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Dramaturgical Tricks in the Clementine Literature

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Abstract

The Clementine novel (written in the 4th century CE and set in the 1st century CE) incorporates a palette of comic features. Using the "Taxonomy of Humor Traits" and the "Script Theory" developed by Attardo and Raskin within the framework of the General Theory of Verbal Humour, this essay examines some of these comic features, focussing on the so called "meta-textual comic" – i.e., the comic effect that uses a manipulation of the plot's structure to elicit laughter from the reader.

Keywords: Dramaturgy, Early Christian Literature, Greek and Byzantine Literature, Humor

Introduction

What is commonly referred to as "the novel of Clement" is actually a conglomerate of texts (see Piras 2011), the author of which seems to intentionally give the impression of compiling a sort of hagiographical file (Jones 2012; Côté 2015) divided into three parts:

1. an opening letter (Pouderon 2000);
2. a novel pretending to be a first-person narrative of Clement set in the 1st century CE;
3. a closing letter.

The second part is organised around an episodic structure, with shorter narrative units that together combine into a longer narrative. The focus of the analysis conducted below is indeed centred on some of these shorter units. However, in order to better contextualise the analysis and to further clarify its remarks, this section offers an outline of the novel and of its sources, as well as of the plot.

Two different versions of the novel have survived. One is named *Homilies*, and it is written in Greek, while the other is

named *Recognitions* and it is written in Latin; they are usually respectively cited as *H* and *R*. Despite an overall similarity in their plot, the contents differ slightly in the two books. Both works are attested in Syriac too (Manns 2003; Vielberg 2010; Gebhardt 2014).[1] Clement is introduced as a disoriented young man in first-century Rome (Jones 1997). He is "disoriented" because he is in spiritual distress; he is distraught with many religious questions to which he cannot find any answers in the theological panorama of paganism:

> Ἐγὼ Κλήμης, Ῥωμαίων πολίτης ὤν, καὶ τὴν πρώτην ἡλικίαν σωφρόνως ζῆσαι δεδύνημαι, τῆς ἐννοίας μου ἐκ παιδὸς ἀπασχολούσης τὴν ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐπιθυμίαν εἴς τε ἀθυμίας καὶ πόνους. συνῆν γάρ μοι λογισμός (οὐκ οἶδα πόθεν τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβών) περὶ θανάτου, πυκνὰς ποιούμενος ὑπομνήσεις ὅτι ἄρα θανὼν οὐκ εἰμὶ καὶ οὐδὲ μνήμην τις ποιήσει μού ποτε, τοῦ ἀπείρου χρόνου πάντων τὰ πάντα εἰς λήθην φέροντος […] – ἢ καὶ τάχα ἔσται τι ὃ νῦν νοῆσαι οὐ δυνατόν. (*H* 1992, 1.1, 23)[2]

In Rome, Clement hears the preaching of a man from Judea who relates to him the miracles of Christ. Clement decides to follow him to Caesarea. There, Clement meets Peter the Apostle and becomes his scribe while traveling around Palestine (Amsler 2014).

In fact, Peter has not become the first pope yet. He is preaching the Christian message from town to town, and he is subject to a supervisor in Jerusalem, whose name is James (Cirillo 2005). More specifically, the Apostle Peter is instructed to transmit to the head of the Church of Jerusalem, James, the accounts of all his teachings. Peter thus needs a scribe and chooses Clement. The title of one of the two versions of this story is indeed *Homilies*, that is "public discourses on religious subjects", as it pretends to be the collection of Peter's discourses, arranged by Clement.

The plot unrolls in the 1st century, while the collection of texts was written in the 4th century: Clement and Peter travel from town to town, along the coast of Palestine. After their stay in Caesarea, they go to Laodicea, to Aradus. Clement meets Simon Magus, who is characterised as Peter's opponent, a sort of negative Doppelgänger (Waltz 1904; Edwards 1997; Luttikhuizen 1998; Côté 2001a, 2001b; Nicklas and Kraus 2008; Pouderon 2008, 2015). Peter goes out to debate with Simon in a three-day public theology contest (Morgan and Jones 2007; Van Nuffelen 2014). Simon, being bested, flees during the night to Tyre. As he escapes, Simon raises ghosts, infects people with disease, and brings demons upon them (Kahlos 2016). Peter decides to pursue Simon Magus so as to prevent him from committing further evil (Adamik 1998; Bremmer 2000; Tuzlak 2002; Verheyden 2004).

During the pursuit, Clement is baptized and recounts his personal history to Peter. He lost his family when he was a child. Soon after Clement's birth, his mother had a vision warning her that unless she left Rome speedily with her twin elder sons, they would all perish miserably. His father, Faustus, who believed stubbornly in visions and horoscopes, promptly consented and sent them with many servants to Athens, but they disappeared *en route*, and their fate remained unknown. When Clement was twelve years old, his father set out to search for the rest

[1] I analysed some parallels between Greek rhetoric and Syriac rhetoric, Greek schooling and Syriac schooling in a previous contribution (Basso 2022). See Duval 2008; Pouderon 2012.

