

**PERMITTED
LAUGHTER**

★

**Socialist,
Post-
Socialist
and
Never-
Socialist
Humour**

**Estonian Literary Museum
Department of Folklore**

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**Edited by
Arvo Krikmann & Liisi Laineste**

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FOREWORD

The book emerged from the papers originally given at the international symposium organised around the theme of post-socialist humour. The conference was held in January 2007, Tartu, Estonia and hosted by the Estonian Literary Museum. For this conference, Arvo Krikmann and Liisi Laineste, also the editors of this volume, asked a number of Russian and Eastern European humour scholars to participate and present insights into the development of humour (first of all, jokes) in their countries accompanying the transition from socialism to post-socialism, the interplay of continuity and change in this process, and their vision for the future directions in researching humour in different societal context to complement the studies done mainly in Western scholarship. The programme and theses of the symposium are available at <http://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/konve/joke07/teesid.pdf>. Folklorists formed the core of participants, but the number of disciplines included in the project has grown along with the amount of interested scholars.

Drawing on original research conducted by humour scholars working in 6 different countries, this book explores the key issues brought on the table by the study of humour. This complex cultural phenomenon is taken to offer a unique view-point for describing the changes in the society, but it is also the changes that offer a unique context for describing the transformation of a tradition. The different approaches present their visions about the status, targets, and plots in contemporary Eastern European humour. This does not make the task of finding an order and general tendencies in the fragmented field easy. The present coverage offered by this compendium falls short of being utterly comprehensive of the whole post-socialist region on the one hand, and of all the approaches encountered in Eastern European humour research, on the other. The attempt was rather to centre part of the attention on Russian folklorists' approach to the subject, because their works remain largely unknown in the West. The other, equally important dominant was to describe post-socialist folklore in the Eastern European region that had not long ago been a (even though peripheral) part of the Soviet Union. This choice was done in the anticipation to compare the different lines of development that the two different yet similar locations – a former centre and a former periphery – have in the contemporary European context. The overall structure is quite diffuse, as the authors draw eclectically on diverse intellectual tradi-

tions, ranging from sociology to folkloristics, from close historical-cultural analysis to descriptions of specific category of jokes and their targets. Still, there are some points of focus that will later be argued upon discussed in the concluding chapter. Certain themes and issues recur throughout the volume and all the articles are brought together by a common concern to understand the changes, account for their reasons, and hence add to the established viewpoints and theories of humour.

The compendium consists of 12 research articles, which are organised by the country. As the majority of the articles present a quite specific insight into one area of this countries' humour practices and the way these were shaped, this seemed a more convenient solution for the reader than forming the chapters based on the primary focuses or issues. The only exception that does not depict any post-socialist country in particular is the more general and broad-based article by Christie Davies about the post-socialist jokes compared to socialist and never-socialist jokelore. This ground-laying article acts as a theoretical starting point for the following journey into the depths of different humour practices in Eastern Europe. It does not reflect on any of the post-socialist countries in particular but aims at giving a general framework for the phenomena of post-socialist humour. The task of the closing chapter is to bring forth the common issues and sets of problems that are relevant in the context of these articles, point at possible re-evaluations of previous theories, and ascertain once more that jokes can offer helpful and rewarding material for describing and accounting for cultural and societal phenomena: cultural processes, their specific features and even the hotly debated and ambiguous functions of humour.

The project of cooperation was first pushed forward in spring 2007, when a proposal for receiving a research grant was sent to the scientific committee of the European Union 7th Frame programme. The proposal was titled "Folk Humour as a Form of Human Creativity Under Socialism, Post-Socialism And Non-Socialism" with the primary task to give an account of jokes from socialist and postsocialist cultures and eras that are merging into the multicultural context of the European Union. Its predication was based on the claim that by using creativity, and humour as a form of it, a dialogue between different (from time to time conflicting) cultures and traditions can be established and intercultural value conflicts moderated. The main aims were the following:

1. Creating an international internet portal of contemporary jokelore, compiled by professional humour scholars, which will:
 - a) Include all relevant publications, archive and internet materials from post-socialist countries on political and ethnic jokelore;
 - b) Provide a platform for a dialogue for the interested public, interdisciplinary scholars and schoolchildren, concerning the issues of ethnicity, identity, multiculturalism, diversity, conflicts springing from that etc.
2. Analysing the compiled database, giving a quantitative multi-dimensional overview covering the following factors of jokeore:
 - a) Ethnicity, geography;
 - b) Political context and timeline (socialist vs. post-socialist vs. non-socialist countries);
 - c) Source (archive / publication / Internet);
 - d) Text parameters: genre, target of the joke, other characters, situation, logical mechanism, context, demographic data of the joke-teller.
3. Help to explain the processes of tradition and cultural practices by pointing at interconnections and dependencies between tradition and its cultural, political, demographical, economic contexts.
4. Getting a more valid overview of jokes as an expression of hate, intolerance and/or racism to guide policy measures and institutional arrangements at the national and EU level.

The project was built on the cooperation of Estonian, Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian humour researchers, and more international members from Britain, Switzerland, and the United States. Although it received high evaluations for its aims and content, the project has not yet been accepted for funding and we will have to revisit its technical and formal details for the next call for proposals. The intended integrative overview of post-socialist humour in the Eastern European countries is thus not yet completed as it still waits for funding. A substantial account of the tendencies in different categories of jokes can be formulated only through a systematic study of the same central issues in all the countries under examination. This in turn must be based on a cross-cultural empirical database covering all the targeted categories (especially political and ethnic, to clarify the status and content of these in the context of the increasing demands for political correctness). The researchers present at the post-socialist humour symposium have since then retained fruitful contact and the present compendium demonstrates the potential that this area of study has to offer.

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Liisi Laineste received her PhD in 2008 in Folkloristics at the University of Tartu. She has been researching ethnic and political jokes since 2000. As a researcher in the Estonian Literary Museum since February 2001, she has been involved in two grant projects of Estonian Science foundation dealing with (ethnic) humour, the second of which (“Contemporary jokelore: postsocialism – Internet – cognitivity”) ends in December 2009. Her research interests involve ethnic and political humour, cultural studies, postsocialism and emotions, Internet studies. She has published 14 articles on humour.

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GENERAL

POST-SOCIALIST, SOCIALIST AND NEVER-SOCIALIST JOKES AND HUMOUR: CONTINUITIES AND CONTRASTS

Christie Davies

Abstract

Post-socialist jokes and humour are best understood by comparing them with the jokes and political anecdotes of the socialist period and with the jokes and humour of democratic societies that have never experienced socialism and then looking for continuities and contrasts. The concept of a 'post-socialist society' let alone the empirical study of the humour of such a society is fraught with difficulties. The aim of this paper is to indicate these problems and to seek ways round them by trying to define the characteristics of a socialist (as opposed to a democratic) society and its jokes and then asking what are the consequences of this for understanding post-socialist jokes and humour. How does this new post-socialist humour differ from that of 'never-socialist' societies? Can it be said that the quality of the jokes was, better under socialism than in either of the other two cases? One of the key differences between socialist societies and one that had important consequences for jokes under socialism was the distinction between the Russians as the dominant people at a time of socialist imperialism and the subordinate peoples. What implications does it have for post-socialist perceptions, identities and joking? A second important factor was the differing economic fortunes of countries after the collapse of socialism and in particular Russia in the 1990s and Germany after reunification which produced new jokes peculiar to those countries.

Key words: jokes, New Russians, Ossis and Wessis, political anecdotes, post-socialism, socialism

Post-socialist jokes are best understood by comparing them with the much larger and more distinctive body of jokes generated under socialism and with the humour of societies that have never been socialist. Such a comparison of necessity requires us to make explicit the distinguishing characteristics of socialist societies as contrasted with modern, democratic, non-socialist societies. Only then can we have an idea of what it means to be post-socialist and to ask the question what are the special characteristics of the jokes and humour of such a society.

It is much easier to define what we mean by a socialist than by a post-socialist society and the jokes and humour of the former are far more clearly related to its clear and distinctive social structure than is the case for the very varied societies that have come into being since the collapse of socialism in Europe.

THE NATURE OF SOCIALISM

Socialist societies and the socialist jokes and humour they generate are in some respects straightforward to define and to understand. An ideal-typical (Weber 1948) socialist society is characterised by an autocratic one-party system in which the people are denied the right to be able to “turn the rascals out” at election time. The Party lays down the single permitted ideology that is not only a political statement but also a kind of secular religion and enthusiasm for it is compulsory (Tamarkhin 1984). Such socialist societies have a centrally planned economy with no ownership of private productive property (capital), except perhaps for small plots of land, and no free markets or at least very limited ones. Socialist societies have a very weak civil society; the independence of such institutions as churches, professional associations, scientific bodies, labour unions or voluntary welfare organisations is severely restricted and in some cases such bodies are prohibited altogether (Gellner 1994). As a consequence of these peculiar, indeed defining, social structures, there tends to be heavy censorship, extensive spying on and intrusion into the lives of individual citizens and a massive military, police and legal apparatus (Andrew & Mitrokhin 2000, 2005) with arbitrary powers of punishment for coercing ordinary people into conformity and even feigned enthusiasm. The degree to which the latter is employed may have varied a great deal but it was always there for potential use and everyone knew that it was there. When it was used with its greatest ferocity, tens of millions of people were murdered or deliberately starved to death and many more tortured or sent to camps (Curtois 1999; Davies 1997; Dolon 1985; Rummel 1990; Werth 1999). A socialist society is one dominated by a planned and coercive order directed by the state (Hirsztowicz 1986) in contrast to the spontaneous order of the market place, a system of common law evolving case by case, or the aggregate outcomes of scientific endeavour (Barry 1982; Polanyi 1951). It is the visible fist not the hidden hand.

JOKES UNDER SOCIALISM

Popular jokes in socialist societies are much more directly generated by the very nature of the society than is the case in other more open and plural societies, where power is more dispersed and censorship more limited. Because in a socialist society the existing political, economic and ideological structures may not be openly disputed or opposed, there exists an enormous corpus of jokes that sneak round these prohibitions in exactly the same sense that jokes about sex or death do more generally.

In a society where there can be open and public disagreement about political and economic matters, there is a relative absence of the kind of jokes that not merely characterised but dominated social interaction between individuals in a socialist society. In countries with a more traditional and less intrusive autocratic government such as Franco's Spain (Payne 2000) or the Shah's Iran or Greece under the Colonels there were many jokes about the rulers themselves (García 1977, Pi-Sunyer 1977) but nothing like the breadth, ingenuity and richness of the political jokes that were to be found throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe under socialism. The more areas in which the government is dominant, the more there is to joke about because everything is controlled and politicised including even the physical sciences (Langdon-Davies 1949; Popovsky 1980).

Political jokes under socialism could cover all areas of life because everything was politicised. What is particularly striking about many socialist jokes is the way in which they begin with utterly varied scripts: women's arses, inventions, paintings, children in the countryside, simple census questions that seem to have nothing to do with politics and yet in the punch line a new opposed script (Raskin 1985) suddenly presents some absurdity of socialism. It does not matter where you start; you always come to the same expected political place but in a way and by a route that is utterly unexpected and in consequence hilarious. One consequence of this is that the jokes invented by the people were better, more intricate, more ingenious, more numerous, more demanding and more profound (see Krikmann 2004: 241) than those now told in post-socialist societies. They were the only superior commodity produced under socialism but then the jokers were private enterprise and part of a spontaneous order, almost a market.

A Nigerian, a Frenchman and a Russian were arguing as to which one's wife had the best arse.

"Mine," said the Nigerian, "it is the biggest one anyone has ever seen."

“Size isn’t everything,” retorted the Frenchman, “my wife has the shapeliest arse and it wiggles so gracefully.”

“Listen,” said the Russian, “when I leave for work, I always give my wife’s arse a good slap and yet it is still vibrating when I come home from work ... but that is because we have the shortest working day in the world!”

(Told to the author by a Russian academic, early 1980s)

Who invented barbed wire?

Michurin. He crossed earthworms with hedgehogs.

(Beckmann 1980: 67; Kolasky 1972: 111)

What is the difference between painters of the naturalist, impressionist and the socialist realist schools? The naturalists paint as they see, the impressionists as they feel, the socialist realists as they are told.

(Lewis 2006)

A schoolteacher is taking her children from a city-school on a country walk, when they see a very young hare. The children have never seen a hare before. “Do you know who this is?” asks the teacher. No one knows. “Come on children,” says the teacher, “surely you know? He’s a loveable character in many stories, songs and poems that we all read.” One of the children strokes the little hare gently and says reverently, “I always wanted to meet you, Grandpa Lenin!”

(Anon.)

Russian census taker: Where do you live? – Leningrad.

Where were you born? – St. Petersburg.

Where did you go to school? – Petrograd.

Where would you like to live? – St. Petersburg.

(Told to the author by Alexander Shtromas 1981 or 1982. He told me at the time that it would happen and it did. See also Shtromas 1981)

The only European society in any way comparable with the Soviet Union and its dependencies for jokes was National Socialist Germany under Hitler, 1933–1945 (Gamm 1979) but then Nazi Germany had many similar characteristics: a single party with an unchallengeable crackpot ideology bent on the radical transformation of society, a government that was the key economic player with priority given to armaments, heavy censorship not only of political matters but of art, philosophy, science and literature, the subordination of civil society and a strong machinery for repressing not merely opponents but doubters lacking in enthusiasm or expressing heretical opinions. Unlike dictatorships which are based on a customary social order and demand only acquiescence, Nazism was an alternative form of a military and socialist society and generated similar jokes. *Genossen* and

Volksgenossen were truly comrades and the master race and the Marxist race had much in common. If Hitler, like Stalin, had eventually been succeeded by a Brezhnev, jokes would have flourished there even more strongly.

