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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STYLISTIC MEANS OF HUMOUS IN “SHUM BOLA” AND “MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS”

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Abstract. This article examines the stylistic construction of humour in G‘afur G‘ulom’s “Shum bola” and Gerald Durrell’s “My Family and Other Animals” through five interrelated categories: hyperbole, situational comedy, linguistic play, satire and irony, and figurative imagery. Using comparative close reading and stylistic-pragmatic interpretation, the study argues that both texts depend on incongruity and a child-centred perspective, but assign different cultural and narrative functions to comic techniques. In Shum bola, exaggeration draws on Uzbek oral storytelling, while comic misfortune frequently exposes material deprivation and unequal authority. In Durrell’s autobiographical prose, figurative overstatement and slapstick domesticate eccentricity and express affectionate familial criticism. The comparison demonstrates that similar formal devices can produce distinctive ethical, social and aesthetic effects.

Keywords: humour, comparative stylistics, G‘afur G‘ulom, Gerald Durrell, “Shum bola”, “My Family and Other Animals”, hyperbole, lof, irony, satire.

Introduction

Humour in literary narrative is more than an ornamental device: it shapes characterization, establishes an evaluative relationship between narrator and reader, and converts everyday contradictions into meaningful experience. G‘afur G‘ulom’s “Shum bola” and Gerald Durrell’s “My Family and Other Animals” offer a productive comparison because both employ youthful observation, colourful episodic plots and the comic exposure of adult behaviour. Their narrative environments, however, are markedly different. The Uzbek protagonist negotiates poverty, work, social hierarchies and precarious encounters; Durrell’s narrator recalls the exuberant disorder of family life and natural exploration on Corfu. The same stylistic mechanism may therefore support social criticism in one work and affectionate recollection in the other.

The purpose of this article is to identify shared forms of humorous expression and explain their divergent functions. Its method combines comparative close reading with stylistic analysis of exaggeration, register, imagery and incongruity. In humour theory, a clash between expected and actual outcomes is a useful starting point, but comic effects must also be interpreted in their cultural and interpersonal context (Attardo, 1994). Accordingly, this study attends not only to what appears funny, but also to whose perspective makes an episode funny and what kinds of authority the laughter unsettles.

Hyperbole and the Uzbek Tradition of Lof

Hyperbole enlarges an object, action or quality beyond ordinary plausibility in order to make its distinctive features perceptible. In “Shum bola”, the mode is especially resonant with lof, an Uzbek tradition of extravagant tall tales and competitive verbal invention. The account of an enormous Namangan beet, supposedly able to shade ten thousand horsemen beneath its leaves, abandons empirical scale and invites the audience to relish the boldness of the storyteller’s invention. Likewise, the tale of an immense cooking vessel in which a hammer strike on one side takes hours to be heard on the other converts physical impossibility into verbal spectacle. These anecdotes exemplify a culturally recognizable performance of imaginative excess, not simply the narrator’s failure to describe reality accurately.

Durrell also exaggerates, but his hyperbole generally focuses on recognizable domestic characters. Larry’s description of his family’s unhealthy appearance in England as resembling illustrations from a medical encyclopedia converts ordinary ailments into a grotesque collective portrait. A comparison of Mother in an old-fashioned bathing costume with a “badly-skinned whale” pushes visual disproportion towards affectionate ridicule. In each case the reader can still recognize the underlying subject, even while the description insists on an impossible or outrageously unflattering perspective. Thus, G‘ulom’s hyperbole often belongs to a communal oral logic of the marvellous, whereas Durrell’s is attached to the narrator’s comic eye and to sharply individualized family portraits.

Importantly, both writers exploit the gap between literal truth and communicative intention. The audience is not asked to believe the exaggeration; it is asked to understand the social performance behind it. Lof advertises verbal ingenuity and communal storytelling competence, while Durrell’s overstatements reveal interpersonal intimacy: an exaggerated description can mock a relative precisely because the narrative tone remains fundamentally warm.

Situational Humour and Slapstick

Situational humour arises when causal sequences develop in ways that characters fail to anticipate. Physical comedy makes this failure visible through bodies, gestures, collisions and abrupt reversals. In Shum bola, the episode involving an egg and stolen fat or butter turns a minor act of mischief into a startling domestic misunderstanding. As the fat melts and the egg breaks when the boy’s headwear is struck, the mother’s perception of the leaking substance produces an alarming but comic inference. The laughter depends on an asymmetry of knowledge: the reader understands the material cause of the apparent catastrophe before the

frightened adult does. The episode nevertheless retains an undercurrent of economic need and corporal discipline.

A more unsettling episode involving boys and the washing of a corpse similarly pushes physical mishap beyond conventional slapstick. The reported accidental displacement of the head and its hurried restoration produces grotesque absurdity alongside anxiety about ritual responsibility. Such episodes should not be flattened into innocent farce. Their humour is uncomfortable because it occurs at the intersection of bodily vulnerability, social expectations and childish inexperience.