[2] Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine. Trans: I, Clement, born in the city of Rome, was from my earliest youth a lover of chastity, while the inclination of my mind bound me as with chains of fear and sorrow. For a thought that was in me, whose origin I don't know, led me constantly to think of my mortal state and to discuss such questions as these: Whether there is any life for me after death, or whether I am to be utterly annihilated; whether I did not exist before I was born, and whether there will be no memory of this life after death, and so the boundlessness of time will consign all things to oblivion and silence […] – unless, perhaps, all things will be buried in oblivion and silence, or [the hereafter] will be something which it is not now possible to conceive.

of the family, and he disappeared as well. The rest of the book deals with Clement and Peter looking for the lost members of Clement's family. This explains the choice for the title of the Latin version: *Recognitions* (Szepessy 1988).

As mentioned above, the *Homilies* features an epilogue in the form of a letter written by Clement. There, Clement relates that Peter provided final instructions on his deathbed, appointing Clement as his successor in the See of Rome. We thus discover that our Clement would become Pope Clement, the second Pope. The whole story is his *Bildungsroman*, the tale of his formative years as a young Christian. The writer's closing remarks warn the reader that the book is only to be shared with circumcised pious teachers, and even then, only one part at a time.

1. The Comic Aspect 1: "Bridges" at the Plot Level

The Clementine presents readers with numerous comic features. This observation entails preliminary questions about what is to be defined as "comic";[3] about which elements are referred to as comic; and about what was considered to be comic in the 4th century. Also, it is worth asking whether what is considered comic in the Western world today was considered comic in the Roman empire of the 4th century.[4] Several instances of humor in the Clementine novel were partly scrutinized in a previous contribution (Basso 2022). However, this contribution more specifically focusses on a different level of comic elements, i.e., the "meta-narrative comic". Several instances of this level occur in the Clementine narrative, and can be grouped under a single label of "the recapitulation with comic effect". Numerous theories have been proposed to explain the perceived funniness of humor, with cognitive approaches being the most prominent, together with arousal and superiority theories.[5] The philological school at the University of Milan, namely Dario Del Corno, Giulio Guidorizzi, and Giuseppe Zanetto, has accurately investigated the mechanisms of comic in Greek literature, but chiefly in Aristophanes.[6] In that case, Del Corno elaborated on the creation of a "plan by the comic hero" in order to overturn the standard, old-fashioned network of relationships and create a new, utopian world (in *Nubes* and *Aves*, to mention the first impressive examples that come to mind). Torrance recently discussed Del Corno's research (Torrance 2013, 37-59, 60-82), with a particular focus on the Aristophanic hero and on the Plautine slave.

Nevertheless, neither the "Aristophanesque comic", the Aristotelian *Tractatus coislinianus* (Aristotle 1987), nor Quintilianus's positions as expressed in *Institutio Oratoria* (see 6.3 and 10.1.37 ff.) will be used as reference here. Rather, the "Taxonomy of Humor Traits", the "Script Theory" developed by Attardo (2001) and Raskin (2008) in the frame of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991) provide part of the theoretical background for the analysis. Linguists from the research group of the Annual Meetings of the International Society of Humor Studies, led by Victor Raskin, have developed a common taxonomy and a classification of humor traits and states, in order to compare findings from different research groups all over the world and about literatures of all ages (Attardo 2008, 105; Ruch 2008, 56).

[3] On the measurability of the comic, see Ruch 2008, 20: the nature and intensity of the subjective experience is most frequently measured via a seven-point Likert scale ranging from not at all funny (=1) to extremely funny (=7). (Martin *et al.* 2003) developed the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ).

[4] On the translation and on the translatability of the comic, see Chiaro 2005, 2007, 2008; Basso 2020. A few articles in *HUMOR* have addressed cross-cultural and comparative aspects of humor, e.g., Al-Khatib 1999. See also vol. 20, no. 3 of *HUMOR* (2007).

[5] For a review of theories, see Keith-Spiegel 1972; Martin 2007.

[6] Aristophanes, *The Clouds* (Del Corno 1986; Guidorizzi and Del Corno 1996; Giovannelli 2007; Zanetto 2010, 203-25; Zanetto 2015, 39-54).