There is a great deal of argument about the meaning and function of jokes in a socialist society – were they protest or accommodation, protest or safety valve, opposition or cynical acceptance (see discussions by Draitser 1989; Larsen 1980; Oring 2004; Speier 1998; Yurchak 1997; Zlobin 1996). After all the jokes were also enjoyed and even invented by members of the elite who had much to lose if the system should crumble (Deriabin & Gibney 1962). However, at the macro level there is a clear goodness of fit between the social order and the jokes it generates.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF DEFINING POST-SOCIALIST SOCIETY

It is much more difficult to define what constitutes a ‘post-socialist’ society. The very term ‘post-socialist’ is problematic, for the same reason that it makes little sense to speak of post-industrial, post-modern or post-colonial societies. No doubt if in the future most people work at home on personal computers, some sociologist will speak of a post-office society. It is quite impossible to get any agreement on what ‘post’ societies are. Post-modern societies are merely modern societies with a greater degree of variation in their culture and style than their immediate predecessors (Davies 1990), not a different kind of society but a variant on modernity. Post-industrial societies are industrial societies based on the same old iron-cage (Weber 1930) but in which services are a greater part of the GNP and manufacturing a smaller. The idea of a ‘post-colonial’ society is an ideological device for enabling the politicians of a society that many years before was a colony to excuse their present deficiencies by blaming their ever-receding colonial past. If we look at ex-colonies as diverse as New Zealand, Korea, Greece, Libya, Singapore, Surinam, Angola, Madagascar or Mongolia, it is clear that their differences are so much greater and more important than their similarities that the term is of limited use. Let us hope that the term post-socialism does not also become a vehicle for muddled and self-interested accounts of societies, which by now may have not much in common other than an ever-receding period in their history that happened to be socialist. Perhaps the best way to use ‘post-socialist’ is as with the British term ‘post-war’, used in and now about the late 1940s

to signify that the war had ended, that society had been changed and scarred by it and that many features of war-time life such as rationing and controls had persisted. Britain in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is still in a sense a post-war society but so much else has happened since, that the use of the term is restricted to the years immediately after the second war. As historical periods, whether wars, socialism or rule by outsiders recede in time, so the idea of 'post' gradually decays and crumbles into sawdust. The phrase 'post-war' is no longer applicable and over time the same thing happens to 'post-socialist'. For this reason when discussing post-socialism I shall restrict myself to considering the 1990s, the time immediately after the collapse of socialism.

AFTER SOCIALISM: THE POST-SOCIALIST AND THE NEVER-SOCIALIST

It is now close to twenty years since the first fall of socialism and the Soviet Empire and what is most striking is how very different the successor states have become. Some have by now nearly shrugged off the legacy of socialism, others are still enmired in it, or at least have not succeeded in creating a truly viable unsocialist polity and economy. Some of the newly independent formerly socialist countries such as the Czech Republic are democratic and have reasonably free economies, indeed the Czech Republic is superior to France in both these respects (according to the "Index of economic Freedom" 2007), even though France never experienced communist rule. By contrast, many of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia have but little democracy and there are places where a state oligarchy in effect still controls the economy. Is it the case that the Czechs have merely reverted to what they had been before the socialists seized power, namely a democratic and trading people, by cultural instinct? But in that case, how do the Czechs differ from the British who have never suffered real socialism? If the jokes and humour of these two countries differ, it may well be for other reasons rooted in a great variety of cultural preferences and traditions, rather than because one of them is post-socialist and the other never has been socialist. Similarly how would jokes and humour about economic matters differ in post-socialist countries newly converted to the free market such as Estonia and those where economic freedom has long operated such as Switzerland?

POLITICAL JOKES AND HUMOUR IN NEVER-SOCIALIST AND IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

Institutions such as multi-party democracy with fair and regular elections and a free market based on private property with a just and secure legal system for assessing and enforcing contracts, freedom of speech, assembly and association and an absence of a police state do not give rise to large numbers of popular *anekdoti* in the way socialism did. In the ‘unsocialist’ society there is a good deal of jokes and humour about politics, the economy, lawyers and the legal system, the police and the ideology of political correctness but it is fragmented – it is humour about sections of society that have a great deal of autonomy, not jokes about a single system. The cartoon strips about Britain’s Prime Minister Gordon Brown and about his rival Dave ‘Snooty’ Cameron in “Private Eye”, American Bushisms, German Kohlwitzes, and jokes about particular political parties are about politics but they are not about democracy as a system. Jokes and humour about hard-hearted bank-managers, fat-cat financiers, bloody-minded labour union leaders, useless business consultants, trivial advertisers, devious lawyers, inflexible police officers, are about aspects of economic life, legal procedures and the maintenance of order but not about an entire tightly integrated system. Also much of it, including jokes, is direct satire and mockery performed on radio and television, in films and in stage theatre or published in books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets and websites, and there are a variety of very different individual authors with very different styles. There is a movement of jokes back and forth between the people and the writers and performers of humour. Under socialism jokes took over the functions that satire was unable to perform and in consequence there was a curious degree of homogeneity about them. The socialist targets were all related and there was only one author, a collective author – the people. There was uniformity about the political jokes in the various socialist countries, far more so than there was in democratic countries which rapidly shared joke cycles about blondes or Scotsmen but not jokes about politics. A Belgian would not have known or told or even understood a political joke about Kekkonen or Edward Heath. By contrast, socialist jokes used to circulate rapidly between relatively liberal socialist countries such as Poland or Hungary and severely repressive ones such as East Germany (DDR) or Romania (Cochran 1989; Banc & Dundes 1986, 1990). The names of local politicians might be switched but the themes remained constant – the stupid leadership, the absurd

and tangled ideology of Marxism-Leninism that intruded everywhere, the slogans and proclamations that had little connection with reality, the muddle of planning and the shortage of consumer goods, the absence of freedom and the presence of informers and arbitrary arrest. It was as if socialism had been a great grim monolith seen in comic and distorted form in a single huge mirror held up anonymously by the entire people. There were no individual authors.

Official socialist satire tended to be monotone because with few exceptions its authors were directed tendentiously from above. Approved journals with sharp and prickly names such as Crocodile, Nettles, Porcupine, Hornet, Stag Beetle, Thistle (Chamberlin 1957; Oring 2004; Sanders 1962, 1982; Talmadge 1943) would publish satires and cartoons telling off in a mocking or even savage way the little people in the front line who had to deal directly with angry workers, clients and customers; they had to carry the can for the failures of those above them. No one powerful was ever mocked in this way, nor was the political and economic system and editors could be sacked for getting too close to the boundary of the permissible. As Emil Draitser, formerly a Soviet humorist on “Krokodil”, once told me – “it was not even enough to know who was who, you had to know who might become who”.

Socialist humour then had two opposed forms and faces, the anonymous jokes of the multitude and the published humour managed by the powerful which was intended to correct rather than to amuse.

Non-socialist societies by contrast have little in the way of official state-controlled humour and popular humour is far more like a kaleidoscope than a single mirror. A variety of loosely connected facets of society are deformed and laughed at in a great variety of mirrors set at odd angles to one another. To the extent that post-socialist jokes and humour resemble this model of the jokes and humour of the never-socialist countries, the trickier the concept of a distinctive post-socialist humour becomes.

THE PRESENCE OF SOCIALISM IN POST-SOCIALIST HUMOUR

How then would we expect the jokes and humour of post-socialist society to differ both from those of socialist societies on the one hand and the never-socialist countries on the other? The answer lies in the past and in the way that past remains with us. We should look first at the institutions that have managed to survive the transition from social-

ism to post-socialism and also at the indelible damage that socialism wrought, both of which are still causing problems many years later: we should look at both survivors and consequences. There is also another socialist past, that is still with us, the remembered past, both a memory however distorted of the real and actual past and a memory of the jokes that were told during that past. For post-socialist countries, that past was once the present but for the never-socialist countries it happened somewhere else. The more intelligent and better read inhabitants of the Western never-socialist countries were often well-informed about the harsh realities of socialism (Conquest 1971, 1972; Haraszti 1977; Szamuely 1969) and understood and appreciated socialist jokes, particularly when they were exported, translated and placed in context (Beckmann 1969, 1980; Brunvand 1973; Chamberlin 1957; Kolasky 1972; Talmadge 1943). Westerners liked them for their humorous and indeed aesthetic and intellectual qualities. In the 1970s and 1980s, paperback translations of socialist jokes into English, French and German were commercially successful in Western countries (Dolgoplova 1983; Draitser 1978; Isnard 1977; Kolasky 1972; Meyer & Meyer 1978; Drozdzyński 1977; Reiningger 1981; Schiff 1975, 1978; Schiff & Parth 1978; Zand 1982). However, their readers had never experienced socialism at first hand and could feel neither the sheer force of the jokes nor the extra thrill and release of tension derived from telling and hearing forbidden political jokes in a socialist society. There are forbidden jokes in democratic countries, such as certain kinds of sex jokes, jokes about despised but protected minorities or sick jokes that in consequence gain an extra savour from being shared in private or when told by a comedian whose speciality they are, but they are not jokes about an entire powerful system and so they do not have the same impact or importance. You can provide a reasonably good account of the history of Soviet Russia through its jokes (Adams 2005); to do that for an open and plural society would be impossible.

The degree to which the institutions and consequences of socialism survive differs greatly from one post-socialist country to another. If such a country is ruled by an oligarchy substantially controlling the economy, then socialist style jokes may well survive and be re-cycled, adapted and become the inspiration of new jokes, particularly if the new oligarchy's members were already powerful before the collapse of socialism. The memory of the old socialist jokes will prove a resource for a humour about the imperfections of a socialist kind that have persisted. This will especially be the case if there are still restrictions on

freedom of expression or if they have been reimposed. Yet the more likely outcome for the jokes of these restrictive post-socialist societies is not that socialist jokes will revive in their original rich form but that jokes similar to those told in Franco's Spain, a country that was authoritarian and repressed opposition but did not extend its reach into all areas of life as socialism did, will arise.

There is a further difference that has implications for post-socialist joking. Some countries have fully come to terms with the evil period in their history called socialism and exposed the activities of those of their countrymen (including some still alive) who created and sustained it. Many of those guilty of crime or collaboration have even been put on trial but elsewhere the past is covered up or denied and the guilty still occupy positions of privilege or at least comfort.

There are in several countries (see websites listed below) museums of communism, terror and occupation open to the public that are a witness to the horrors of past but elsewhere museums remain or are in the process of being created that actually celebrate Lenin and Stalin (see websites). But if the perception and display of the past can differ to this extent in post-socialist societies, does it not suggest that there will be equally wide variations in the kind of humour and jokes that characterise the post-socialist period? It is a matter for further investigation.

THE SPECIAL CASE OF JOKES AND HUMOUR UNDER POST-SOCIALIST FAILURE

Some ex-socialist countries, notably Russia (but also, in a very different way, East Germany) failed to flourish under capitalism in the 1990s. In the case of Russia, those who had been in a strong position under the rule of Communist Party were able to obtain the assets of the state in corrupt ways when these were privatised (Adams 2005: 159). The absence of a proper system of commercial law and banking and of a tradition of open, honest, regular trading led to new economic problems when the economy went post-socialist under Yeltsin (Whitlock 1995: 229–233). There was the growth of a class of shady racketeers whose activities lay on the border between the legal and the criminal (Adams 2005: 160). This was the basis of jokes about New Russians who had become rich quickly by dubious methods and flaunted their wealth in a vulgar and offensive way before the eyes of an impoverished and often more cultured population. In Seth Graham's (2003a: 206–207; see also Graham 2003) list of 34 collections of

anecdotes brought out by the Minsk publishing house Literatura by 1998, there are three separate volumes of jokes about New Russians whereas other targets, including such risible ones as Alcoholics, Blacks, English Lords, Husbands and their wives' Lovers, and the Militia only get one volume each. It was clearly the dominant joke cycle of the early and mid 1990s in Russia.

"Father, all the lads at school go there on the bus and I feel left out, because the chauffeur always takes me in the car."

New Russian: "Don't worry, my boy. I will buy you a bus of your own and you can travel in the same way as all the others."

(Anon.)

New Russian: "Look at my splendid new necktie, I bought it for twenty roubles at the boutique on the corner."

Second New Russian: "You've been swindled. You could have got it for twice the price at the place next door."

(Anon.)

Viktor wants to go out with Anna. Anna: "Does your father have a Mercedes?" – Viktor: "No."

Anna: "Well, does your father have a three-story house in the country?" she asks. – "No."

*Anna: "In that case you can f*** off."*

Victor goes home and tells his father how he was rejected. The father calls up his chauffeur on his mobile phone: "Ivan, go and sell one of the Rolls Royces and buy a Mercedes." He then says to his son: "But there is no way I am going to knock down the top two stories of our dacha just to please that silly girl of yours."

(Anon.)

