

SUBVERSION, IRONY AND PARODY IN THE WORK OF MARIN SORESCU

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Abstract: A relevant component of Marin Sorescu's poetics is the playful one, with spectacular accents. The space and time of the game sum up the gratuitousness of the events, representing a carnivalesque direction of their unfolding, in a spirit of bliss and unproblematicness, even if subtextually one can intuit a semantism of gravity, a metaphysical semitone. The Sorescian ludic involves a combination of the unusual and the ordinary, solemnity and banter, the emphasis being shifted from the problematic to the derisory and gratuitous, in frustrated language and familiar discourse. Marin Sorescu retranscribes myths and problematizes emotions, revealing the poetic meanings of the world, in a mixture of fantasy, irony and playfulness, with mimed gravity and "solemn" meaning, in a mixture of buffoonery and sublimity, resulting in the ambiguity and depth of his apparently anecdotal verses, reduced to banter and theatricality.

Keywords: poetry, subversion, irony, parody, ambiguity.

Marin Sorescu's poetry has been defined by literary critics by several important features: nonconformism, insurgency, rejection of prejudices, conventions and preconceived models. Sorescu's lyrical identity cannot be reduced to a single trait, because the poet is both playful and serious, solemn and parodic, in a diverse range of thematic and expressive manifestations, the emphasis being placed above all on the deconstruction of literary taboos, even if the poet is also a builder, an architect who articulates a harmonious, coherent and unified lyrical universe through the technique of verse, reconfiguring lyrical models, through the filter of an unmistakable sensibility. The style of these poems results from polarization, from the assembly of opposites under the sign of irony, from the redistribution of meanings and forms of the world from the perspective of parodic and playful relativization, through which the important themes of literature are questioned, the creator assuming with lucidity the awareness of his own limits and uncertainties.

Dominant in Sorescian lyrical discourse is the playful-parodic and subversive stance, the poet repudiating the sublime, the serious, the ceremonial in a supple dynamic of utterance freed from formal constraints, utterance that mimetically expresses the spectacle of the disorder of the world, with its repetitive structures: "Yesterday I photographed only stones,/ And the stone at the end/ resembled me. / The day before yesterday - chairs - / And the one who remained / Looked like me.// All things look awfully like me..." (*Development*).

The poet is aware of artistic convention, of the tics of poetry, his first book, *Alone Among Poets*, having a polemical substratum, the texts here being a kind of metapoems, poems about poems, which do not lack the critical intention against the ideological rhetoric of proletarian epic poetry, but also against some extravagances of lyrical modernism. Marin Sorescu aesthetically refunctionalises lyrical patterns in parodic,

histrionic and playful arpeggios, through which he assumes a series of stylistic masks, the poet taking a critical distance from his models. The parodic is an essential constant in Sorescu's poetry, allergic to the stimuli of convention and the stereotypical nature of lyrical language, his lyricism demolishes the established poetic forms of tradition, the serious, symbolically prestigious forms being diverted towards the derisory everyday, even if the verses also suggest a certain nostalgia for the original background, a search for the primordially of things.

For the poet, the word is imperfect, a copy of the real, a schematic pattern of inexhaustible reality, a guilty face of an inauthentic view of the world, so that the return to authenticity, to spontaneity through the regeneration of the meanings of the word, motivates the meanings of these verses that denounce man's alienation from reality through the word: "I am cold in this shirt/ Of letters/ Through which all the weather easily/ Enters". At the same time, the tension between man and nature, between life and the word, is represented as a kind of replacement of the living with bookish elements: "Where is my life printing/ That it is full of mistakes/ Inadmissible", the verb being a depreciation of totality, even if the poetic act is a possibility of rescue from a confused, paradoxical reality, the creative act being understood as a euphemised transcription of things through lyrical resemantization.