Attardo lists several of these taxonomies of humorous traits:

- taxonomies based on linguistic phenomena at *word*-level, such as homophony, homography, and paronymy; e.g., "Diplomacy: The noble duty of lying for one's country" ("lying" instead of "dying");
- systematic taxonomies based on linguistic phenomena at *sentence*-level, which Attardo calls taxonomies "based on linguistic categories" (2008, 105); e.g., "A giant leap for the International Monetary Fund, a small step for mankind" (Milner 1972, 19);
- taxonomies based on linguistic phenomena at *surface-structure*-level, such as the phonetic distance between the two phonetic strings punned upon, or the friction between the phonological representation and the unexpected graphic representation; e.g., "Lagoçamilébou" (i.e., "La gosse a mis les bouts" (The girl left), from Queneau 1959, 48). The phonological representation of the French sentence "La gosse a mis les bouts" is perfect (as far as the use of a non-IPA transcription allows), but the unexpected graphic representation is perceived as odd, and is exploited by Queneau for humorous purposes;
- "eclectic" (i.e., taxonomies that mix criteria);
- finally, at the highest level, Attardo lists "metanarrative humor" (2008, 112), which works at the level of *plot*. In fact, Attardo extended the analysis of the humorous traits to a fuller scale (2002), including longer humorous texts (e.g., novels, short stories, TV sitcoms, movies, and plays). Attardo noticed that the reader of a text elaborates a Text World Representation (similar to a mental space or a possible world), which includes and organizes all the information about the events in the text and serves as a starting point for inferences and jokes (2008, 110). In his research on humorous elements in short stories and movies, he remarked that – in the patterns of occurrence of punch lines and jab lines – some interesting configurations have begun to emerge. The two most obvious ones have been named, somewhat colourfully, *bridges* and *combs*. A "bridge" is the occurrence of two related (punch and jab) lines far from each other; a "comb" is the occurrence of several lines in close proximity (111).

Attardo's definition of "bridges" is particularly relevant to our case, since a peculiar case of "bridge" in the Clementine narrative is the "recapitulation with a comic effect", which will be discussed below, borrowing concepts from Shultz's, Ermida's and Chłopicki's studies.

2. The Comic Aspect 2: The Emergence of Humor in the Narrative Macrostructure

Coming now to the mechanisms of humor, the most successful model of explanation is the "incongruity-resolution model". Shultz defines "incongruity" as "a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke", and "resolution" as a "second, more subtle aspect of jokes which renders incongruity meaningful or appropriate by resolving or explaining it" (1976, 12-13). Typically, an incongruity is experienced between objects, between elements of an object, or between an event and an expectation. Perceiving such a friction may cause us to engage in playful processing of incongruity and feel the "lightness" involved in amusement (Lyman and Waters 1986; Ruch and Ekman 2001). The "incongruity effect" at the basis of the comic can not only take place at the level of two words, but also at the level of two elements of the plot. To use Attardo's terminology, I spotted "bridges" at the plot level in the Clementine literature.[7]

[7] On humorous self-reference in movies, see also Withalm 1997.

Ermida (2008) and Chłopicki (1987) further elaborated on Raskin's theory and investigated the emergence of humor in the narrative macrostructure. To understand Ermida's framework, it is necessary to introduce the peculiar use of the term "script" in the General Theory of Verbal Humor. In Raskin's theory, a "script" is a set of propositions, kept in the individual's memory, about any "social episode", be it catching a plane or eating in a restaurant, that allows us to identify, select, assess, and interpret such episodes in the discursive context where they occur (1985; see also Van Dijk 1979). Raskin borrowed the concept of "scripts" from the approach of Schank and Abelson (1977) and applied it to the mechanisms of humor. On the basis of these "scripts", Ermida suggested that a narrative text is to be classified as humorous if it obeys at least one of the four principles (2008, 172) explained as follows.

The first principle is the Principle of Opposition, according to which each script processed in the text activates an opposite (shadow-)script. This opposition is translatable on the basis of lexical antonymy. E.g., " 'Is the doctor at home?' the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. 'No,' the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. 'Come right in' " (Raskin 1985, 32). This is Raskin's favorite example, also largely reiterated and discussed by later authors, which he uses many times for explaining the overlap and opposition of incongruous scripts (104-05): the joke includes the "scripts" of (VISITING THE) DOCTOR and (VISITING THE) LOVER; the scripts are linked via the component of "whispering" compatible with both.

The second principle is the Principle of Hierarchy; where the scripts used in a text are hierarchically organized, the choice of the script opposition DUMB/SMART will reduce the options available to the generation of the "butt" of the joke. For example, A light bulb joke is a joke cycle that asks how many people of a certain group are needed to change, replace, or screw in a light bulb. Generally, the punch line answer highlights a stereotype of the target group. Early versions of the joke, popular in the late 1960s, were used to insult the intelligence of people, especially Poles. For instance:

Q. How many Polacks does it take to change a light bulb?
A. Three – one to hold the light bulb and two to turn the ladder.