A New Russian urgently needs a new bookkeeper. "I've got an excellent candidate in mind," says his manager, "but he's still got half a year to serve."

(Adams 2005: 164)

Yet in what sense are these jokes post-socialist in nature? They are certainly post-socialist in that they emerged from the special conditions that existed in a particular society: in Russia, after the collapse of socialism. On the other hand there are echoes of such jokes and humour in the never-socialist countries, told about *arrivistes* and *nouveaux-riches* of any kind. It is a fine line between a *nouveau riche* and *novyi russkiy*. This is particularly the case when relative incomes have been suddenly transformed by events. In a democratic country such as Britain the nearest traumatic experience to East European socialism

and post-socialism has been the two world wars and their aftermath and it is worth comparing the kinds of jokes told at these different periods. In Britain after the First World War it was realised that there had been a major disruption of the social order. Some had become rich quickly from the manufacture and sale of armaments and other forms of war production and were popularly seen as profiteers who had thrived while others suffered. A future Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said in disgust in 1918 that many of the newly elected members of the British Parliament were “a lot of hard-faced men who look as if they had done very well out of the war” (Keynes 1919). After the war, jokes about Mr. and Mrs. Newrich or Mr. and Mrs. Warprofit circulated particularly among the established or cultured classes, many of whom were now *nouveaux pauvres*, people in reduced circumstances due to inflation, taxes, wartime bereavement and economic disruption. Mr. Bott the millionaire and his wife who speaks ‘common’ in Richmal Crompton’s best-selling British series of humorous ‘William’ stories and books that she began in 1921 are comic characters drawn from this vulgar new rich class. There was a general humour at the expense of this class:

MAN OF WEALTH (to his son home for the holidays): “... and why don’t you like your fur coat? I’ll bet none of the other boys ‘ave got one.”

SON: “Yes but none of the other boys have to be called ‘Skunky’...”

(“Mr. Punch’s Children’s Hour” 1933: 234, see also p. 198)

The two sets of jokes differ but they have enough in common to make us want to question once again exactly what we mean by post-socialist. Perhaps these Russian post-socialist jokes like the British post-war jokes of the 1920s or British jokes about spivs, drones and wideboys getting rich in the black markets of 1940s austerity are best seen as part of a bigger set of jokes dealing with times when many people had a sense of frustrated hopes and expectations, even decay, and when the sudden wealth of the unscrupulous or undeserving in the face of others’ decline was much resented.

THE FAILURE OF POST-SOCIALIST EAST GERMANY AND GERMAN JOKES

In a very different way the Eastern part of Germany, the former DDR, also experienced economic failure after reunification with West Germany, the new *Anschluss*. Half a century and more of socialism had destroyed the entrepreneurial spirit of the East German people. There

was no ‘German miracle’ of economic development in the DDR as there had been in post World War II West Germany after 1948. Although the tradition of German technical superiority had enabled East Germany to be a great centre of manufacturing for the Eastern block under socialism, by West German standards the industry there was backward and uncompetitive and the economy inflexible, producing inferior products and wrecking the environment with pollution (Smyser 1992: 162–164). Many of the old industries collapsed after unification. The rapid integration of East Germany into a unified Germany with a single currency and welfare system and, in consequence, comparable labour costs meant that West German industrialists had no incentive to invest in Eastern Germany. Why incur high labour costs for low labour productivity by investing there? Instead the industrialists preferred to buy into Skoda in the Czech Republic and to invest in Hungary or Slovakia (or even in the Russian Kaliningrad triangle), where the rate of return on investment was higher. In consequence, the provinces of the former East Germany experienced something close to economic collapse with factories closing and high unemployment. It could be twenty years more before living standards are the same in the East and West of Germany. The government of a now reunited Germany tried to remedy this with a massive public works programme to renew the cities and infrastructure and restore the historic monuments of its Eastern *Länder*. Yet this meant taxing the citizens of the never-socialist West Germany to subsidise the failed economy of the post-socialist former East Germany (Hancock 1994: 249–250; Smyser 1992: 35–36, 159). It was a recipe for social division and it led to the creation of the new identities of ‘Ossi’ (Easterner) and ‘Wessi’ (Westerner) and the multiplication of Ossi and Wessi jokes based on the enduring contrast between the prosperous, efficient never-socialist and the ineffective and subsidised post-socialist parts of the country. The Ossis are represented as gauche and useless and the Wessis, the *Besserwessis* (from *Besserwisser*, know-it-all) as arrogant.

*An Ossi says to a Wessi: “We are one people.”
“So are we,” replies the Wessi.*

(Anon.)

*What do you get when you cross an Ossi with a Wessi?
An arrogant bastard on the dole.*

(Anon.)

These are clearly post-socialist jokes, emerging from a situation that was a direct result of the problems left over from socialism but there

are parallels with other never socialist countries that have major differences between regions where one is prosperous and the other backward such as the North and South of Italy, again a problem accentuated by a clumsy and over-rapid reunification.

WHY UNDER SOCIALISM WERE THE RUSSIANS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER EAST EUROPEAN NATIONS IN THEIR POSITION AND THEIR JOKES ALIKE?

Under socialism there was one major difference between the serious and humorous perceptions of the Russians and of the other nations. The Russians were not only the dominant nation of that great prison house of the nationalities, the USSR but also the conquerors, oppressors and colonizers of many other countries, mainly in Eastern Europe. Imperialism is the highest stage of socialism.

The Russians often featured in the jokes of those whom they oppressed, and in jokes people tend to get lumped in with their governments, even if they did not choose those governments. The initially violent and later arrogant behaviour of ordinary individual Russians in the countries they had conquered did not help matters.

The Russian and Hungarian governments have concluded a new treaty over the navigation of the Danube. The Russians have control over traffic up and down the river and the Hungarians the right to cross from shore to shore.

(Anon.)

Under a new economic agreement between Poland and Russia the Russians will take all Poland's coal and in return the Poles will give Russia all their wheat.

(Anon.)

It would be interesting to know whether these jokes achieved any great success in Russia, where the one popular feeling that did underpin the regime was Great Russian chauvinism, the sense that Russia was a great military power that could dominate other countries and whose glory was shared by even the humblest Russian. The ordinary Russian worker had little to be proud of in terms of personal achievement or material possessions but he could feel proud of being a member of the Marxist race, the Russians, the tramp of whose soldiers' boots was shaking the world. A distant victory over some lesser people, triumphantly celebrated on television or a parade of tanks and missiles in Moscow compensated for living in one squalid room. The Russians were lousy but loyal.

One key scapegoat of the regime was the Jews (Vaksberg 1994; Johnson 2007), which, of course, meshed with popular anti-Semitism. In consequence, an important thread in the jokes of the socialist period was Jewish jokes about anti-Semitism (Harris & Rabinovich 1988). The jokes are two-sided since although they make the socialist regime look ridiculous, they also imply that its anti-Semitism has popular support among ordinary Russians.

A telephone rings in a communal apartment:

“Can I talk to Moishe, please?”

“There’s no-one of that name here.”

“Then, can I speak to Misha, please?”

“MOISHE, it’s for you!”

(See also Draitser 1998)

The headmaster came into a classroom in a Moscow school and announced:

“A delegation from Syria is coming to look at the school tomorrow – Finkelstein, Shapiro and Ivanov by your mother’s surname should not attend.”

A visitor to Odessa could not find a phonebook. He was told: “They had to be confiscated. They were used to list all the names of the Zionist spies and saboteurs in Odessa. Then to hide the fact they added in the names of all the other people in alphabetical order.”

A worker became a political instructor in his area. After his first day the local party leader asked him how it had gone. “Fine, but that Zhid, Khaimovich asked a provocative anti-Soviet question. He asked: ‘Can you tell us please how many republics there are in the Soviet Union?’”

“What did you answer?”

“It wasn’t easy but I managed to get out of it. I told the Jew bastard to go stuff himself.”

In what circles would these jokes have circulated in Soviet Russia? How would they have been perceived by non-Jewish Russians, some of whom would have been anti-Semitic? They are jokes about fellow-victims of socialism but also about a group to whom popular attitudes were, shall we say, ambivalent.

RUSSIAN REAL AND HUMOROUS UNIQUENESS IN A POST-SOCIALIST WORLD

The above discussion should draw our attention to a key distinction between post-socialist Russia and the other post-socialist countries. For the other countries becoming post-socialist was also to become independent and to get rid of quisling governments. It was a double liberation. For the Jews it meant that the personal anti-Semitism of or-

dinary Russians was, for the time being at least, no longer sponsored, reinforced and implemented by official policy. For the Russians, however, post-socialism also brought with it a post-imperial sense of loss of national power, national importance and national self-confidence. It must have been all the more devastating because it coincided with the economic chaos of the 1990s. For Estonians or Czechs, socialism had been an unmitigated disaster, for it involved a brutal foreign occupier as well as an oppressive social order, but many Russians may well feel nostalgia for the time when they lived in an ordered society that seemed about to rule the world. What are the implications of this for the study of post-socialist humour? Should we accept the view that the increased intensity of Russian ethnic joking in the post-socialist 1990s, notably about Chukchis, Ukrainians and Georgians (Draitser 1998) was a product of the loss of pride by an also even more impoverished Russian people? They were no longer able to console themselves for their wretched living conditions with fantasies of Soviet, that is to say Russian, power and glory.

Thus post-socialism has in many ways a quite different meaning for the Russians than for the others. For the others it meant collective national and cultural liberation as well as individual freedom and a chance to control their own economic destiny, whether they will be successful or not. True, the Russians as individuals were released from the oppressive nonsense of Marxist-Leninism but collectively they lost out not just in power but also in social, cultural and linguistic influence.

Whereas the British relinquished control over the British Empire slowly and without internal political disruption and were able to retain cordial relationships with most of their former dependencies, the Russian Empire collapsed suddenly and traumatically, as a consequence of an economic and political crisis in Russia itself. Many of the Russians former colonies and dependencies immediately erased the relics of the Russian aspect of socialism, including the use of the Russian language. Educated Indians and Nigerians still speak English, even to each other, but, despite its great literature, the Russian language has been widely rejected because it was the language of a backward and oppressive socialist system and not a useful language of modernity. In Mongolia, after independence, they immediately ceased to write Mongolian in the Cyrillic alphabet. All street signs were changed to use a combination of their own traditional alphabet and the Latin one. For Slavophiles in Russia, who, entirely justifiably, take a great pride in the Russian literary tradition, this must have been a

great blow, one comparable to the hurt felt by the French when their language, which had once been the *lingua franca* of diplomats and aristocrats, ceased to be widely known or used except in menus. What would Kamyshev and Alphonse Ludovikovitch (Chekhov 2003) have made of it all? The collapse of Russian power and for a time of the Russian economy meant that the Russian language must have become central to their national pride and identity, as it had been in the nineteenth century. For the Estonians the restoration of their own native language to its rightful pre-eminence is simply justice, as is the moving to a more suitable place of a brutal invader's war-memorials (Erelt 2007), but for the Russians it is a humiliating reminder of their world relegation. Can we perhaps see here the basis of the strange popularity in Russian post-socialist jokes about the mistakes Estonians make when speaking Russian, jokes that are far more common than they were under socialism?

THE CRISIS OF POST-SOCIALIST JOKES?

In the years immediately after the fall of socialism there was a great flurry of published collections of socialist jokes in the post-socialist countries since they could now be freely published but their popularity waned in time (Graham 2003a: 214) because they no longer spoke about the immediate realities of everyday life and because they were no longer forbidden. No hegemony, no jokes. Fewer new ones were being invented and they depended on memories that in time were bound to fade, particularly as a post-socialist generation grew up for whom it was history. Also with the removal of severe censorship, new and interesting rivals to the exchange of jokes, namely humorous publications with known authors and commercial comedy produced for profit were developed. In many cases they were foreign products dubbed and dumped in the post-socialist countries, an example of the McDonaldisation of humour.

Why is McDonald's superior to the human body?

It takes the human body 24 hours to turn food into shit. McDonald's do it in five minutes...

Jokes remain a crucial and central aspect of modern folklore in post-socialist societies as they have long done in the never-socialist societies, but many must feel a sense of nostalgia for the good old jokes of the bad old days. Why were they so good and why is it so difficult in a post-socialist world to maintain that standard?

My hypothesis is that jokes under socialism were unique in that the intellectuals became strongly involved in the creation of popular folklore. They became part of the folk because there was no permitted high culture through which they could express their humour of alienation. The intellectuals and the broad masses may have had different tastes in jokes but they belonged to a common culture of joking. Everyone enjoyed exchanging context free, tightly constructed, humorous narratives and riddles. To know many jokes and to tell them well was a social asset, particularly in the time of Brezhnev (Beam 1982; Draitsner 1978; Yurchak 1997). In Russia there was the added advantage that many of the intellectuals were Jewish, the people of the joke (Davies 2002).

Now the intellectuals have tended to retreat from joking, retire into high culture, and even find employment in commercial humour such as advertising or broadcasting. There is a danger that a situation may arise as has happened in the Netherlands (Kuipers 2006) where the intellectuals come actively to dislike jokes and to distance themselves from them as a means of asserting their cultural superiority to the common people. However, in more egalitarian societies such as Australia or the United States this has not happened, though it has to be said that the generality of jokes in these countries, with the exception of Jewish jokes (Davies 2002) lack the sophistication of the best of those told under socialism. I also doubt that it will happen in the post-socialist countries, precisely because of the past experience of a common culture of joke telling. The jokes about New Russians were very likely fuelled by the resentments of the intellectual classes.