In “My Family and Other Animals”, by contrast, domestic space repeatedly becomes the stage for escalating collective panic. When Larry opens a matchbox containing Gerry’s scorpions, the apparently trivial action releases a cascade of screams, rushed movements and animal reactions. The scene is structured as a chain reaction: each participant responds rationally to a fragment of the situation, but the combined responses create theatrical disorder. Leslie’s attempts at household security similarly turn protective intentions into an explosive disturbance. Durrell’s slapstick thus emphasizes how order is undone by the incompatible habits of an eccentric family, whereas G‘ulom’s mishaps tend to reveal a world of greater material risk and asymmetric power.

Linguistic Humour, Register and Verbal Characterization

Verbal humour operates through ambiguity, unexpected diction, repetition and contrasts between registers. Shum bola incorporates conversational Uzbek, oral formulas, nicknames and the lively rhythms of street speech. These features establish the protagonist’s proximity to the social world he describes and create humour through the collision of youthful directness with adult pretension. The speech of characters may also expose differences in education, status and practical intelligence: linguistic competence becomes a means of negotiating power rather than a neutral feature of dialogue.

Durrell likewise turns idiolect into comic characterization. Spiro’s highly distinctive English, including such expressions as “we donts wants to worrys your mothers,” renders his voice immediately recognizable. His unusual morphology and syntax communicate earnest protectiveness while inviting amusement at mismatched linguistic conventions. Verbal slips such as the confusion between pilots and “aeroplane piles” exploit phonetic similarity and lexical misselection. Dr Theodore Stephanides’ taste for puns, including the description of gulls as “gullible,” operates differently: here wit arises from deliberate manipulation of shared lexical forms, not second-language interference.

Satire and Irony

Satire distinguishes the two texts most sharply at the level of social emphasis. In Shum bola, laughter repeatedly exposes the moral inconsistency of individuals whose public position seems to guarantee virtue or respectability. The figure of an eshon who repudiates material wealth while discreetly accepting or hiding money exemplifies the discrepancy between moral proclamation and private appetite. Such a contradiction is structurally ironic: what the character claims to be clashes with what his actions reveal. The boy’s inventive lies in

encounters with powerful figures, including the wealthy Sariboy, likewise destabilize adult authority by showing how verbal agility can interrupt an apparently fixed hierarchy.

Durrell’s irony is less institutionally confrontational and more interpersonal. The narrator playfully acknowledges that a book supposedly devoted to animals has been taken over by his family. This metanarrative joke creates an ironic mismatch between an announced natural-history purpose and the actual narrative distribution of attention. Larry functions as a particularly effective agent of sarcasm: while pointing out everyone else’s eccentricities, he repeatedly demonstrates his own. The comic point lies in the speaker’s inability to apply his critical standards to himself. G‘ulom’s satire therefore has a pronounced social-demystifying function; Durrell’s irony turns domestic incompatibility into an enduring source of narrative pleasure.

Metaphor, Metonymy and Comic Imagery

Figurative language intensifies humour by making abstract judgments sensorially immediate. In Shum bola, images grounded in everyday material culture can make poverty or exhaustion both concrete and memorable. The image of a person as a worn-out broom, for example, compresses hardship into a familiar domestic object. Recurrent speech habits can also acquire metonymic force: Sariboy’s insistent “innaykeyin” (“and then what?”) comes to stand for a demanding and acquisitive social posture. Strictly speaking, the phrase functions as a recurring verbal marker of characterization; its metonymic reading emerges when that fragment of speech evokes the whole personality.

Durrell’s comic metaphors are often zoomorphic, literary and extravagantly visual. His depiction of Mother as a patient Noah steering a vessel filled with strange offspring transforms family management into a mock-biblical rescue mission. Animal imagery is especially fitting in a narrative where creatures continuously cross the boundary between natural history and family life. Similarly, a deliberately incongruous comparison between difficult poetry and a camel’s stomach turns intellectual criticism into a tactile, absurd image. These metaphors are not merely decorative: they bring lofty language into contact with ordinary bodies and habits, creating the downward shift of register on which much comic characterization depends.

Conclusion

The comparison demonstrates that G‘afur G‘ulom and Gerald Durrell deploy overlapping stylistic devices but direct them toward different artistic ends. Hyperbole in Shum bola draws considerable force from the oral logic of lof, while Durrell favours vivid domestic caricature. In both works, situational incongruity converts a small triggering event into physical chaos, yet the Uzbek text often retains sharper undertones of insecurity, discipline and social exposure. Speech patterns make characters audible and memorable; satire and irony disclose discrepancies between claim and conduct; metaphor transforms personality and experience into memorable visual form. Ultimately, humour in these texts is not an interchangeable inventory of techniques. It is an effect of the interaction among stylistic form, narrative perspective and cultural circumstance. This conclusion encourages future research to compare individual passages in their original languages and to test how much of each comic effect survives translation.

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