Q. How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?
A. None – the light bulb will change when it's ready.

Q. Why is it easier for a Pentecostal to change a light bulb?
A. Because their hands are already up. (Ermida 2008, 91)

The third principle is the Principle of Recurrence, whereby the "scripts" are recurrently instantiated, activated, or evoked by several infra-scripts, which lead the reader to make predictions and to create interpretive expectations. It is the mechanism at the basis of "metanarrative humor", "comic suspense", and "comic surprise". Ermida adds to this list the humorous mechanism of *allusion*, through what she calls "meta-textual scripts" (62, 195), meaning that they provoke laughter by referring to the world *outside* the mere sentence of the joke; in fact, they work at a Weltanschauung-level. Nash calls this strategy of humor the "*cultural* mode of expansion" (1985, 62; my emphasis). *Allusion* covers the set of literary, ethnographic and socio-historical references which make up the culture shared by a group, and it provides a palette of comic material, which encompasses cultural stereotypes, behavioral patterns, artistic and literary conventions, institutions, prejudices, traditions and artefacts. It is comparable to a reservoir of references from which humor derives and on whose basis it is established. This gives

rise to several forms of *allusion* (e.g. to political facts, philosophical maxims, literary quotes, everyday events) and types of *parody* (e.g. of literary styles, social attitudes and conventions) (Nash 1985; Ermida 2008, 101). It is no wonder, after all, that the verb "to allude" comes from *alludere*, or *ad+ludere*, which in Latin means "to play". When the humorist makes an allusion, (s)he challenges the audience to identify a source text, often cunningly camouflaged, which is indicative of general culture or even social status (Ermida 2008, 162).

The fourth principle is the Principle of Informativeness, according to which a joke fails to evolve gradually from the least to the most informative message, but does so abruptly. For example:

Place: the old city of Jerusalem, the Jewish quarter. A tourist asks a local boy: "Where is the Wailing Wall?"

The boy: "In Israel".

In conclusion, to use the framework of the General Theory of Verbal Humor introduced above, in this late antique text one can distinguish three grades, or three nuances, of "comic", all based on an incongruity at a certain level:

a) a funny joke or a funny line (i.e., playing with the words);

b) a funny situation (i.e., playing with the system of characters, a very theatrical level which involves proxemics, such as body language, bodily distance, gestures);

c) the meta-textual comic (i.e., playing with the whole text itself).[8]

Level (c), the meta-textual comic, is the focus of my analysis. To use Ermida's terminology, the comic elements I spotted in the Clementine literature obey the Principle of Recurrence and the Principle of Allusion. A previous contribution (Basso 2022, 107-29)[9] analysed some excerpts from *H* (12-14) in the light of Hermogenes' *On Issues* and Cicero's *De inventione*, underpinning how the rhetorical theory of στάσεις[10] impacted on the Clementine novel, both character-wise and structure-wise. The suggestion advanced hereby is that precisely this exposure to the exercises of στάσεις grew generations of writers sufficiently subtle and aware to play with the "structure" of a tale, in order to generate what was listed above as the "meta-textual comic". Consequently, three examples of this "meta-textual comic" in the Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions* are presented here.

1) At *H* 20.11-12 and *R* 10.60, the pagan and skeptical Faustus, Clement's father, in a reckless move, confronts the evil Simon alone, against Peter's suggestion. During the ensuing altercation, Simon subdues him and – with a charm – transforms Faustus' face into Simon's own face (Barilier 2008):

[8] I must thank Christos Hadjiyiannis, for suggesting the addition of a fourth possible kind of comic, on the occasion of the debate following the International Workshop "Storyworlds in Collections: Toward a Theory of the Ancient and Byzantine Tale (2nd-7th ca. CE)", University of Cyprus, 26-27 November 2021. This fourth kind of comic makes leverage on an abrupt change in *style* to catch the attention of the audience, which goes along with the idea of comic as friction, or comic as change in mood.

[9] See De Temmerman 2006. De Temmerman started from a major insight by George Kennedy, who in a 2003 essay developed the concept of the "rhetoricalization" of imperial literature, a period in which our novel falls, by drawing a parallel between the training in the rhetorical figure of *ethopoeia* in rhetoric and dialogue-writing in the Greek novel (see Kennedy 2003). See in the same direction of research, De Temmerman 2007, 2010, 2014. Before him, see Nadeau 1959; Heath 1995, 17-27; Classen and Döpp 1999; Fernández-Garrido 2009; Patillon 2010, 43-78, and especially 86-90, for a discussion of the stasis-theory in literary creation.

[10] Aelius Theon and Hermogenes's στάσις-theory actually merges, into a single denomination, what was *inventio* and *dispositio* in Cicero and Quintilian, i. e., the individuation of the proper topics about the case, and their arrangement in the most efficacious way (see Cicero, *De Inventione*, 1.98-109; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 3.6.1 to 6.5.11).

ἧκεν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτόθι, τὸν Πέτρον ἡμῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ διαλεγόμενον καταλαβών· καὶ ἀθυμοῦντα ἰδὼν προσαγορεύσας ἀπελογήσατο δι᾽ἣν αἰτίαν ἔξω κεκοίμηται. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐμβλέποντες αὐτῷ ἐξειστήκειμεν, τὸ εἶδος Σίμωνος ὁρῶντες, φωνῆς δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἀκούοντες Φαύστου […]. καὶ ὁ Πέτρος ἔφη· Ὑμῖν μὲν ἡ ἀμάγευτος αὐτοῦ φωνὴ μόνη γνώριμός ἐστιν, ἐμοῦ δὲ τοῖς ἀμαγεύτοις ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ ὡς ἔστιν ὁρατὸν ὅτι μή ἐστι Σίμων, ἀλλὰ Φαῦστος ὁ ὑμέτερος πατήρ. (*H* 1992, 20.12.3-12-8, 275).[11]

Peter does not immediately undo Faustus' transformation, but compels him, as a form of punishment, to travel around Palestine, in the appearance of Simon, to restore Simon's wrong-doings. The transformation is only undone at *R* 10.67.