A relevant component of Marin Sorescu's poetics is the playful, with spectacular accents. The space and time of the game sum up the gratuitousness of the events, representing a carnivalesque direction of their unfolding, in a spirit of bliss and unproblematicness, even if subtextually one can intuit a semantism of gravity, a metaphysical semitone. The Sorescian ludic implies a combination of the unusual and the ordinary, of solemnity and banter, the emphasis being shifted away from the problematic towards the derisory and gratuitous, in frustrated language and familiar discourse: "We wash with your rinse, sun/ Our fundamental soap,/ Laid at hand/ On the polish of the sky. / We always stretch out our arms to you/ And rub ourselves well with light,/ Our bones ache from so much happiness./ Oh, what joy/ Is on the ground in the morning/ Like in a boarding school laundry./ When children take water in their mouths/ And splash each other./ For now we don't know where to get/ And the best towels -/ And wipe our faces with death" (*Morning*). Spectacle, representation, role, textual direction are frequent in Sorescu's poems, through certain terms from these semantic spheres (juggler, balls, mask, etc.), but also through theatrical procedures that have the role of staging the substance of lyricism, knowledge being perceived as representation, visualization, theatricalization, for the world is questioned through "looking out the window", a way of trying to rediscover the permeability of the world: "Looking out the window has become a tic,/ Everyone looks out the window. / They read, wash, love, die/ And now and then they run away/ And look out the window./ What do you want to see?/ Who are you looking after?/ Take your mind, whoever has come has come,/ Whoever has gone has gone, / Whoever has passed by has passed by" (*Atavism*). The poet imagines himself as a juggler, aware of the limits of knowledge, a fallen demiurge, handling "balls and circles", anemic substitutes for reality. On the other hand, the poet expresses the absurd condition of being reduced to appearances, in which

the spirit is under the sign of the confrontation between appearing and being, between form and the betrayal of meaning: "The streets were full of clothes/ Going about their business. // Some were running to be late for work,/ Others were chatting/ Or going into clothes shops/ Where they came out with new designs.// And I was looking for people./ I knew they must be/ Either in the pocket of my vest/ Or in the front or back of my clothes/ Attached with a clip" (*Vision*).

The feeling of love is, in turn, extracted from the ambience of sublime solemnity, being reduced to the derision of the everyday, in a tone of ironic banter, whereby invocation is replaced by the persiflage, unproblematic interrogation of domestic farce, in which the ironic, lucid, cerebral ego refuses emphatic, pathos, love being rendered in the repetitive rhythm of the mechanics of everyday gestures: 'I owe you a more elevated mood/ And that because of you. / Not that I want to reproach you for anything, on the contrary/ Take it as a compliment to your beauty/ Which - I tell you plainly - is foolish". At other times love, a sign of ephemeral and prosaic happiness, seems a calligraphic exercise, a repetition of previous versions of the feeling, with a view to perfecting it: "When a love/ I was working on before/ Has succeeded/ Then I pass it on cleanly,/ To the heart of another woman./ Nature has been wise/ In creating more women/ Than men/ Because we can perfect our feeling/ Using a great number/ Of drafts".

In Marin Sorescu's poetry, poetic language undergoes a process of democratization, by descending into the street, into everyday life, into common speech, which is also the explanation for the audience of these verses that aim to reduce the distance between life and art, by demythologizing literary conventions, considered too rigid compared to the unpredictable relief of reality. This is precisely why the poet rewrites, in a spirit of irony, of playful and bookish subversion, the great themes of literature, transforming themselves into the tragicomic farce of language. A significant poem is *Scale*, which illustrates the poet's fantasy-parodic way of relating to existence and his vision of literature. Between poetry and life, the poet suggests, a correspondence is established with multiple meanings and roles, the poet being a thinker, whose thoughts, fears, sorrows are transformed into an "instrument of research", poetry itself living in "awareness".

In *Scale* poetry an instrument of scientific knowledge, of rigour is transferred to the space of literary imponderability, of the spirit of finesse, the poet experiencing the changes that occur in the structure of the literary text, in the order and functionality of words, the irony of the poet turning towards some procedures of the study of literature, which tries to capture the specificity and vitality of the text through geometrizing methods and practices, The poet also suggests here an ironic, relativizing approach, which questions the intrusion of mathematical logic and the rational factor in the field of life, of emotions, a field that cannot be controlled by lucidity, having ineffable parameters: "Then the echo can extend/ Into everyday life too. / Sounds, images, souls/ Are exaggeratedly large,/ Listen to words with the echer,/ Watch shows with the echer.// Do not venture/ Into true love/ Without an echer at your buttonhole./ And also, at night before bedtime/ Put an echer at the head of the bed/ For your golden dreams". The poetic communication, neutral, sober, concise, is marked by a shaking off of stylistic

ornaments, absent almost entirely, metaphors being camouflaged, disguised behind words or expressions of everyday use. The "scale" thus symbolises a rigid, dogmatic spirit, which abolishes the meaning and value of things, being inadequate to their essence, in opposition to the fanciful and playful spirit.

