about New York and the appreciation of its culture through his own religious background. Evidently Jonathan interprets the phrase 'holy ground' literally and according to the Bible, where it appears in the following context: "God Himself first identified the area in which He met Moses on Mount Sinai as holy ground".[5] At the end of the extract, verbal humour is enhanced through the pun ('Holy-day Ground') in the following sentence: "If this is New-York

[5] https://www.gotquestions.org/holy-ground.html [Accessed on July 9, 2019]

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Holy Ground, what must be the Holy-day Ground be!" Specifically, the pun 'Holy-day Ground' exploits the religious script already activated in the context. In the Bible the word 'holy' means 'set apart' and holy days are days set apart to focus on what pertains to the Lord. Over the centuries, holy days have been traditionally instituted by Christian churches.

The discussion above stresses Jonathan's stereotypical representation of the naive, innocent American bumpkin. Bu it also adds to his representation as a complex and rounded character in the play as it also informs this portrait with a religious aspect. In Example 5 Tyler build his satire against puritan America making fun of the religious identity of his compatriots and, more precisely, debunking Jonathan's puritan background and his Calvinist beliefs.

Example 6 (see below) is another case of Tyler's religious humour or satire. Here Jessamy and Jonathan discuss the reasons behind Jonathan's unsuccessful attempt to flirt and seduce Jenny (Charlotte's maid), despite Jessamy's advice. As I will immediately demonstrate, the characters attach different meanings to the word 'graces'. For Jessamy 'graces' are equivalent to refined manners. For Jonathan, however, 'graces' seem to be the prayers he thinks that Jenny would like him to be saying as a prerequisite for accepting him as her suitor. In short, the religious satire and humorous religious representation of Jonathan in this extract is triggered by Jonathan's misinterpretation of the semantic content of the word 'graces', which is mistakenly understood within a religious context:

(6) JESSAMY. I was thinking, Mr. Jonathan, what could be the reason of her carrying herself so coolly to you.
JONATHAN. Coolly, do you call it? Why, I vow, she was fire-hot angry: may be it was because I buss'd her.
JESSAMY. No, no, Mr. Jonathan; there must be some other cause; I never yet knew a lady angry at being kissed.
JONATHAN. Well, if it not the young woman's bashfulness, I vow I can't conceive why she shouldn't like me.
JESSAMY. May be it is because you have not the graces, Mr. Jonathan.
JONATHAN. *Grace! Why, does the young woman expect I must be converted before I court her?* (**jab line 10**)
JESSAMY. I mean graces of person: for instance, my lord tells us that we must [...]

The Contrast, Act V scene 1 p. 42

I contend this to be a very humorous extract which specifically adds to my argument that Jonathan's portrait in the play is less stereotypical than it might seem at first sight.

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Jab line 10

SO KR: a man need not be converted before he may court a lady of a different denomination/ a man must be converted before he may court a lady of a different denomination; a man need not be religious for a woman to respond favourably to his flirt/ a man must be religious for a woman to respond favourably to his flirt

LM KR: reasoning from false premises; faulty reasoning

SI KR: a tourist narrates of his sightseeing experience

TA KR: the ethics of the Puritans in post-revolutionary America; the social norms regulating love affairs

NS KR: dialogue (in a play)

LA KR: ambiguous expression 'grace' (disambiguation)

In GTVH terms the extract involves humour, due to at least two overlapping scripts, which offer incompatible interpretations in jab line 10 (see above). There the target seems to be a double one: first, post-revolutionary American society with its norms regarding relationships/affairs; second the religious morals of the Puritans of Tyler's time. Moreover, if Jonathan's question (jab line 10) is understood as a denial of any religious doctrine, then the SO of the jab line might be alluding to Jonathan's independence. If this is true, then the playwright could be saving a favourable characterisation of Jonathan. What I am saying is that, should Tyler want his audience to understand that Jonathan is unwilling to be converted to any religion (apparently Jenny's) before he kisses the girl, he then may be enhancing Jonathan's portrait as the proverbial independent Yankee.

3. Conclusions

Overall this work focused on the humour of early American drama. Particularly, it focused on the analysis of humour as a means of doing American identities in the first American comedy, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1789). It discussed how the playwright employs humour as a tool to mock post-revolutionary American identities and values through characterisation. It showed that *The Contrast* is a comedy rich in humorous male and female representations of post-revolutionary Americans viewed in contrast to one another. In addition, it has been shown that Tyler's play also uses humour to address post-revolutionary American values, targeting various social and class issues of his time. Specifically, he debunks the politeness rules and restrictions regulating mixed gender social encounters, the mores of married life, the extravagant looks and snobbery of Europeanised Americans, the status of servants, religiosity and the Puritan ethics. The textual analysis of the selected extracts demonstrated that the playwright employs puns,

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figurative language (e.g. metaphors, euphemisms), dramatic irony, comic and serious satire.