One cannot quote the correlative segment of the conclusion of this punishment in the *Homilies* because *H* ends pretty abruptly, before the restoration of Faustus' real face.[12] This delay in Faustus' healing, caused simply on a whim on behalf of Peter, is hilarious. This frightening situation of one of the main characters under a terrible face-changing spell is usually interpreted as an admonishment to an audience of inexperienced Christians not to fight evil alone. However, if Peter is the representative of good on earth, there is undoubtedly something sadistic about not curing Faustus immediately. This friction between the possibilities of immediate healing and of postponing it may make the reader smile – precisely because the reader knows that, all things considered, Peter will not be able to avoid curing Faustus in the end. The provocation to laugh (or smile) is a comforting strategy: the reader is confronted with (1) the lesser evil of punishment in a horizon of final healing, by Peter, vs. (2) the disfiguring evil of Simon Magus.

In addition to that, many theatrical comic performances rely on the mechanism of "the face does not match the voice", which is based on the strategy of friction, and that is a typical trigger for laughter.

When authors choose the fictional genre to convey their message instead of the dry didactic treatise, they do so because they want to be able to use all the tools of fiction, as well as all the problematic implications. For example, they might aim at relieving the tension that results from having the readers concentrate for too long on lofty themes, such as those developed in Peter's sermons. Tension not only is relieved by more or less surprising plot twists, but also by changes of register. Modern readers must expect humor because it may be legitimately banished from a treatise; it is indeed hard to expect jokes in Gregory of Nazianzus's *Theological Orations* or Ap̄rahaṭ's *Demonstration XVIII on Virginity*. However, it is likey to be found where storytellers, rather than preachers, actually try to engage with their audience.

[11] Trans: Our father came in and found Peter talking to us about him; and seeing him displeased, he called to him and apologised for having slept outside. But we were astonished when we looked at him, for we saw the form of Simon, but heard the voice of our father Faustus […]. And Peter said: 'You recognise only his voice, which is unaffected by magic; but as my eyes are also unaffected by magic, I can see his form as it really is, that he is not Simon, but your father Faustus'.

[12] This is a demonstration, based on a dramaturgical argument, that the text of *Homilies* preserved to us is certainly incomplete. However, the text of *R* is incomplete as well: *Recognitions* accounts for cross-references that remain incomplete, too; see *R* 3.61: "decem sunt ergo quae diximus paria huic mundo destinata ab initio saeculi. Cain et Abel unum fuit par; secundum vero gigantum et Noe; tertium Pharaonis et Abraham; quartum Philistinorum et Isaac; quintum Esau et lacob; sextum magorum et legislatoris Moysi; septimum temptatoris et filii hominis; octavum Simonis et meum, Petri; nonum omnium gentium et illius qui mittetur seminare verbum inter gentes; decimum Antichristi et Christi; de quibus paribus alias vobis per singula latius exponemu". Trans. by Smith, Peterson and Donaldson 2004, 272: "The ten pairs of which we have spoken have therefore been assigned to this world from the beginning of time. Cain and Abel were one pair. The second was […]. Concerning these pairs, we shall give you fuller information *at another time*" (my emphasis). There is no further mention in the text about it. Thence one can deduce that the narrative corpus was originally larger.

And yet, in this passage, this comic side complies with a very deep Leitmotiv of the story. In such a labyrinth of Doppelgängers, (Pouderon 2001; Touati 2008), along which the narrative of the Clementine novel evolves, each character is led to find their true self, thanks to the new Christian *paideia* (education) (Pervo 2003; Duncan 2017). As reality before our eyes has at least two levels of interpretation (an ominous reality and a supermundane one), in the fictional reality of the Clementine literature, in order to give concrete shape to this duplicity, the author imagines that some of the main characters have two faces, both metaphorically and literally; Simon himself had claimed that he could appear to have two faces:

> Ταῦτα τοῦ Ἀκύλα εἰπόντος, ἐγὼ Κλήμης ἐπυθόμην τίνα ἄρα ἐστὶν ἃ ποιεῖ θαυμάσια. οἱ δὲ ἔλεγόν μοι ὅτι ἀνδριάντας ποιεῖ περιπατεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ πῦρ κυλιόμενος οὐ καίεται, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ πέταται καὶ ἐκ λίθων ἄρτους ποιεῖ, ὄφις γίνεται, εἰς αἶγα μεταμορφοῦται, διπρόσωπος γίνεται, εἰς χρυσὸν μεταβάλλεται, θύρας κεκλεισμένας ἀνοίγει, σίδηρον λύει, ἐν δείπνοις εἴδωλα παντοδαπῶν ἰδεῶν παρίστησιν, τὰ ἐν οἰκίᾳ σκεύη ὡς αὐτόματα φερόμενα πρὸς ὑπηρεσίαν βλέπεσθαι ποιεῖ τῶν φερόντων οὐ βλεπομένων. (*H* 1992, 2.32.1-2.32.3 = *R* 2.9, 48-49)[13]

On the other hand, only catechumens provided with proper theological tools can get rid of their "false faces".