Another representative poem, *The Map*, is defined by the same playful, fanciful and spectacular spirit in which serious, fundamental elements of the human condition are transcribed in an ironic mode, the poem can be read as a lyrical self-portrait, sketched in the tents of allegory. The human body and even the whole of existence are depicted in the form of a map, in which emotions, feelings and experiences are outlined in the proportions of a cartography of geography: "First let me show you with a stick/ The three parts of water/ Which are clearly visible/ In my bones and tissues:/ The water is drawn with blue.// Then my two eyes,/ My starfish.// The driest part,/ My forehead,/ Continues to form daily/ Through the crinkling of the earth's crust". The lyrical tension here results from the connection of two distinct fields, geography and human anatomy, one explaining the other, for the human body, defined by its imponderables and appearances, with its more or less visible rhythms, is reduced to rigid, schematic conventions and lines.

At the same time, the ineffable components of the human being (feelings, aspirations, anxieties, emotions) are outlined in the form of a map ("This island of fire is the heart,/ Inhabited if I am not mistaken.// If I see a road/ I think that there must be/ My feet,/ Otherwise the road would be pointless. // If I see the sea/ I think that must be where/ My soul must be, or else its marble/ Wouldn't make waves"), the poet being aware that on the "map" of the creature there are "white spots", uncharted regions, unrepresented spaces: "There are of course/ Other white spots/ On my body,/ Such as my thoughts and happenings/ Of tomorrow. // With the senses,/ The five continents/ Daily describe two movements:/ A movement of rotation around the sun/ And one of revolution/ Around death...". Marin Sorescu is a poet of demythologizing and deconstructing taboos and pontifications, but he also proves to be a poet of construction, articulating a coherent, harmonious lyrical universe, a fact proven by the unity of technique and style, by a repetitive poetic pattern.

Sorescian style, his lyrical imprint comes from polarisation, from the contrastive assembly of poetic objects reduced to ironic moods, subversion and playful fantasy, through which the conformation of reality is altered, through persiflage and banter, procedures that relativise meanings, establishing an awareness of the limits of creation, but also the certainty of the distance between text and creator, between letter and spirit. Relevant in this respect is the poem *Toys*, representative of the spectacular ludic, through which the author renders a mixture of gravity and derision, an alloy of poetic registers from which lyricism draws its authentic dimension: "We who are awfully big,/ Who have not fallen on the ice/ Since the two wars,/ Or if by mistake we ever slipped,/ We even fractured a year,/ One of our important and stiff years/ Of gypsum.../ Oh, we awfully big/ Sometimes feel/ That we lack toys". The play is a liberation from the constraints of space and time, an escape from the grip of determinism, a utopian revenge of the imaginary in the face of an impoverished world with derisory semantic

dimensions ("We have everything we need,/ But we lack toys./ We miss the optimism/
Of the dolls' woolly hearts/ And our ship/ With three rows of sails,/ Which goes as well
on water,/ As on land").

Through toys, the child's status is transferred to the sphere of the imaginary, toys being bridges to another world, symbolic and fictional but also redemptive, insofar as they undermine the terror of time and space, reshaping the dimensions of reality, for play dissolves rules, relativises patterns and dynamises concrete reality: "We'd like to saddle a wooden horse/ And the horse to necrotize with all the wood,/ And we'd like to say: 'Take us somewhere,/ We don't care where,/ Because everywhere in life/ We're going to do/ Some great deeds'". The end of the poem suggests a distance, a limit, the distance between toys and adulthood, between maturity and play, between the fictional horizon established by the playful and the age of rationality ("Oh, how we sometimes miss our toys!/ But we can't even be sad/ Because of that/ And cry our heart out,/ Holding on to the leg of the chair with our hand,/ Because we are very big people/ And there is no one bigger than us/ To comfort us").