What may become more of a problem is fragmentation. Under socialism there was a common set of experiences and a shared target. Now, jokes fall apart; the centre cannot hold. There have always been jokes that are only fully understood by members of a particular specialism but these are going to increase – such jokes are the valuable and meaningful folklore of, say, surgeons, of mathematicians, of statisticians, of computer experts, of different types of scientist but they are hardly part of a common folk culture. Such tendencies are discernible in never-socialist societies, though paradoxically mitigated by the World Wide Web which allows us to spy on the esoteric folklore of the specialists which they increasingly choose to place there. It remains to be seen how the joking of post-socialist societies develops in a world that is far more global and yet far less homogenous than that of socialism.

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See also

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<http://www.stalinmuseum.ge/>

ESTONIA

POLITICAL JOKES IN POST-SOCIALIST ESTONIA (2000–2007)

Liisi Laineste

Abstract

Estonian contemporary political jokes offer insight into several issues discussed in humour studies, including the interdependence of jokes and social reality, and on a broader scale also the dependence of jokes on the political regime into which they are born. The article surveys Estonian political jokes on the Estonian Internet (www.delfi.ee/jokes) in the period 2000 – 2007. The material covers both “old” and “new” jokes, as they exist side by side. The analysis concerns the nearly 800-strong collection of political jokes accessible on the humour site. The jokes are analysed from three points of view: first, how actual political events may have influenced the number and contents of the jokes, second, the inner structure of the category of political jokes, to reveal whether this could indicate a shift towards the depoliticisation of certain (e.g. animal or vocational) jokes; and third, whether the recent transition from totalitarianism to democracy may have caused some change in the target choice of jokelore. Thus, against a pervasive background of old Soviet jokes, the article will put the contemporary joke traditions into context, in order to discuss the main targets, popularity and directions of the contemporary political joke.

Key words: humour, political jokes, ethnic jokes, post-socialist, Internet

INTRODUCTION

The article will give an account of contemporary Estonian political jokes, most of all their general characteristics, possible subcategories and popularity in recent years, focusing on Internet jokes. We will see how political jokes react to local and global events, acting as cognitive tools that help to comment on daily politics in a playful way, performing the role of a more or less subtle parody. So far Estonian ethnic jokes have already been studied to some extent (see Laineste 2005a; Krikmann, this volume). This article focuses on political jokes. Distinguishing ethnic from political jokes is not an easy task: on many occasions the categories of political and ethnic jokes tend to fuse and form a distinct category so typical to Eastern Europe, the ethno-political

joke. The targets of these jokes are ludicrously behaving ethnic neighbours, but also the much-loathed political oppressors, and these two may end up in being just one target. The recent development of more distinct categories will be traced. Another characteristic feature of post-socialist jokes is the coexistence and interaction of old Soviet and new or modified / adapted / recycled political jokes. The changes in their popularity inevitably lead towards the discussion of national identity and its construction. Getting to terms with and – in a way – opposing past heritage in contemporary traditions is an important part of a nation's self-identification. The intertextuality of contemporary jokes is examined, to reveal the presence of these complex identity issues. The rejection of old jokes reflects only a section of a nation's struggle to define itself: the choice of new targets, and in some cases the switching of old targets for new ones, is also an identification of new perspectives based on inclusion ("us") and exclusion ("others"), indicating our opinions and fears. The results will, all in all, demonstrate how the political reality of a post-socialist society is reflected in jokes.

In post-socialist societies, complex changes are taking place in jokelore, and in the performing and telling of jokes. There are several reasons for this change: first, the regained independence in Estonia and the consequent transition from being a periphery of a huge totalitarian society into a free democratic nation state, secondly, globalisation, which is altering jokes in the same way it is affecting all kinds of traditions worldwide, and thirdly, the dawn of the Internet era and the high level of computerisation that has transformed joke-telling practices. Political jokes were among the first to undergo these changes.

In describing the present situation, we can give a full account only when considering both the specific, contemporary background and the historic perspective, and in addition to this, the media where the material appears. It is thus necessary, alongside the newer jokes that characterise most of the contemporary active joke tradition, to describe old Soviet (political) jokes. Their tradition was very vital, and had a great effect on thinking about political jokes in general (at least in the former Soviet bloc), besides it is still a distinct though diminishing category among contemporary political jokes.

JOKES AND THEIR RELATIONS TO SOCIAL REALITY

Most jokes (in Freud's terms *tendentious jokes* (Freud 1905/1989) are, according to some humour scholars, a (distorting) mirror of the society they are born or adapted into (Douglas 1968; Linke & Dundes 1988). There are some, who, after stating the relationship of the joke and its object, also advocate the aggressive effect or consequences of these "ugly" jokes and try to refrain from citing them to avoid further "pollution" (Billig 2001) thus outlining the relationship between the joke and its target as possibly harmful to the subject (in the same vein, several psychological studies have supported the hypotheses that aggressive / sexist jokes predispose subjects to hostile sexism, e.g. Ryan & Kanjorski (1998); or diminish self-directed negative affect for enjoying the jokes as maintained by Ford, Wentzel & Lorion (2001)). On the other hand, many relevant studies (e.g. Dundes & Hauschild 1983) have refrained from becoming involved in the problems of reception, and for them the essence can be revealed without examining the effect of jokes. It is enough to describe the joke text and its broader social context. They (e.g. Dundes & Hauschild 1983) believe that even if the picture we see there is unsettling or even downright disgusting, it is in part still the ugly essence of the actual feelings and thus needs to be studied, described, and perhaps brought forward as a question worth discussing in public, in order to raise awareness of our prejudices. These studies support the safety valve theory, claiming that jokes express the aggressive impulses that would otherwise be painfully inhibited. Yet others maintain (Davies 1998) that jokes have little to do with actual stereotypes or real feelings of distress. Jokes express emotions, but not only (or rather: primarily) at times of greater oppression or perceived threats. In the times of conflict, there tend to be more apt measures than jokes to deal with the problems. Jokes are elicited by other factors. Peaks in creating jokes and telling them coincide with periods of decay of political regimes, diminishing tensions etc. According to this theory, political jokes are the result of uneven or unjustified exercises of power. In addition to this, there is the question of whether jokes are "true" in an emotional, or on a higher level, a societal sense – or are they merely a play with stereotypes we might know but do not really believe in. We play with an inspiring detail of a real-life event not because of the event itself, but mostly because of the allusions evoked by the event, the possibilities of interpretation it allows, the ambiguities it involves, etc. The choice relies not on the importance of the event, but on more irrelevant factors such as playfulness and the

search for ambiguity that are decisive in joking. Besides, maintaining that jokes are in accordance to social reality is complicated because the multiplicity of realities, opinions and emotions that surround and inhabit the contemporary man. All of these standpoints and approaches challenge the researcher with questions that are empirically difficult to tackle.

The most basic and auspiciously also the most easily accessible of the issues is the interaction between jokes and their social reality – if jokes do mirror reality, how does this mirror work? If they are a thermometer for registered emotions, are they indicative of opinions only at a meta-level? The latter would mean that there is no straightforward relationship between the jokes and the society with its stereotypes, instead the connection is evident on a generalised level (e.g. there are more jokes on stinginess if the mocked nation is believed to be an economically successful former outsider). As we often have to admit, there are not many examples to point at when we want to maintain that a joke reinforces some certain attitudes, and there are attitudes that will induce certain jokes. Internet jokes with their meta-text of time, place and sender, provide the interested researcher with the necessary material to answer the questions: e.g. when and related to what event the jokes became popular.

W. Bascom and R. Abrahams have discussed the functions of folklore genres, including jokes. For them, jokes are either disruptive / destructive texts in folklore that target taboo areas, in order to point out the forbidden (Bascom 1965: 10), or conflict-focused texts that raise problems instead of solving them (Abrahams 1976: 206–207). That is, in folkloristic research, the aggressive side of jokes is emphasised over its coping, bonding or other positive functions mostly mentioned in psychological studies (visible in psychologists' rising interest in positive psychology). Jokes do not, however, exist only at the times of conflict: the USA is famous for its black and Pole jokes, but these do not stem from an actual hatred towards the group or any actual threat from them (Davies 1990). Instead, the threat is more often economic in nature, and the jokes are thus rooted in economic inequality, unevenly distributed assets etc., from which stupidity and canniness jokes arise. There may be an event that triggers them, but it may not be that evident. In the case of political jokes, the relation to a conflict (a daily political issue) is more visible, but here too the actuality of the stereotypes exhibited therein is questionable. What the choices displayed in political jokes represent is a relevant issue to this article. Joke cycles are a good example of how real events are reflected in jokes, but even

if the events are there, the outspokenly aggressive context of these joke cycles (e.g. Challenger, WTC etc.) hold very similar reactions to different events and people, which leads us to think that it may not be the stereotypes we have about these joke objects but rather some other drive pushing us to express the overwhelming emotions in a particular way. Other motives are involved in creating and circulating these “sick” jokes – possibly emotional coping with the event as well as with its representation in the media.

Jokes in which the relations with social reality are self-evident include topical jokes and news parodies (e.g. Kuipers 2005; Kürti 1988). Political jokes do not, however, clearly and univocally refer to their source. This research shows that there are many aspects involved in how social reality becomes distilled into jokes: it depends on the social and political context, and the qualities of the stimulus (the textual, contextual and intertextual characteristics of the news text, political or other events as social text etc.), which will be discussed in greater detail below.

CATEGORIES AND TARGETS IN POLITICAL AND ETHNIC JOKES

Another issue is that of the direction of joking, both in socialist and post-socialist society, and the closely related problem of distinguishing between ethnic and political jokes. Broadly speaking, these two categories of jokes work by different means: the ethnic joke (as Christie Davies has argued on a huge amount of comparative data, 1990) is directed towards the inferior, while political jokes target the superior. Davies has firmly stated that most numbskull-jokes are directed downwards, that is from the centre and better-off towards the periphery and worse-off (the few exceptions being British jokes about the aristocrats and in cases where the political power has been unjustifiably attained, see Davies 1998: 93–95). In most multiethnic societies, however, jokes are often told both about the majority and the minority (Estonians and Russians in Estonia, Jews and Russians in Soviet Russia, Polish/Black and WASPs in the USA etc.). Minorities can tell jokes about their own group (in self-deprecating jokes), but they can also mock the majority. The question is more about the power and recognition of the multiplicity of jokes and the intensity of these jokes: some cycle or target may be less spread, limited only to a few groups. Sometimes the derogatory jokes are spread by the targets themselves (as shows the classical example of Jews (Davies 1993), but also visible

in Estonian (Laineste 2005a), Serbian (Hicks 2002; Vucetic 2004) and other jokelore, to offer but a choice of very different examples). Thus there are societies in which the universals of the direction of target choice do not apply. In the segmented topological division, it is the centre or the “golden mean” that qualifies as normality. Normality is the ideal that the in-group is eager to identify itself with – “they” are strange, marginal; “we” are normal. It is also the nature of folklore by definition – folk traditions are created, maintained and passed on by the “average folk”, with no particularly great power or powerlessness. The socially marginal groups at either extreme of economical, territorial or other spectra do not belong to this in-group. The old folk jokes seem to follow precisely this argumentation in their choice of targets (see also Remmel 2003: 174). In some other historic examples, top-down and bottom-up joking forms an undistinguishable set of joke tradition, which has the main aim of mocking a regime in general (e.g. jokes from the Soviet bloc). There the centrifugal forces are overplayed by a common, both political and ethnic target, that dictates the direction of jokes. In Soviet jokes, it was the Russians bringing about and impersonating the Soviet way of life (though there was also the Chukchi, more a miserable victim of the system than the reason for the country’s misery). In many cases, the nationality of the target was not mentioned, but it was instead supplemented with a “code-name” from the animal world, for instance. Different groups inside the totalitarian society were represented by animals (wolf as the “power”, fox its lip-servicing two-faced disciple, hare as the innocent victim – and sometimes the trickster, etc.). The Soviet joke tradition can also be seen as adding a general political overtone in every joke. It mocked all aspects of the absurd everyday life, turning almost every humorous text, be it situated in the bedroom, school, workplace or public space, into a political joke. The omnipresent skepticism and nihilism in Soviet jokes made a point of discrediting the regime by using every walk of Soviet life as an inspiration (see also Graham 2003: 99). Thus in Soviet jokelore (but not only there) we encounter confusion between the direction of joking and also in joke categories. Belonging to the category of political jokes did not mean that a joke could not belong to other relevant categories, as was often the case with Soviet jokes. A joke could be political and ethnic, sometimes also harbour an additional sexual allusion etc. Ethnic jokes about Jews carry a strong political connotation, especially those that date from the 1950s (see Benton 1988). We can assume that certain political, economic, etc. repressions or organised persecutions load different types of jokes with political

meaning, and the jokes will then represent more than one category: they are political and also ethnic, sexual, animal etc. jokes. The transition from a totalitarian to democratic society should then produce a set of de-politicised jokes – the categories do not mingle, but instead display relatively fixed and objectively identifiable characteristics and boundaries. In addition, the old Soviet jokes that had a political undertone are now being circulated because of some other amusing detail – absurdity, sexual abnormality etc. It is debatable whether a formerly political joke will now be perceived as apolitical (if the wording remains largely the same), but the tellers of the joke distance themselves from it. The problems it depicted are now bygone. Even if the joke is remembered to be political, it probably does not actually carry the significance of a political joke. As in this following joke, where in contemporary presentation the political power relations give way to a much stronger sexual undertone:

A Russian and Chukchi are fighting on the street. A policeman approaches them: “What is going on here?” – “We are arguing about who is the master of Chukotka [the Chukchi Peninsula].” – “You will continue the argument in jail,” answers the police officer. Next morning the policeman asks them: “Did you solve you issue?” – “Yes,” answers the Chukchi. “The Russian is the master, and I’m the mistress...”