2) In *R* 8.1-56, Niketas and Aquila discuss with Faustus, who has not been yet recognised as their father, the beneficial nature of prayers and the influence of the stars.[14] At *R* 8.41, Faustus – not knowing that he is speaking to his two sons – invites Aquila to keep on speaking, addressing him as "my son": "et senex: prosequere, ait, fili, ut vis".[15] The reader cannot but smile at this formula, which will reveal all its truthfulness to the characters only later, since Aquila is soon to be recognized as Faustus' real son. If one reads (or listens to) the story at least a second time, one will smile at the *clin d'œil*.

This situation can be read on two levels. It is undoubtedly tragic in itself; readers will certainly be moved by the tragic irony of the fate of a father and a son who cannot yet be reunited. More attentive readers see that the situation somewhat foreshadows the fate of those who are unaware of their relationship with the Father in heaven.

Nevertheless, it is not to be forgotten that the text was meant to be read several times. Therefore, not only there is an element of surprise, which occurs at unexpected turns in the plot, but also an element of pleasure in discovering new nuances in the text as one re-reads it. On a second reading, readers no longer feel anxious because they already know that Faustus and Aquila will eventually be reunited. Readers then smile at the anticipation of the vocative *fili* (son), which seemed to be an ordinary and harmless vocative, and was in fact a significant clue. They also smile because the author had openly given them a crucial clue and they had not grasped it. It is a form of pleasure very similar to that of someone reading a detective story for the second time, knowing the murderer already, and smiling when they realise the clues offered by the author that have gone unnoticed during the first reading. It is important to note that

[13] Trans: When Aquila had said this, I asked Clement: What are these miracles he works? And they told me that he makes statues walk, and that he rolls himself on the fire and is not burned; and that sometimes he flies; and that he makes loaves of stone; that he becomes a snake; that he changes himself into a goat; that he becomes two-faced; that he changes himself into gold; that he opens locked gates; that he melts iron; that at banquets he produces images of all manner of shapes. In his house he makes dishes appear to be carried by themselves to wait on him, and no carriers are seen.

[14] The rhetorical στάσις training is clearly visible at work in Niketas's analysis dismantling Epicureanism, and in Aquila's analysis dismantling Skepticism (see e.g., *H* 4.12-13; *R* 3.22).

[15] Trans: Then the old man said: 'Go on, my son, as you please'.

this smile does not undermine the other emotions – for example, the anxiety about the fate of the reunion of Faustus and his son – but is superimposed on other reactions and emotions, as humor does not override seriousness.

3) With *H* 13 (= *R* 7) a recapitulation is introduced, which appears quite odd and apparently unexplainable. The reader finds this "recap structure" time and again in *H* 13.2 (= *R* 7.26 and *R* 9.35). Relevant excerpts are first quoted and then analysed:

Ταῦτὰ μου εἰπόντος, ὁ Πέτρος πάντα αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ κεφαλαίων ἐξέθετο, ὡς ἅμα τῷ αὐτοὺς προοδεῦσαι ἐγώ Κλῆμης τὸ ἐμὸν γένος αὐτῷ ἐξεθέμην καὶ τῆς μητρὸς τὴν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ὀνείρου πλαστῆς προφάσεως μετὰ τῶν διδύμων αὐτῆς τέκνων γενομένην ἀποδημίαν, ἔτι τε καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς τὴν ἐπὶ ζήτησιν αὐτῆς ἀποδημίαν· ἔπειτα καὶ ὡς αυτὸς Πέτρος μετὰ τὸ ἀκοῦσαι ταῦτα εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὴν νῆσον καὶ τῇ γυναικὶ συντυχὼν καὶ προσαιτοῦσαν ἰδὼν, καὶ τοῦ προσαιτεῖν τὴν αἰτίαν πυθόμενος. (*H* 1992, 13.2.1-2 (= *R* 7.26, 193))[16]

Haec cum ego dixissem, cuncta eis Petrus per ordinem coepit exponere et ait: Cum venissemus antaradum et ego vos praecedere iussissem, profectis vobis, eadem die Clemens, cum incidisset sermonis occasio, genus suum mihi exposuit ac familiam. (*R* 1994, 7.26.1, 209)[17]

The same occurs at *R* 9.35:

Et cum haec dixisset, conversus ad turbas ita coepit: Hic quem videtis, o viri, in hac veste pauperrima, romanae urbis est civis, ex genere ipsius Caesaris descendens; nomen ei Faustinianus. (*R* 1994, 9.35.1, 320)[18]

This part is lacking in the corresponding segment of *H* (14.9), possibly becasue it is the third time when all the events are is recapitulated by Peter, each time to a different audience. Three explanations for this repeated summary of the events are possible.