The poem *Toys*, with its playful and serious tone, sums up the tragedy of existence, transposing it into the minor range of irony and parody, the author rendering the drama of the mature being who has lost his ties with his own childhood, with his own past, without access to the candour of his beginnings, the mature being, by his condition, surrendering himself to an essential solitude, in a natural, simple, clear language, the words being borrowed from the panoply of everyday language, with few figures of speech, emphasising the idea of prose and spontaneity. The "depersonalisation" comes from the playful and spectacular structures, through which the "events" of prosaic existence are staged, focusing on scenes of everyday life, with new meanings and perspectives, not devoid of symbolic connotations, the poetic text having a narrative flow, "characters" and dialogues, exposition, plot and denouement in a spectacular space and time, with limited, prosaic, common lines, even if underneath the prosaic, sometimes comic gestures, a more serious, deeper meaning can be noticed.

Some poems are transcribed in a colloquial, natural tone, the atmosphere taking on tragi-comic overtones, in a mixture of the grotesque and the ironic, with a subdued lyrical tension. Some poems summarise images of everyday life, treated in a grotesque-ironic register, fragments of the allegory of fate, for the poet often aims to demythologise serious, prestigious themes, the myth often being inserted into the epic-lyrical scheme of banal, prosaic events, giving it new meanings and a relaxed tone. The reinterpretation and refunctionalisation of myth in the form of playful, ironic or parodic challenges. For example, the biblical act of the creation of the female creature is diverted towards farce, by over-emphasising the creative instinct of the man who creates a whole series of unofficial Eves in order to satisfy an oversized erotic appetite, resulting in an artistic end to Adam's gesture of multiplying female models, This gesture could also be seen as a departure from the aesthetic canon, as a break with pre-established patterns, or as a rebellion against pre-established models, so that expulsion from paradise is also equivalent, from this perspective, to a sanction of iconoclasm, of hybris. A grotesque-comic vision of hell is represented in the poem *Fresca*, in which the myth of hell is

rendered in parodic shades, the sufferings of the damned being relativised by the use of derisory, concrete, banal words.

The "valorization" of sinners is achieved by selecting and grouping them into two categories; women undergo a process of disinfestation, their specific accessories being removed from their minds, after which they are assigned to the boiling cauldrons ("In hell sinners/ Are valorized to the utmost. // Women have their hair removed from their heads,/ With tweezers,/ Nails, clips, rings, bracelets,/ Cloths, bed linen,/ Then they are thrown/ Into boiling cauldrons,/ Beware of the pitch,/ Not to set them on fire"). Relevant here is the poet's ability to plasticise notions, giving relief to abstractions, by combining concrete words with those from the sphere of the immaterial and the subjective ("Then some/ Are transformed into sufferings/ With which they carry to the home of retired devils/ Warm sins"). Men have a different fate, being used for the hardest work, the poem ending in the poet's established style, with a diversion of meaning towards farce, grotesque subversion: 'Men are also used/ For the hardest work,/ Except for the very hairy,/ Who are twisted again/ And made doormats'. The vision of hell is terrifying, coupled with a sense of derision and spectacle staged with surrealist verve. The poetic imagery, drawn from the dream imaginary, is remarkable for its sharpness of detail, focused with descriptive verve, parody and carnivalesque merging in this poem to contribute to an ironic and subversive allegory of the afterlife.

In *Don Quixote's Youth* the ludic is dominant, as is a certain equivocal familiarity in which lyrical discourse is oriented towards colloquial, colloquial communication, as in the poem *Signs*, in which the human being is perceived in terms of his willingness to identify and interpret the 'signs' of the universe. Surrounded by things, events and creatures that signify something, the lyric ego feels the terror of "signs", becoming captive to its ability to decipher the meanings of the world, which thus becomes a hellish space, because the meanings have become detached from things and handcuff the lyric ego's imagination, out of excess of signification. The solution to this semantic disaggregation of the world is irony, whereby 'signs' are relativised, their tyrannical contours loosened, losing their alienating force. The poem's terse and austere ending de-emphasises the drama of the poem, suggesting a way out of the infernal labyrinth of absurd and irrelevant signs. The poem *Signs* has a tree-like, alluvial repetitive structure, suggesting the dread of unanticipated being, the sense of semantic emptiness resulting precisely from the abundance of the signifier and the de-subjectivization of words, conventional tools stripped of metaphysical thrill.