(Delfi, Dr Huibolit, May 28, 2004)

JOKES IN SOCIALISM AND POST-SOCIALISM

These jokes, like the one about the Chukchi and the Russian, could be regime- and society-specific. Political jokes still do travel from society to society, as tradition is an active flow of texts that do not simply cease to exist. Jokes change, merge and diffuse. Jokes from Soviet Russia or Communist Cuba live a parallel life in democratic Finland or Great Britain, only with different targets (although the popularity of those jokes can be different in the country of their origin and among “secondary” joke-tellers). Raskin (1985: 222) admits that there are two types of political jokes: some context-specific political jokes are only possible in a certain country (or a certain regime), as the knowledge needed to understand the joke is not available to the listeners, whereas others can exist successfully under all regimes and circumstances. Politics has been the object of jokes since Roman times, and some of these are still known today, even if they have been modified somewhat to fit into contemporary society (Larsen 1980: 5). Abraham Lincoln, who was a skilful orator, has said that he could at best call

himself a restorer of jokes, as he did not create new ones but recycled old ones (Parker 1978: 4). The totalitarian Soviet Union, especially in the last decades of its existence, has often been said to be the most fertile environment for joking about politics and politicians (Davies 2007; Krikmann 2006).

Political jokes are said to owe their popularity to the feeling of superiority which is achieved by ridiculing those in power. Jokes that poke fun at the incompetence of our leaders or reduce them to the level of the average citizen (or, for that matter, below that; the lower the better) have always been favoured in all societies. Tony Veale claims that mocking those of higher status, reputation, social and economical level provides emotional satisfaction for the “average citizen”, i.e. those not in power (Veale 2004). As old jokes keep reappearing in different contexts, with stupidity and vanity as the main concerns, there seem to be no specific contextual parameters that dictate certain types or themes of jokes. Some limits are nevertheless set by the relevance of texts. The main setting and oppositions involved should be culturally understandable and relevant to the new context they are told in. Some jokes seem to have quite limited potential: even if they are not complicated to understand (which might also be the case, as older joke tales are longer, more elaborate and often do not have a punch-line), they may involve certain rigid moral norms that are not today regarded as important. In the contemporary world of gender equality, for example, there is no significant emotional difference between the male and female adultery that forms the core of this joke:

Franz Joseph notices a man who resembles him strikingly. “Was your mother at some time in service at the palace?” the emperor asks. “No, Sire,” is the answer, “but my father was!”

(Central European, 1900s, cited in Raskin 1985: 225)

The joke retains its archaic setting, and it is not possible to transform the joke into a contemporary setting by merely changing the targets. In Estonia, the joke was told during the first republic in the 1930s, with the Estonian peasant talking to a Baltic-German estate owner (Hindrey 1931: 209), but the text has not appeared in post-socialist jokelore. There are, however, jokes with less specific contextual parameters. These cross temporal and geographic borders with remarkable ease. Consider the following joke:

Hitler takes a walk in the woods and falls into a lake. A young boy pulls him out. Hitler tells him to ask anything he wants in return for having saved his life. “Oh yes,” said the boy. “May I ask you not to breathe a word

about this to anybody?” – “But why?” asks Hitler. “You could be made famous for this heroic exploit.” – “This is what I am afraid of, sir,” says the boy. “If I become famous, my father will hear about it also, and he will wring my neck right away!”
(Cited in Raskin 1985: 226)

There are several records of this joke, with different targets: Nixon, Clinton and other higher officials, to name but a few. In Estonian material, the target was well-known and despised contemporary politician Edgar Savisaar:

Edgar falls into the river and starts crying for help. A farmer comes running and pulls him out of the water. Savisaar says: “I will grant you everything you wish for. Do you want to become a member of my party?” – “No.” – “Do you want a place in the top ten of our election list?” – “No.” – “What then?” – “Just don’t tell anyone I saved you...”
(Delfi Najaleht: She, Feb. 24, 2003)

The recyclability of political jokes seems to rest in the setting of the events and norms involved. More universal jokes with a less region-, culture- or era-specific context do travel well and may appear under different regimes. Consequently, we could claim that this cultural context or build-up of the joke is one of the main factors that determine the popularity of a text in different times and countries. Another competing theory maintains that cultural values inherent in jokes are important, but they cannot be adapted from one country to another merely as a result of this – instead, different jokes apply to different political systems and are not transferable. It is the target that differs in totalitarian and democratic political jokes (Rose 2002). Totalitarian jokes tend to mock the system in general, while jokes from democratic regimes mock leaders in person, reminding us that they are people from among “us”, their voters. This supposition does not prove entirely correct from the standpoint of Soviet political humour. Soviet Estonian political jokes can be divided into three categories: (1) jokes and conundrums about politicians, with the main focus on gaining the upper hand over the opposing character (in many cases Russian vs. American politicians); (2) those that mock the socialist regime without naming any particular political leaders who were responsible for the miserable living standards; and (3) jokes and conundrums on daily life referring to the inefficiency of the system (Sarv 1995: 106). While the last two categories correspond to what Rose said about the targets of totalitarian political jokes (i.e. jokes are about the system in general), the first type of jokes on international relationships prove that politi-

cal leaders were not an unknown joke target during socialism. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that political jokes in Estonia are now more leader-oriented, focusing on politicians' (sometimes imaginary) vices (Laineste 2005b), and the issue will also be addressed in the empirical part of this research. Contemporary jokes lack a pervading, central theme, and there are not many jokes about the political system or the hardships of daily life created by politicians; there seem to be more effective means of discussing these issues (the most active of which being discussion boards on the Internet, see Imfeld & Scott 2004: 206). Jokes become political mainly by using the names of politicians. Inspiration comes from daily news – those who find themselves in the limelight will soon figure in personalised jokes:

Minister of Agriculture Ivari Padar orders farmers to plant potatoes at night.

“Why?” ask the puzzled farmers.

“Then the potato bug will not see where the seeds are planted.”

(Delfi Naljaleht: Urmas, Oct. 12, 2004)

Polemics on how well jokes mirror social reality, what forces are behind the choice of joke targets in different societies, and how this is expressed in political / ethnic jokes will be viewed, using the jokelore of post-socialist Estonia as an example. Analysing the material on a wider temporal scale from the 1950s to the present day, one can put the jokes in a proper context. Briefly put, the following research hypotheses / assumptions will be tested in this article:

- (1) Political jokes stem from a real social-political context. The creation of new jokes thus depends on everyday life: the more political conflicts or intriguing events, the more jokes in circulation. Active periods (elections, scandals and other local / global events that reinforce each other and are incorporated into jokes) result in a heightened interest in jokes.
- (2) Contemporary Estonian political jokes form a distinct category that excludes ethnic and other thematic topics, whereas in Soviet jokes all categories are intertwined.
- (3) Contemporary Estonian political jokes concentrate more on the leaders than on the shortcomings of the current political system or difficulties of daily life, while Soviet humour focused on the latter.

METHODOLOGY

We assume that the situation in Estonia is not an isolated exception but mirrors the underlying mechanisms of how jokes change in all transitional societies in Eastern Europe. For this research, political jokes from Estonia's major joke source at www.delfi.ee/jokes (Delfi Joke Page) were analysed. The Delfi Joke Page is a popular site where users post about 20 new jokes a day in different categories that have been assigned to the received jokes by the portal's editors.

A total of 854 jokes from the category of political humour, from the years 2000 to 2006, were included in the analysis. In describing political jokes, we will compare the category to other major thematic sections (jokes about animals, ethnic groups, sex) which were also analysed for the study.

Simple quantitative analysis was performed on the material, counting the frequency of jokes during the period.

ANALYSIS

First we will describe the medium in which the jokes are published. The Delfi portal is an extremely popular pan-Baltic news and entertainment site, a common example in public discussions on several issues concerning Internet ethics, culture etc. It is evident that its popularity is still growing, as it surpasses all of the now emerging and developing online newspapers or other infotainment portals. The most essential feature of the Delfi portal is online news and commentaries. In the years 2000–2005, the number of commentaries rose alongside – and as evidence of – the popularity of the portal, as shown in Figure 1. By 2004, the number of daily news texts had stabilized at around 40 a day (and subsequently fallen), although their quantity rose until then. There is an optimal amount of news that people need and want to read, and an overload of information is not attractive to potential readers, which might be the reason for subsequent standstill. Further analysis reveals that while the number of daily news has remained stable, the number of commentaries is still on the rise (with the average in 2007 being around 150 comments per news item), indicating a deep interest in engaging oneself in online interaction.

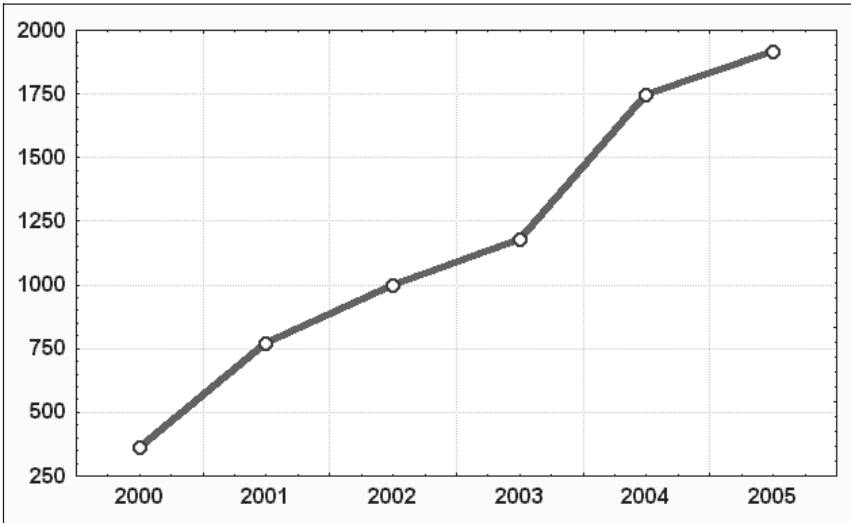


Figure 1. Amount of daily online commentaries in Delfi (2000–2005)

Commentaries are the soul of this media – their great number shows that people are willing not only to read the news but also to form an active community, discussing the events and their significance. They express opinions, take sides, argue (and of course insult each other when discussion becomes heated), and occasionally also share jokes. Regarding the growing popularity of the medium, it might be surprising that the overall number of jokes follows a falling trend (Figure 2).

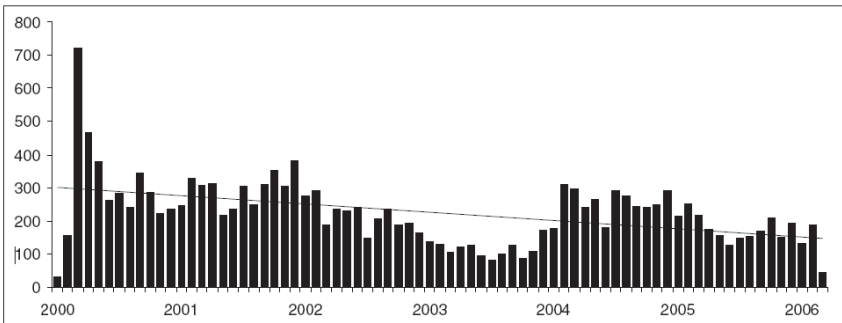


Figure 2. Overall amount of jokes in Delfi (2000–2006)

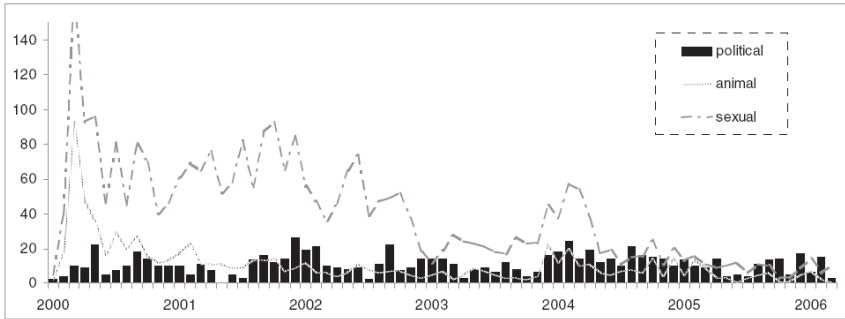


Figure 3. Amount of political, sexual and animal jokes in Delfi (2000 –2006)

Since the launch of the joke page www.delfi.ee/jokes in February 2000 and the first peak of fascination therein, there has only been one slight revival in 2004/2005, but it does not compare to the average of 430 jokes during the site’s first months, in winter and spring 2000. Some reorganisations of the joke site took place, raising interest among Internet users in 2004 (new features for evaluating jokes, new categories of visual material, such as cartoons and film strips, were added, etc.).¹ The trendline on Figure 2, however, shows a falling tendency. There is a negative relation between the daily amount of both news and commentaries on the one hand and the number of jokes on the other. Considering that identical jokes will not be posted on the joke site (there is editorial control over duplicates), this is to be expected. At first, all jokes that were circulating were sent to the Delfi joke page, and later the sources ran dry. When we look at each of the joke categories separately, however, summing up the amount of jokes in these over the years, we see an interesting pattern. There are great differences in how political and topical jokes are created / sent on the one hand, and the rest of the categories on the other. All other categories (e.g. jokes about vocations, absurdity, computers, blondes, etc.) other than political jokes fit the mentioned trend: the first months see a huge number of jokes, and then a decline follows. In Figure 3, the latter category is shown together with jokes about animals (this contained roughly the same number of jokes, ca. 800). The popularity of ethnic and sexual jokes from the same period was also added to the comparison.