It might be a repetition compulsion of Peter, with a comic effect. The figure of a bountiful old man that rises up and every time begins with an unnecessary recap like a blindfolded ram has an irresistible "comic" force (Nicklas 2020). Such a quirky narrative device also adds an exquisite tridimensionality to the holy character, giving a concrete touch of humanity to Peter. The author of this redaction of *H* pays great attention to gestures (touching, sitting, lying, rising up) and deictics to build up pathos, and chiefly, to give us a continuous feeling of being present at the events (De Temmerman 2014).

It might be a repetition compulsion of the writer, because of her/his education: the expression of a typical attitude, due to the exposure to the *exergasia* in the *katastasis* (the exercises of "summing up" and "expansion") in Theon's rhetorical training (as exemplified in Matidia's story, *H* 12.13 and ff., and in the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, *H* 2.19-21) (Aelius, 1997).

[16] Trans: When I said this, Peter gave them a summary of all that had happened – how (when they had gone before), I Clement had explained my origins to him: my mother's journey with her twin children under the false pretext of the dream, and also my father's journey in search of them; and then how Peter himself, on hearing this, went to the island, met the woman, saw her begging, and asked her the reason for doing so.

[17] Trans: And when I had said this, Peter began to tell them the whole story in order, saying: 'When we had come to Aradus, and I had ordered you to go on before us, the same day after you had gone, Clement was led in the course of conversation to tell me of his origins and his family'.

[18] Trans: When he had said this, he turned to the crowd and began: 'This person whom you see, deepl O men, in this poor garment, is a citizen of the city of Rome, descended from the lineage of Caesar himself. His name is Faustinianus'.

This forced recap might have a further "dramaturgical" function,[19] and the reason for such a flaw might (also) be found in the distribution and in the fruition of the narrative material. In fact, books in antiquity were read aloud to an audience; the process of reading a book was a shared moment between the readers and their community. This implies that reading was a performative moment too. Books were surely not read from beginning to end, but through excerpts or in instalments. The Clementine literature, Clement's journey, is a catechetical journey, and its narrative form aims to render this spiritual journey more captivating for the reader or listener.

The three explanations are not mutually exclusive: smiles, laughter, humor do not erase or replace other reactions. Readers can "learn" by laughing, as much as they can be frightened "while" laughing: under this light, the usual explanation of the passage is not invalidated. My concern is not to undermine the "serious" explanation, rather not to underestimate the (possible) humorous layer, which usually goes completely unnoticed. In fact, the storyteller is allowed to use any means to keep the reader's attention and to imprint the elements of the story in the reader's mind, on all levels.

Too often it is thought that ancient readers would be attentive enough to catch all the nuances on the first reading. More educated readers might as well have enjoyed all the details at first sight, but readers – today as well as yesterday – are allowed to miss clues and enjoy re-reading a text and, what is even more important, storytellers know this.

In this perspective, storytellers use "percolating" strategies, through which they aim to reach different readers that have different levels of awareness and degree of education. This strategy is sometimes mistakenly called polysemic, but it is not, because the *sema*, the signal, the message, is unique. It is, if anything, poly-targeted, i.e., capable of reaching the heart of different audiences at different depths.

Philosophical and catechetical treatises have an elitist "0/1" approach: either readers have the tools to understand their arguments, or they are cut off. Fiction is more democratic; at worst, the story takes root in the readers' heart and the seed will germinate when their soul is ready. Meanwhile, a smile or a laughter will help to memorize the main tenets of the text.

This reasoning might also help to understand the fictionalization of the material. The Word of God is for everyone, and the correct but dry catechetical treatises could have cut off a less educated segment of the audience. On the other hand, the author of a narrative wants to reach as wide an audience as possible.

It is worth remembering that the reading performance was aural; in those times, a reader used to read to a group of people. Therefore, saying "read" and "reader" implies saying "listen" and "listener". In fact, before Ambrose stunned visitors with silent reading (see Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.3.3; Burnyeat 1997; Gavrilov 1997; Valette-Cagnac 1997; Cavallo and Chartier 1999, 1-36), the user of a book, more often than not, was not an individual: one read aloud and entertained a "group"; the group was "listening" to the performance; the fruition of the performance was delivered in segments, i.e., every time the group gathered, a reader would read a segment of a chapter (Edwards 1992; Bowie 1996). This might account for the cumbersome number of recaps in *H* and *R*, which would not be a "mistake", but might be due to the text's format of delivery. In fact, an individual reader might have browsed back through the pages of the *codex* or rolled up the scroll of the papyrus to re-read certain passages. However, with a larger audience of listeners, the reader (and thence the writer, who writes with this reader in

[19] I am using "dramaturgy" and "dramaturgical" here in a very technical way, in the sense of "storytelling" and "structure of storytelling", that is the discipline that gathers and studies the techniques and skills that underlie both theatre and literature and oral storytelling as well – for example, scriptwriting (Howard and Mabley 1993).

mind) must recap for all. As I have mentioned before, the book itself, in the closing letter of Clement to James which is the epilogue to *H*, accurately describes the target audience and the rhythm of fruition. The book is to be given only to one who is a pious and circumcised teacher and, even then, only a part at a time (Amsler 2005; Zetterholm 2021).