The poem *Eyes* is a text about knowledge, because the being as a whole is transformed into a huge eye in which the world mirrors itself with all its forms and metamorphoses. Knowledge is under the sign of visuality, of the assumption of the appearances, surfaces, lines and colours of the universe, the eye becomes the poet's creature, a kind of flesh lens that slowly absorbs all the apparent manifestations of the world: "My eyes are getting bigger and bigger,/ Like two circles of water,/ They have covered all my forehead/ And half my chest. / Soon they'll be as big/ As I am.// Bigger than me,/ Much bigger than me:/ I'll be nothing but a black dot/ In their midst". In the circle of the being that has become gaze, the whole universe is assimilated, in a pure

energy of the visual: "And so that I don't feel alone/ I will let into their circle/ Many things:/ Moon, sun, forest and sea/ With which I will continue to look/ At the world". The poem addresses the theme of visual perception as an instance of knowledge through which a lyrical phenomenology of the gaze is configured. The poem *Eyes* is composed of uneven verse, concise, concentrated images, the preferred process being hyperbolisation, the exacerbation of features and dimensions of things, suggesting an image of the absurdity of the world and words.

A poem also significant for the process of retranscribing myth, of reconsidering serious themes from the perspective of irony and parody is *Shakespeare's* staging of banter and parodic relativity. Sorescu here rewrites Shakespeare's intellectual biography, linking it to the biblical motif of the making of the world, the stature of the English writer being hyperbolized, for the author of *Hamlet* is perceived as a demiurge creating an enormous fictional universe by means of the founding logos: 'Shakespeare made the world in seven days.// On the first day he made the heavens, the mountains, and the chasms of the soul. / On the second day he made the rivers, the seas, the oceans/ And the other feelings -/ And gave them to Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra and Ophelia,/ To Othello and others,/ To rule them and their descendants,/ Forever and ever. / On the third day he gathered all men,/ And taught them tastes:/ The taste of happiness, of love, of despair,/ The taste of jealousy, of glory, and so on,/ Till all tastes were gone."

The poem is written in two registers, one serious, solemn, the other ironic and parodic, in which the elements of major resonance are relativised, through a prosaic, persiflage and subversive representation: "Then some people arrived who were late,/ The creator patted them on the head with pity,/ And told them that all they could do was to become/ Literary critics/ And challenge his work. / The fourth and fifth days he reserved for laughter./ He let the clowns loose/ To do somersaults,/ And left kings, emperors/ And other unfortunates to amuse themselves./ On the sixth day he solved some administrative problems:/ He set up a storm,/ And taught King Lear/ How to wear a crown of straw./ A few scraps remained from the making of the world/ And created Richard III.". The end of the poem is written in the same colloquial tone, the theme of disappearance being softened by the insertion of the relativising adverb "a little": "On the seventh day he looked to see if there was anything left for him to do./ The theatre directors and posters filled the ground,/ And Shakespeare thought that after all his toil/ He might deserve to see a performance himself./ But first, because he was too exhausted,/ He went to die a little". From this union of the theme of the creator and the biblical topos of genesis, a lyrical space is born, offering us a definition of the destiny of the one who creates an entire world from the flesh of words with evocative power, while at the same time representing the drama of the creator, enslaved to the created world, subject to his own ideals and aesthetic imperatives.

Marin Sorescu is not only the author of poems imbued with a playful instinct, a fantasy spirit, he is also a poet of existential gravity, of disturbing visions of existence or of the human condition, as in the poem *The Mouth of the Crayfish*, a transcription of a nightmarish vision of a humanity that has gone through an apocalyptic deluge, a world

threatened by monstrosity, instinctuality and gregarious aggression, in which the image of the crayfish symbolises the teratological: "When mankind came out of the water,/ Full of mud, seaweed and salt,/ On the other shore they climbed,/ Climbing one on the other's back/ And slipping into the sea,/ But leaping with the next wave,/ On the grass - the crayfish.// Creepy, mangy crayfish,/ Full of legs like warts,/ Green as frog silk and red,/ Swarming with red on their bellies." A ruthless competition thus ensues between the human and crayfish kingdoms, the encounter between humans and crayfish resulting in man's regression into the aquatic environment, into instinctuality: 'Humans began to walk/ Trying to accommodate themselves to the dry sunlight/ Other than the light from the water.// The crayfish began to run/ In the opposite direction,// Tapping their catalyses on the globe/ As in a man's downed chest. // One day the first humans met/ The first crayfish,/ Each with his own./ They were taken to their armpits/ And dragged into the sea's stagnant pool,/ Back to places they'd been before/ (Their eyes remember them perfectly/ By the tears in the shape of gorgane),/ But which for the crayfish were indeed/ New places,/ And they claimed, rightly,/ To carry them forward."