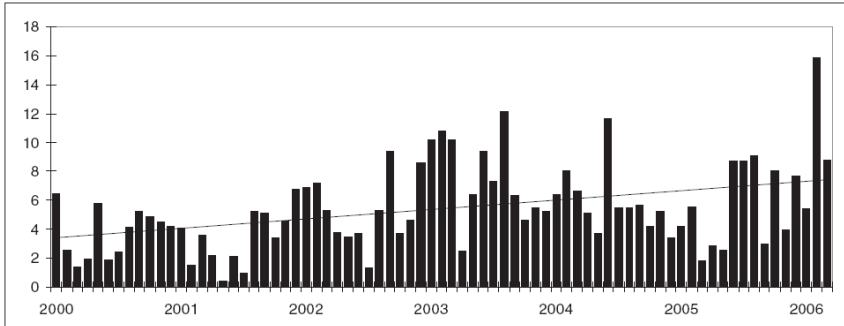


Figure 4. Share (%) of political jokes (2000–2006)

Though interest in sexual jokes remained high for a longer period of time, it has recently lost popularity and remained roughly stable at around 6 jokes a month sent to the Delfi joke site. Correspondingly, animal and ethnic jokes have remained at around 8–15 jokes a month since 2001. Such jokes are not inspired by real-life events. Even if their total number is the same as that of political jokes, it is only the latter that systematically appears only when there is a certain triggering event. Political jokes do not cease or decrease in frequency because the joke-tellers may run out of jokes; instead they rely on the joke-tellers urge to react to social reality, appearing only if there is something to joke about. The greatest difference with other joke categories is the shallow / unenthusiastic start in 2000, which gradually changed into a greater interest in sharing political jokes online (see also Figure 4). As the overall number of sending jokes decreases (Figure 2), political jokes remain at the same level of popularity, leading to the increase shown in Figure 4. This indicates that the mechanisms behind the creation and sending of political jokes differ from those in the rest of the categories – other factors are at work here that influence rises and falls in their popularity. We could suggest that political jokes help to process and give meaning to daily experience and their functions differ from other jokes primarily meant to amuse.

The typological reserve of political jokes may not be greater, but their potential use is, as is their flexibility. In general, the popularity of political jokes seems to be rising. It is possible to argue that the commenting of daily politics through humour is an Internet-specific trend and has nothing to do with the situational joke-telling in real interaction, but even if that were the case, it is significant that Internet users in Estonia have a heightened interest in sending (and reading) political jokes. The Internet as a medium is, after all, a very popular and

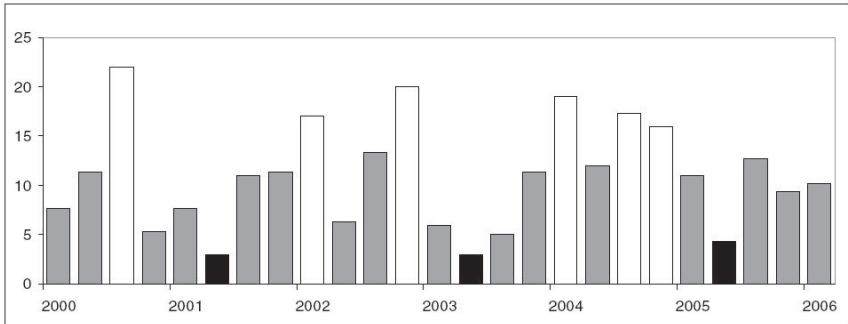


Figure 5. Intensity of joke-sending in Delfi joke page (2000–2006). More intensive joke-sending is marked in white (autumn 2000, spring, late autumn and winter 2002, spring, autumn and winter 2004), less intensive joke-sending in black (summer 2000, summer 2003, summer 2005). These periods will be analysed in detail below; the quarters marked in light blue will not be given attention to in this article

increasingly influential medium that to some extent involves the majority of Estonians. In addition, ironic humour and humour mixed with insults (e.g. in naming, ethnic slurs, etc.) is very common in Internet commentaries.

Next we could ask if the fluctuations seen in Figure 3 are straightforwardly influenced by events that take place in daily politics or whether there is no link between the frequency of the sending of jokes and the intensity of political issues. The social and political background of each period, which had an average of more than 15–20 jokes per quarter was analysed. At the same time, the periods in which jokes showed a considerable decrease (averaging less than 5 jokes per quarter) were analysed as a control group. To this end, the front-page topics of daily newspapers were examined. The news texts were taken from the period of heightened interest in joke-sending, but also two months previous to that, in order to account for the possible delay in creating relevant jokes. The high and low periods of joke-sending can be seen in Figure 5.

In autumn 2000, the background events include a court trial over Siim Kallas, who according to the overruled accusations, set aside money from successful deals with the state’s finances (the so-called “million dollar deal trial”), and no confidence vote for Jüri Mõis, mayor of Tallinn. In the area of other countries’ politics, the re-election of George W. Bush as the president of the US is the main issue. The jokes are, however, more often about domestic politics:

*Once upon a time there was a man who had three sons.
Two of them were normal, the third was Jüri Mõis.
(Delfi, Jaanuspoiss, Nov. 8, 2000)*

The joke parodies a fairy-tale format, alluding to the meager mental abilities of the mayor of Tallinn. This makes it a simple stupidity-joke that requires no specific context to understand it – fairy-tales with a simple-minded third son are known worldwide. This is a type of political joke that uses front-page news quite arbitrarily. It reacts quickly, though without any insight or significant allusions, picking characters that happen to stand out in the crowd. Nevertheless, it is a political and context-specific joke.

There are also jokes that try to penetrate issues more deeply. They display associations that are of ontological quality (i.e. are meaningful with regard to the event or the persons involved). Though the following joke did not appear in the first period of joke increase on the Delfi joke site, it depicts issues relevant to autumn 2000 with a delay of some months:

Kraft, Kallas and Kaju are sitting in a pub drinking cognac. “Damn it!” Kraft suddenly exclaims. “I must head back to the office. I think I left the safe open!” – “So what,” the others try to calm him. “What if someone steals the money?” Kraft worries. “Who could do that, we’re all here, aren’t we?”

(Delfi, PAX, Feb. 7, 2001)²

The majority of jokes from that period deal with specific issues from current affairs, and not all of them use such universal scripts as in the first example. In addition to these, however, we also find a number of old, non-topical, Soviet jokes, even though the events these depict are no longer relevant. Another line of jokes are those with general topics (“Democracy – it’s like bureaucracy, only a demo version”), the politics of foreign countries are not reflected in jokes from that period.

Spring 2002 was a very active period in terms of domestic politics. Background information includes Mart Laar resigning from the post of prime minister, re-electing new government members (a new and exceptionally young members being Mailis Rand (Reps), Minister of Education and Sven Mikser, Minister of Defence), as well as the building of an expensive (1 million EEK) public toilet opposite the parliament building in Tallinn. The latter event has offered material for many jokes, for example:

Kallas tells Savisaar: "Listen, you should tear down the outhouse you built here." Savisaar: "Which one?" [literally: the million (kroon, Estonian currency) one?] Kallas: "No, the two million one."
(Delfi, March 21, 2002)

Autumn 2002 witnessed the election of local governments with Res Publica as the surprise winner. Many jokes from that period depict different parties, but also the elections themselves:

October 21. Candidate No. xxx won three votes. At home, his wife is outraged: "You have a lover!"
(Delfi, I, Oct. 18, 2002)

Spring – autumn 2004: The period between spring and autumn 2004 is made up of several months of heightened interest in joke-sending, not only of political jokes but also of other categories of jokes (see Figures 2 and 3). The portal in general and the joke page in particular has improved, and in our research material this interacts with an active period in politics: Estonia enters the European Union and NATO, a theft from Estonia's grain surplus is discovered, local elections for the European Parliament are held, the first "statue scandal" took place (a monument depicting an Estonian soldier in an outfit resembling a German military uniform was erected in Lihula, but taken down by the government soon afterwards, accompanied by protests), Mayor of Tallinn Edgar Savisaar is under attack. The jokes depict all of these issues, e.g. the Lihula events:

(Prime minister) Parts goes to meet the people in Lihula. "Why are there only women in the audience?" he asks. "Those that came with eggs were not admitted for security reasons."
(Delfi, Mo Nu Ment, Oct. 31, 2004)

The joke-scarce periods are of course not event-free, but the events are obviously less inspiring: the Ministry of Education moves from Tallinn to Tartu, problems with the privatisation of Estonian Rail (summer 2001); the referendum on joining the EU, speeding tickets received by some important politicians, President Rüütel meets President Putin (spring-summer-autumn 2003); the EU sets fines for exceeding the amount of sugar that may be stored, corruption accusations against Edgar Savisaar, terrorist explosions in London (summer 2005).

What then is the comic potential that turns some news into great jokes, while others are left out? An examination of these joke-scarce periods indicates that above all, the event or news item has to be essentially attractive, prominent, short and simple, yet striking, point-

ing at typical shortcomings, “greater” than just one event (being exemplary of some general tendency in politics, e.g. corruption). For example, the long and profound polemics on the privatisation of Estonian Rail did not result in jokes, because the topic violated the rule of brevity and simplicity – events that are too complicated or multifaceted are unsuitable for joking. Another feature of good material for joke-telling is that it should be fresh and up-to-date but not overexploited. If the media fulfils the need to comment on issues in serious mode, jokes cease to be appreciated because the problems have been discussed too much – this is what happened to government officials who received speeding tickets (although there were jokes, especially because of the fact that it was Minister of Justice who was caught speeding). The fact that the media influences folklore in several ways, in some cases supporting and in others hindering it, has also been noted in other genres than jokes (see Donovan 2004).

There is also the question of how many of the jokes are actually on topical issues – if many of them are irrelevant to ongoing events, we have failed to prove that there is indeed a connection between social reality and emergent jokes. It is expedient to differentiate between four types of jokes (see Figure 6) and count their relative frequency during the four more intense periods of joke-sending.

Not all of the political jokes sent to the Delfi joke page are topical (old Soviet jokes, politics as a general subject vs. local politics and foreign affairs, which largely depict recent topical issues), but there are significant changes in all of these four categories during the period under observation. The relative incidence of jokes shows that topicality is more valued than before, while non-topical political jokes, especially those on general politics, but also old Soviet jokes, are decreasing. Largely context-free general political issues have fallen from an average of 32% in 2000 to 13% in 2006 (jokes on politician as a vocation, or problems of democracy, e.g.: “*What is democracy Russian-style?*” – “*It’s when everything is done as the head democrat says.*”).

The reduction in the number of Soviet jokes has been even more significant (from 45% to 24%). It seems that these jokes neither respond to any specific event, nor do they receive an outward impulse to be sent, or even created. Especially the old Soviet jokes that no longer belong to the active, self-renewing tradition are running out of versions. We can say that their decrease resembles the patterns visible in other joke categories (that of animal jokes, for example (see Figure 3)).

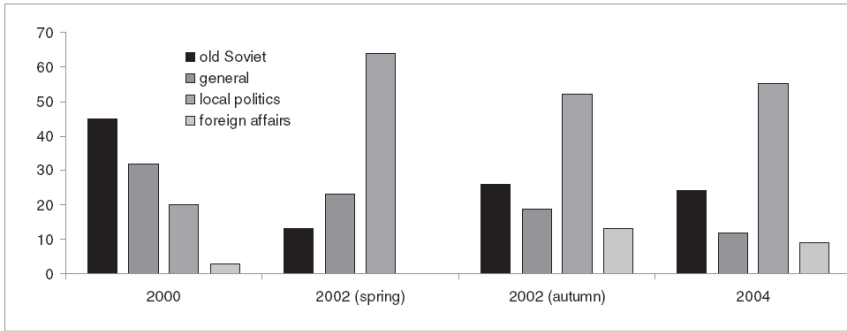


Figure 6. Share of old Soviet jokes, and jokes on general / local politics and foreign affairs, the last two being topical

The politics of foreign countries have not been a very active joke theme, but with the emergence of Western influences on Eastern European jokes, translated jokes featuring foreign politicians are making an entrance. Most of all, these jokes mock the Presidents of the USA (Clinton for sex affairs, Bush for the anti-terrorist war), but there are also jokes about relationships with other countries (in the vein of jokes from Soviet times, when, for example, the leader of the Soviet Union met – and competed with – the leader of the United States: *Americans have landed on the Moon. Brezhnev orders the Soviet astronauts to land on the Sun. “We will burn up,” the astronauts object. “I have thought of that: you will fly at night...”* Viikberg 1997). The main tendency evident in Figure 6 is the rise of topical jokes about Estonian politics and politicians.