The implementation of the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 2001) proved a valuable tool for my work in that it pronounced clearly the playwright's humorous targets (people and ideas). It also offered a way of accounting for the incongruity of the play in that the analysis of the knowledge resource of *script opposition* in the selected extracts spelt out the dramatic world/dramatic information in Tyler's play vis-à-vis the pragmatic level operating outside the play. I deem this invaluable for research in this field in order to acknowledge the play's humour more thoroughly and in doing so to appreciate the characters and the themes of the play more fully. Besides, the knowledge resource of *logical mechanism* (LM) informed characterisation in the drama and illuminated the playwright's playful, satirical, farcical, ironic or other approach of the character pronouncing the jab line. For example, to my mind, Charlotte's faulty reasoning in Example 1 enhances Tyler's ironic approach of the character. Or in Jonathan's case, the repeated faulty reasoning or ignoring the obvious as the LM for resolving the incongruity may add to a recognition of the farce and the satire involved in his characterisation. On this basis, I can see how the discussion of KRs as the basic tool of the GTVH can enrich the analysis of drama.[6] Nevertheless, this is a point which needs to be further investigated.

The analysis of the examples demonstrated that the portraits of Americans in this comedy are less one-sided and more complex than they might appear. This is also true even for the stereotypical representations of Americans, like that of the archetypal Yankee represented in the *dramatis persona* of Jonathan. Another humorous portrait in the play is that of the libertine young woman of post-revolutionary America represented in Charlotte. It is interesting that Tyler constructs an amusing, mirthful portrait for his female heroine, while at the same time targeting the excessive behaviour and extreme values of the pseudo-sophisticated elites of his time. With Charlotte's representation Tyler's satire aims at ridiculing instances of insincere and foolish behaviour by young Americans. Charlotte's discourse in the play (primarily based on metaphors) provides a pragmatic insight in the American social norms and mores of Tyler's era regarding friendship, marriage and family life. On the other hand, Jonathan's metaphors, puns and euphemisms largely enhance the humour of the comedy. Seen against his counterpart Jessamy, Jonathan is the stereotype of the Yankee - unspoiled, genuine, naive but also independent and brave. By contrast, as shown, Jessamy fills in the representation of the Europeanised American.

[6] Manteli (2011) applied the GTVH to discuss the humour, parody and irony in a postmodern Greek theatre performance text.

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As shown, Tyler seems to be humorously exploiting many amusing contrasts in his comedy. On the one hand, there is the exterior (i.e. superficial) perfection and pompousness of pro-European Americans embodied in Jessamy (and Dimple). On the other, there is the interior genuineness and simplicity of Revolutionary officers ('Massachusetts men', 'true blue Bunker Hill sons of liberty') embodied in Jonathan (and Manly). These two contrasting identities are humorously exploited in the comic duet of servants, which I extensively analysed here. Regarding the representation of Jonathan as the archetypal Yankee, I should stress the following conclusion. Far from the light-hearted satirical and comic overtones, Jonathan's portrait is also a vehicle for Tyler's satire to mock puritan America and the Calvinist Christian beliefs of Americans in late 18th century. Consequently, I contend that in his drama Tyler develops a critical discourse targeting the behaviour and social habits of his compatriots after the Revolution.

As implied in my discussion of the examples, genuineness of character and simplicity of attitude are key themes in *The Contrast*. Tyler used exaggeration and ridicule as humorous tropes in his play but it also appears that he was writing a comedy with a patriotic intent. In pronouncing the contrast between the genuine, innocent Americans (Jonathan, Manly) and the servile and polished pro-European Americans (Jessamy, Dimple, Charlotte), he offers to his native people a mirror to look closely into themselves and acknowledge their different images. As Siebert (1978, 10) concludes: "This sense of self-examination is emphasized by Tyler's repeated efforts to remind his audience that they are inside a playhouse, that somehow the play's meaning and significance involve them." Therefore, Tyler's heritage to the American dramatic literature of the post-revolutionary era seems to be a comedy for independence and 'self-reliance', to use Ralph Waldo Emerson's most esteemed philosophical term in the 19th century.

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