This kind of reading in instalments also aligns with the habits attested (actually much later) in *typiká*,[20] such as the one at Stoudiou monastery, dating to the end of the 9th century, and *The Athonite Rule* by Athanasios (Meyer 1894; Thomas and Hero 2000, 109, par. 28), composed for the Lavra in 963 CE: " Ὑπερχομένων τῶν ἀδελφῶν εἰς τὸ ἀριστῆσαι […], γίνεται δὲ καὶ ἀνάγνωσις […], Σημεῖον δὲ τοῦ τέλους τῆς ἀναγνώσεως ταύτης ἐστι ὁ ἦχός τῶν κλιερίων ἐν τῇ ὑστάτῃ μαγειρίᾳ".[21]

But why using a comic effect to mark the beginning of a new reading session? How do we reconcile the presence of these comic elements with the alleged seriousness of the Clementine literature? To answer, reference is needed to another prominent theory of humor, the so-called "Theory L", named after the scholar Robert Latta. According to Latta, the basic humor process manifests an initial stage, a mid-process transition, and a final stage (1998, 37). "Final-stage laughter […] is an avenue or means of relaxation. It is not a mere 'expression of relief' " (42): laughter at a joke is the sudden passage to a rare state of relaxation. These comic elements in the Clementine novel probably contribute both to marking a moment of relaxation and to fulfilling the concrete function of summing up the plot.

Conclusions

Once one imagines that the fruition of this literature was through instalments, one can better grasp the necklace-like structure of the novel – actually, a conglomerate of shorter narratives – and the positioning of the various "cliffhangers" (i.e., the suspense points that keep readers hooked until the next denouement of the plot) (Field 2005; Truby 2008; Stutterheim 2019). In the French *feuilleton* still in vogue at the beginning of the 20th century, the rhythm of the cliffhangers was dictated by the length of the journal: *Fantômas* by Marcel Allain initially came out in short instalments at the Arthème Fayard publishing house, before being published as an independent and complete detective novel in its own right. The Clementine literature displays the similar need of the author to pace the writing according to the reading habits.

Actually, hagiography is a particular subset of fiction where the audience is burdened with a specific social pressure – the audiences could not tell the storyteller that they were getting bored. Did clerical storytellers really care about attention, though? The Clementine literature seems to contribute to a positive answer to this question. In the case of the Clementine narratives, one should not forget the social dimension in sharing one's own personal experiences with other people. Storytellers need to transform personal incidents to suit their listeners' perspectives or expectations; they are supposed to share their emotional experiences in order to vent emotions, elicit empathy or attention, inform or warn others, and strengthen shared convictions and world views (see Habermas 2019, 203-09).

[20] In monastic usage of the Orthodox Christian Church, the *typikón* of the monastery includes both the rule of life of the community and the rule of prayer.

[21] Trans. by Miller in Thomas and Hero 2000, 109, §28: "When the brothers come down for the midday meal, [a] reading […] takes place […]. The signal for ending this reading is the sound of the spoons at the last serving, when all together toss them on their dishes". Attested also in two versions in two mss., [A] Codex Vatopedi 322 (956) (thirteenth-fourteenth century); [B] Codex Vaticanus graecus 2029, fols. 179-85 (ninth-tenth century); the passage in question is present in both. Dmitrievsky 1895, pt. 1, 224-38; PG 99, 1704-20, at 1713, §28.

The comic moments highlighted in this study fulfil the further, pragmatic function of tightening up the knitting of the shorter narratives, and – most importantly – they do it in a light way. Peter's clumsy recaps link the previous episodes with the ones that follow like beads in a necklace, soldering the narrative joints among shorter episodes without burdening the audience, who would smile at the refrain of this old character jumping up to summarise once again a previous session, thus resuming the story and revamping the narration. In fact, laughter, or better, the alternation of concentration and relaxation, helps to keep the audience's attention. In addition to that, at *H* 13.2, Peter's recap connects Niketas and Aquila's quest for their mother to Clement's quest for the rest of his family. By doing so, it solders two narrative segments, functioning as a sort of narrative hinge between the two parts. In addition, it not only reunites two shorter narratives, but also physically reunites Clement's family. Similarly, in the other example at *R* 9.35, Peter's recap connects the short narrative of Faustus's mysterious disappearance at the beginning of the story (*H* 1.1; *R* 1.1) with the philosophical debate at the final stage of the novel, in an elegant *Ringstruktur*. In both cases, Peter acts as a *deus ex machina* for the resolution of the major mysteries in the plot. One must admit that there is some meta-narrative comic nuance in this choice, too: what better *deus ex machina* than Christ's successor at the guidance of the Church?

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