As demonstrated, political jokes make up a considerable proportion of all of the jokes sent to the Delfi joke page. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that their overall intensity is not extremely high, and it may affect the differentiation between accidental and regular trends in the material. In the first years of the Delfi joke site, old Soviet jokes were quite numerous. Figure 5 with “joke reactions” to daily politics contains both old and new jokes, and the share of old Soviet political jokes can be seen in Figure 6 – in 2000, nearly half of the texts were actually not on political topics, but were instead remembered as having been political. Other periods with increased joke-sending become more and more topical, more focused on daily politics and less on Soviet times. Another problem is that there were also periods that produced new and topical, creative political jokes, but counting all the jokes together were not numerous enough to be included in the analysis.

Leaving aside old Soviet political jokes and looking at the “new” jokes that are left, we see that some of them are influenced by Soviet times, displaying a considerable intertextuality between the two joke traditions: these are old modified or recycled jokes that use a fragment and/or recognisable opposition and/or resolution of incongruity. As a former part of the Soviet Union, Estonia has a distinct and versatile background of jokelore that still lives on in our collective mind. In the subcategorisation of new jokes, we also find some that are translated from other languages, primarily English. The latter are very often simple stupidity jokes, which are quite universal in their construction. It suffices to change the name of the target to make the joke relevant to local daily politics (as also mentioned in the initial discussion of “travelling” jokes, see the example in which Hitler → Savisaar is saved from drowning). Jokes that mock general stupidity do not need a direct influence, or much less a proof of real stupidity – the only necessary factor is public interest in the person. The interest may be the result of political actions, but also general attitudes towards certain political parties, politicians’ physical features, or even a funny / allusionary name. There are also more specific jokes that rely on social reality to a greater extent, commenting on real issues (e.g. the million dollar deal joke). All in all, however, we can say that most new jokes are topical political jokes, because they display an array of current political emotions and map focal issues (e.g. the vast amount of jokes on Edgar Savisaar denote a general dissatisfaction with the Centre Party, etc.).

On the basis of the analysed material, there is insufficient evidence that jokes are a truthful / complete mirror of reality: old Soviet jokes and joke-scarce periods overrule the suggestion. Traditions are dependent on the historic context of the jokelore (Estonia’s political past dictates the lingering of old Soviet jokes and their recycled new versions), the attractiveness and ambivalence of the news text, the medium itself (its popularity, sometimes due to purely arbitrary improvements), and even on the season (see Aikat 1998; Laineste 2003). As evidence of the last point, in this study all of the setbacks took place in the summer, while spring was the most intensive joke-sending period. We can, however, still say that the topicality of political jokes is more the rule than the exception. It may at times be more operative or other times more tardy, and is always dependent on the comic potential of running news; nevertheless, there is increasing interest in political jokes.

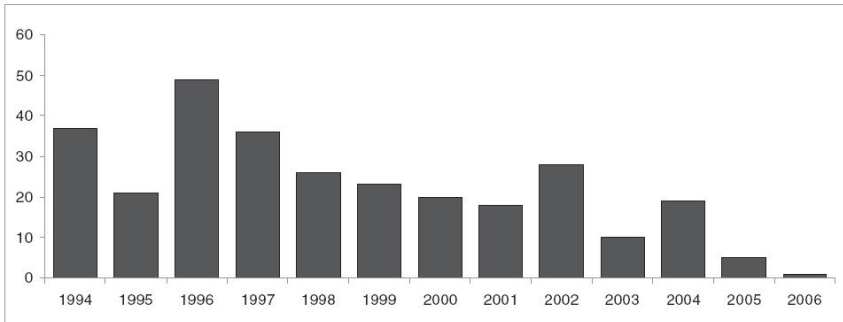


Figure 7. Share of old Soviet jokes in contemporary Estonian jokes about Americans (1994 – 2006)

Looking at the Estonian contemporary political jokes on the Delfi joke page, and also at other categories listed there, we can see if distinctions between categories have become more obvious. Old Soviet jokes (as described above) selected joke targets from many groups of people, aiming both upwards and downwards, and being also inevitably infused with political issues. It would be a challenge to test the rules of ethnic joking on pre-1991 Eastern European jokelore (see also Laineste 2005). The globalisation of joke scripts influences the obvious change in Estonian political jokes, which was also visible in the thematic subdivision of jokes on the politics of foreign countries: these are becoming more popular, not because we are more interested in these matters, but also because the matters present themselves more readily (in the form of Internet jokes). Ethnic jokes that are about to lose their political dimension have already been discussed above, and examples of the tendency are numerous. The tension between Estonians and Russians is no longer a political issue, and animosities are exchanged on a more basic ethnic level:

Why do the Estonian, Filipino and Russian go to a brothel?

The Estonian goes to spend some time with the prostitute, the Filipino goes to clean the girls' rooms, and the Russian goes to pick up his girlfriend after she has finished working.

(Delfi, Dr Huibolit, May 26, 2005)

At the same time, Russians have also begun to interest themselves in Estonians: their stupidity and most of all their proverbial slowness, creating increasingly popular (Internet) jokes about the nation (Krikmann, this volume). One interesting tendency is that three-nation jokes (classically about a German, a Russian and an Estonian), which

are still told among schoolchildren (see Tuisk 2008), target the Estonians instead the previously popular Russians. Political jokes no longer interact with ethnic jokes, and there is even some evidence that Estonians are in a way searching for the most fitting ethnic group as a new joke-target (Laineste 2007).

It is notable that there are quite a lot of old Soviet jokes still circulating (this can, for instance, be seen in contemporary Estonian jokes about Americans, Figure 7).

The jokes that have survived the society's transformation from a totalitarian to a democratic system must have some common asset that helped them survive. They usually have a strong sexual undertone or rely on acute absurdness. Thus we are more likely to find these jokes under the latter categories. The following joke about policemen already circulated before the 1990s, but then it was more about the stupidity of the officials who maintained the system, would have been classified under political jokes:

A piece of shit was floating in the gutter. Suddenly it noticed a police officer passing by and yelled: "Hi, comrade!" – "I am not your comrade," said the officer, who increased his pace. The feces won't drop behind: "Hi, comrade!" The officer is offended: "How am I your comrade?" he asks. "Well, we're both from the internal organs,"³ the answer comes.
(Anekdoodiraamat, joke from 1979)

This cited joke is now under absurd jokes, as well as the next one:

*What is the difference between oral sex and the KGB?
A mere slip of the tongue can land you in deep shit.*
(Delfi, Kiizu, April 20, 2007)

These are jokes that were clearly about political issues, but have turned into absurd jokes with respectively a strong scatological and sexual undertone. At the same time, exemplifying the overall trends of changing categories, a version of the scatological joke can also be found under political jokes:

Kalle Laanet gloomily drives his dear new Audi to the police station to pass it on to his successor, when he suddenly hears someone yelling: "Hi, colleague!" He stops the vehicle, looks around, but sees no-one. He hears again: "Hi, dear colleague!", steps out of the car, but still sees no-one. After searching around for a while, he notices a piece of shit lying on the ground, ogling at him. "I'm not your damned colleague!" Laanet shouts angrily. But the feces reply: "How so, we're both from internal organs!"
(Delfi, klassik, March 4, 2003)

This shows how jokes are considered political when they depict actual characters or issues, as in the joke about Kalle Laanet at the time he was the head of Tallinn police precinct, which appeared shortly after polemics about his acquiring a luxurious Audi as his official vehicle. The Delfi joke page contains jokes that mainly perform the function of political commentary, excluding jokes that do not name any particular political clues. The only exception is old Soviet jokes that are remembered as political – they are categorised under political jokes, like the following example:

A wolf and a fox caught a hare and want to stew it. The wolf sends the fox to the shop to bring some fat for frying, as the hare is very bony. The fox returns without any fat: "There was no fat at the shop!" – "Well, bring some butter then," the wolf says. The fox soon returns, and says there was no butter in the shop. "Go get some margarine!" the wolf demands. The fox returns: "There was no margarine either!" he cries. The hare cheers: "Long live the Soviet Union, the home of the poor and the repressed!"
(Delfi, Tshuks, March 24, 2006)

This joke survived over the fall of communism and has become almost apolitical, acquiring a nostalgic / mythological meaning, and calling to life the retro and strange Soviet world when everything was deficit. The old Soviet jokes told today need more explaining and cannot be understood without some additional clues. In many cases, joke-senders add to old Soviet jokes the introductory sentence "That happened way back in Soviet times..." This brings the joke text closer to the genre of myth or fairy tale. At the same time, a number of old jokes gain new value when they are recycled, by changing the targets into contemporary politicians. This is, in a way, also an act of "domesticating" the largely foreign and borrowed tradition, as is the case with many translated jokes. The dialogue is performed on different levels, from profound alterations to mere borrowings of some formulas (e.g. "Armenian radio was asked...").

Political jokes here mostly include those that mention the names of active politicians or political parties, dwell on some topical issue in politics (elections etc.), and the old Soviet political jokes listed there also largely follow the same principles. Political jokes in contemporary Estonia mock certain political figures or events, addressing them quite directly.

We now reach the question of the target of the contemporary Estonian political joke, compared to the socialist ones. Estonia offers a good research site to discuss jokes under different regimes. Assuming that

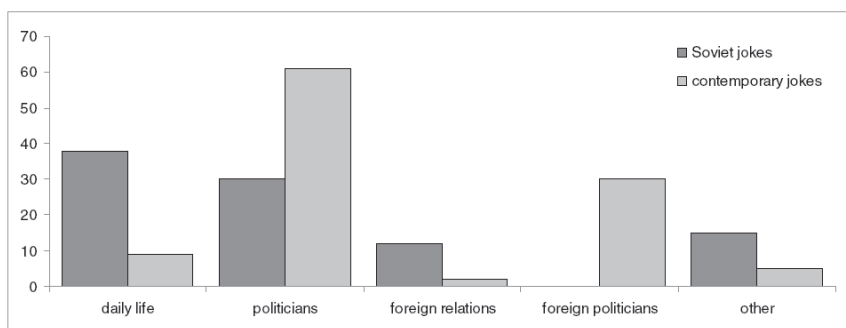


Figure 8. Main subcategories of political jokes (1950s–1990 and 1991–2007)

society’s transition is mirrored in its active joke tradition, this change should be visible in our material. According to Rose’s (2002) thesis, the direction is from more general jokes on the political system in a totalitarian society towards more targeted jokes on politicians in a democratic society. A comparison of the targets of contemporary political jokes to the characters in old Soviet jokes reveals interesting developments – not only have the targets become local (Estonian politicians), they have also become more directed at certain persons, more universal (e.g. stupidity jokes instead of more specific scripts), and at times also more aggressive.

To account for the change from one political system to another, 300 randomly selected political jokes from the Delfi joke site were analysed on the basis of their content, and for comparison, the same amount of old Soviet political jokes were chosen from Jüri Viikberg’s joke collection.

As we can see from Figure 8, jokes about politicians are more numerous than before, as are jokes about the politics of foreign countries (before the 1990s this was an almost completely unexamined topic). Still, during Soviet times, jokes about politicians were as numerous as jokes about the system (32% versus 38% respectively) are now. Jokes about daily life also exist today, although these are not as popular as they were before. The most significant change is that of political jokes about foreign politicians and political events that did not concern Estonians in the pre-1990s. They spread through the Internet, being translated from English, but their focus is on more influential countries and closer neighbours. The European Union also features in jokes:

Q: What will happen when the Sahara desert is accepted into the European Union?

A: Nothing at first, but in about 4 or 5 years the price of sand will rise severalfold.

An Estonian sends his son abroad to study at a European university. One day he gets a telegramme: "Send 50 EUR, must go shoot some chicks." The father sends 20 EUR: "Go shoot some cheaper ones!" Two weeks go by, and the boy sends another telegramme: "Send 5000 EUR! Must fix the gun!"

(Delfi, sass, Nov. 22, 2003)

Also from the same category (jokes on foreign politics) and by far one of the most numerous subtopics there are jokes about the USA and its leaders:

News: In a recent fire, US President George W. Bush's library burned down. Both of his books were lost. As Ari Fleischer, his public relations officer said, Bush was particularly upset about the second one – he hadn't even finished colouring it.

(Delfi, Justus, Feb. 26, 2008)

Foreign countries are no longer seen as competitors (which was the main issue concerning foreign politics in Soviet jokes) but equals that are allowed to laugh at.

We will now focus on the main topics in post-socialist political jokes, the most popular of which are jokes about contemporary politicians. The choice of more exploited targets (Edgar Savisaar (former Prime Minister of Estonia, currently a government minister; 169 jokes), Arnold Rüütel (President of Estonia 2001–2006; 120 jokes), Jühan Parts (former Prime Minister of Estonia; 65 jokes)) is based on both their actions as politicians and the comic potential of their characters. Even if there are hordes of mockable politicians, certain characters are preferred. Important factors that can turn a politician into a laughing-stock include the actuality of real events relevant to the politician, political views of the wider public (in this case of Internet users), the character and external features of the target, etc. This all makes up the comic potential of a person. In this case, Savisaar gets extra attention because of his weight problem, Rüütel is mocked because of his slow (and at times unintelligible) speech, and Parts is laughed at for his muddled diction and crooked posture. These special features allow the use of recycled jokes that were known from different persons. We could even suggest that jokes are not told about politicians who are unpopular or even hated, but rather about those who are perceived as (present themselves as) good targets.