Two ways of living are confronted here, the human spirit, oriented towards the light, towards the values of rationality and instinct, the going backwards, the regression towards the shadows, towards the aquatic element and the darkness ("Only in the water did the people dismount,/ There was a struggle with all the living things/ And those who managed to break free/ From the rusty iron claws/ Came out exhausted on the shore,/ Full of mud, algae and salt"). The poem's ending serves as a warning, suggesting the possibility that at any moment animality may resume its aggressive offensive against the human condition, by regressing to animality and the gregarious element ("Breathing deep, they wearily set forth,/ But behold, on the opposite shore,/ Stealthily, from the shadow of the planet's mud,/ Creeping crayfish appear,/ Setting off in the other direction").

An allegory of writing is transposed in the poem *Dream*, under the sign of the oneiric ludic, in inconstant and vague images, the lyric vision conveying the sensation of agitation, of crowding at the gates of the poem, the whole reality being anxious to be transferred into the poetic text, to be mirrored in the verse: "In front of the house in which I live with myself/ There was a tremendous commotion. / All mankind had gathered there/ And wanted to pass through my verses./ I could hardly stem the waves of people,/ I was running around, sweating all over,/ And handing out order forms". All the elements of reality were present before the available consciousness of the lyric ego, all claimed their right to poetic existence ("There were forests, mountains and moonrises there:/ They had heard it was poetry/ And they came out of habit. / To appease both people and nature,/ I chose the strongest,/ I asked them to take in their arms,/ Beside their joys and sorrows,/ A tree, or a mountain,/ And only in this way I made them wind/ In a stanza"). The ending highlights, in a parodic key, the avatars of the feeling of love, the poem being the transposition of a poetic theme into a dreamlike and playful register, the poet imagining the process of transposing the empirical elements of reality into the imponderable realm of the poetic.

A poem in which the lyrical imaginary is characterized by a duality of transposition is *Atlantis*, with a first level of the text situated in a fantasy, playful and parodic dimension, under which serious senses of knowledge are hidden, the dominant feeling being of uncertainty, of uneasiness in front of a declining, threatening, disarticulated universe. The poetic being and the lyrical discourse are under the sign of the fall, which transforms living into martyrdom, emphasizing aggressiveness and revealing existence as an ordeal, in the subtext of the poem, underneath the ironic-ludic tone of the text: "Who built the world/ On a falling earth?// Yesterday the moon was above you,/ Now it is above its life./ You sank a little more. // Yesterday you held the sky on your head/ Like a tray/ Of wonders,/ Now it floats higher.// Pack your bags quickly,/ Climb to the roofs of the houses,/ Climb the houses to the attic,/ Carry your cattle and your food and your feelings to the top of the mountains,/ If you still want to have cattle and food - and feelings,// And move the mountains/ To the rock at the top,/ If you can." The state of ephemerality and perishability, of anguish in the face of the fall, of sinking into nothingness, insinuates itself into the layers of the poetic text, through a diffuse restlessness that dominates the territories of consciousness. The feeling of absurdity stems from the inability to communicate with an inconsistent reality, for there is a flagrant contradiction, a fundamental disagreement, which the poet feels acutely, between human consciousness, eager for certainty, balance, security and foundations, and a fluctuating, unstable and insidious reality, Atlantis being the expression of such a disagreement which gnaws at the being gripped by anxiety in the face of the supposed fall of the world. From a formal point of view, the poem is made up of rapid, concise notations that transcribe the state of urgency of the being, but also of repetitions and interrogations that give a greater affectivity and subjectivity to the poetic discourse. Marin Sorescu retranscribes myths and problematizes emotions, revealing the poetic meanings of the world, in a mixture of fantasy, irony and playfulness, with mimed gravity and "solemn" meaning, in a mixture of buffoonery and sublimity, from which results the ambiguity and depth of his apparently anecdotal verses, reduced to banter and theatricality.

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