Jokes about Estonian politics are largely dependent on topical issues, and characters are chosen according to their actuality in the political arena. A person who does not stick out will not be encountered in jokes any more (Lennart Meri, Estonian President from 1992–2001, was only popular in jokes at the time of his presidency). Many of the contemporary jokes involve general stupidity or other features alluding to it (slow or muddled speech, unintelligent reasoning or decisions, bad foreign language skills, etc.), but those about physical characteristics are also quite numerous. Many jokes refer to the understanding that the target is unqualified for his/her office (a very short joke: “*Stupid as the Minister of Education*”, Delfi, J, Sept. 12, 2005). A funny or allusion-loaded name present good options for joking (the jokes about Edgar Savisaar’s wife and fellow politician Vilja (literally: ‘grain’, ‘corn’) are based on this pattern).

Another common sub-topic is jokes about foreign countries. The most popular joke targets here are countries from the former Eastern bloc (Ukraine, Belorussia, Chechnya, Latvia), but also the USA, Finland and other Western countries. Estonian daily life is only rarely depicted:

Estonian old age pensioners are so poor that even the bags under their eyes seem empty.

(Delfi, Cobra, April 29, 2005)

The contemporary material shows a clear inclination towards choosing targets from among domestic and foreign politicians, though jokes about daily life do exist too. Old Soviet jokes, however, even if focused largely on daily absurdities, were also interested in politicians. Thus the difference between totalitarian and democratic jokelore lies in something more than just mere choice of target: while totalitarian jokes poked fun at almost everything, and much of the laughter was simultaneously politically motivated, then the democratic system has brought about a de-politicisation of jokes. Only those that mention politicians’ names or topical issues are labelled as “political”. Democracy gives plenty of reasons to criticise the system, but the means for doing it are more numerous (due to free speech) – in addition, people feel more in control of their lives.

Contemporary political jokes in Delfi include many old Soviet jokes, their proportion being around 1:4. In discussing this topic, we should keep in mind that the categories of “old” and “new” are quite arbitrary, as old jokes get recycled, and the decision of whether a joke is “new” enough is quite subjective. Those Soviet jokes that are still told with-

out any modification of content (incl. target) are numerous, and this points to the fact that traditions are slow to change, even in the case of an operational genre that deals only with surface issues instead of ontological and existential questions (see Abrahams 1976). The folkloric process is more inert. Even if new jokes appear (are created, modified, translated), the old jokes stay in the nation's memory. Again, this is partly due to the medium itself: the memory space produced by the Internet is illimitable and allows all texts to co-exist simultaneously and for an unrestricted period of time. The Internet serves as external memory that documents all that is inserted, including those that are already inactive in everyday interaction. There may be two contradictory reasons for old Soviet jokes still being sent to the Delfi joke site (even if their number is diminishing, as can be seen in Figure 7): either they circulate because the inertia of collective memory as jokes "remembered as political", or they are actively taking part in an identity struggle. By telling them we remember our difficult past and also construct a more dramatic contrast between "then" and "now", "totalitarian" and "democratic", "repressed" and "independent". Even if the joke-tellers themselves have not experienced the repressions of the totalitarian regime (being too young to remember the consequences that gave rise to Soviet political jokes), the memories still exist in a collective space which takes part in forming a specific post-socialist jokelore. It is untenable to state that the collapse of the totalitarian Soviet Union ended in a lack of jokes altogether (e.g. Adams 2004: 159). On the contrary, post-socialist jokelore freely uses both old and new material, producing creative blends, showing its distinctive character. But it is still an open issue whether the jokes are still told, or exist at Internet joke sites.

The researching of contemporary Estonian jokelore and its comparison with Western and Soviet traditions makes it possible to see differences, analyse changes and point at specific patterns of how political systems influence jokes.

CONCLUSION

Political jokes are quite popular in the studied media, the Internet. The reasons (also discussed above) may be that Internet is an appropriate media of expressing all kinds of opinions, including political opinions, often in an informal and humorous manner. Also, Internet users' demographic profile could contain reasons for this interest in political jokes (the choice of characters, for example, is dependent on

the political preferences of the joke-senders, who are mostly well-paid, right-wing government officials). At least political jokes are alive and well, which could be because their cognitive functions differ from those of jokes from other joke categories.

Post-socialist jokelore is herein viewed as a completely different, transitional stadium with specific characteristics. “New” jokes (modified, translated, created) more or less fit the description of jokes typical to democratic regimes (after Rose 2002). Unmodified old Soviet jokes are, however, also still being told (or rather sent to joke sites), even if the joke-tellers have little or no knowledge and experience of the circumstances that gave rise to those jokes. They are disappearing, but the old jokes still circulate as an important part of our social memory. But Soviet political jokes that still circulate lack acute emotion – fear, anger, distress. In contemporary new jokes, the popular themes come and go, arousing discussion in both serious and jocular conversation (themes like elections, incompetent decisions, corruption, etc.), but one single foolproof joke incentive like the one offered in Soviet times is missing. That is why the old Soviet political jokes can even acquire the status of “real” political humour for those who consider contemporary jokes to be too universal, shallow and lame. Another reason for remembering old political jokes could be because of an affiliation with 1980s style. The younger generation uses them to reconstruct a retro world of their parents with the help of symbols like Mischka the Olympic bear or the personalities of Gorbachev or the gerontocrats, etc. It is clearly an oversimplification just to state that democracy makes fun of leaders, and totalitarian jokes mock the system. The difference between totalitarian and democratic jokes seems to lie elsewhere, most of all in the politicisation of all jokes in the Soviet bloc. Our research proved that in a Western, democratic society, jokes tend to be more focused on current affairs and certain politicians that represent them. It also causes them to turn away from many unfitting themes, considering them to be too complicated, overexploited or uninteresting. In a society with free speech, politicians’ human weaknesses, errors, their alleged stupidity and other vices pique the audience’s interest. Subcategories of old Soviet and new / modified / translated etc. jokes show interesting tendencies over the years 2000 to 2006. The number of old unmodified jokes sent is falling in favour of topical political jokes that depict everyday domestic affairs in Estonia. Some rising interest in foreign affairs can be noticed. This all points to the fact that political jokelore is (slowly, but still) transforming to be about the issues we have to face today, and not past problems. Con-

cerning the relationship between social reality in a narrower sense (not the system and its jokes, but rather real political events and consequent jokes), we found that political jokes are embedded in the surrounding reality in contemporary Estonian material, though with some reservations. We could suggest that the topicality of jokes may be dependent on the political system. In a totalitarian society, events and jokes are more loosely linked, as every joke could have a potential political dimension. Political humour did not need an incentive (though it did reflect on reforms, speeches, the death or inauguration of new leaders), and fed itself on “normal” everyday life, and was actually part of everyday life itself. Subsequently, politics evaded into different subtopics of jokes, causing fuzzy categories. In democratic society, all media channels are full of news texts that provide the necessary inspiration. Jokes refer back to the news in a more straightforward way. In the studied material, news with the necessary comic potential produced a wave of thematically linked jokes. If many remarkably strange, catastrophic etc. events happen simultaneously, the topics may blend in jokes.

This research shows that political jokes are not losing their edge and have a constant appeal to Internet users. Even if people do tell fewer jokes, they are sending more political jokes than was the case a few years ago. Political humour is a functional and popular way of discussing the rapid changes that are taking place in our society, the decisions that affect them, and the personal characteristics of the people who are responsible for it all. A more comprehensive pan-Eastern European study analysing regional old Soviet jokes (also those that have now been forgotten) could help shed light on the topic. This would not only give an overview of the present situation of jokes in the former Soviet bloc, but allow insight into more basic questions such as the characteristics and status of political jokes under different regimes and in societies in transformation.

Notes

1. Personal communication with Delfi Jokebook editor Ingvar Kupinski in April 2002.
2. Kraft, Kallas and Kaju – the (now former) president of the Bank of Estonia, and two main figures involved in the “ten million dollar deal” (ex-president of the Bank of Estonia and his advisor).
3. “Internal organs” is a Soviet term meaning institutions of interior defence (police, both public and secret, etc.), i.e. the offices created for keeping interior affairs under control.

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FINNIC AND BALTIC NATIONALITIES AS ETHNIC TARGETS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN JOKES

Arvo Krikmann

Lithuanians tell jokes about how stupid and slow Latvians are, Latvians tell jokes about how stupid and slow Estonians are, Estonians (who happen to be the real laughing stock of the Baltic States) tell jokes about how stupid and slow Finns are. Finns, as far as I know, just don't care.

<http://www.literaturejunction.com/showthread.php?t=4328>

Abstract

The paper aims to corroborate / illustrate the following assertions:

1. After the collapse of the USSR and the decay of the socialist camp, the number of ethnic butts in the countries of Eastern Europe has considerably increased. Russian jokelore has started to mock the representatives of the former Baltic Soviet republics. Of these, the Estonians have evidently become the most popular.
2. From the middle-nineties, jokes have largely moved from oral tradition to the Internet. Joke sources on the Internet can be divided into four basic types: static context-free, static context-bound, dynamic context-free, and dynamic context-bound, the last type being of the most folkloristic value.
3. Internet jokes (in Russia and elsewhere) have developed a large synonymy of ethnic butts. Russian jokes do not make a clear-cut distinction between Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, and the elements of their languages, their proper names, geographic places etc. are often confused.
4. As to similarity of plots and motifs connected with them, the four target characters of Russian jokes divide to two clear-cut clusters – The Finnic (i.e. Estonians and Finns), and Baltic (i.e. Latvians and Lithuanians).
5. A dominant ethnic characteristic assigned to both Finns and Estonians is slowness, the feature that has originally been ascribed to several Scandinavian nations like the Finns, Norwegians and Swedes. So there is a good reason to think that the image of the Finn has initiated and mediated the process of the further southward expansion of the slowness stereotype in Russian jokelore, but later, in the 1990s, this feature was transferred to the more relevant Estonian.
6. Slowness is not very salient among the universal features of the objects of ethnic mockery. Finns' and Estonians' slowness is, however, evidently closely associated with the mainstream ethnic topics such as ASEXUALITY, DUMBNESS, and LANGUAGE DISTORTION.

7. Surprisingly enough, the strained political relations between Russia and the Baltic states are only quite modestly represented, mainly through Estonians' and Latvians' painful attitude to Russians' poor knowledge of Estonian.

Key words: humour, ethnic jokes, post-socialism, Internet jokes, Russian, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, slowness, dumbness, asexuality, language distortion

ETHNIC BUTTS IN RUSSIAN JOKELORE

My colleague Liisi Laineste (2004; 2005) has found three significant trends that characterise the temporal development of Estonian ethnic jokes from the 1880s to the 2000s:

1) a noticeable decrease in the relative share of ethnic jokes in the total of national folkloric jokes;

2) a clear increase in the number of ethnic butts and the scope of their geographic origin;

3) a close interconnection between ethnic and social-political aspects in the jokes of the Soviet period.

The same tendencies very probably also hold true for jokes of numerous other nations with similar recent historical faith.

In the Soviet period the list of principal ethnic targets in Russian jokes was quite short: the Jews, Chukchis, Georgians and Ukrainians. Of course Soviet Russian jokes involved other ethnic characters as well, but the available sources do not allow one to estimate how frequent / popular / productive this or that of them actually was.

After the collapse of the USSR and the decay of the Eastern European socialist camp as a whole, the former ethnic butts have continued their existence in Russian jokelore – some with the former intensity, and others with decreasing intensity. Alongside and in addition to these, however, a number of new ethnic characters have emerged – first of all the representatives of the former Baltic Soviet republics that regained their national independence in 1991, i.e. the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Of these, the Estonians, who were almost non-existent characters in Soviet jokelore, have evidently become the most popular (cf. also Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002: 47 ff., 75 ff.).

In Russia as elsewhere, jokes have largely moved from oral tradition to the Internet in the last decade, and there is good reason to believe that Russian joke sources on the Internet are perhaps the greatest of all national sources of e-jokes (including ethnic ones). The contemporary wave of political correctness and shying away from and

avoiding ethnic jokes has left Russia almost untouched. As my former experience has shown, however, Russian e-sources have also canned, alongside recent layers of post-Socialist jokes, a huge number of older jokes from the Soviet period. Obsolete jokes certainly vanish from human memory faster than from the Internet, and therefore it is often difficult to decide what exactly in these immense strata belongs to Socialism and what to post-Socialism.

In awareness of these these overlappings and other possible noises, I performed a number of searches in the Russian search engine ‘Rambler’ (October 2008), to find responses to the search string ‘X-ian’ + ‘joke’ (*X-иц + анекдот*) where *X-ian* was Russian, Chukchi, Jew, American, Georgian, etc., following the list of ethnic favourites in the Russian biggest joke portal *anekdot.ru* compiled earlier by Dima Likhachev in September 2002 – see <http://dm-lihachev.livejournal.com/570686.html>

Table 1 indicates the top 40 most frequent nationalities.

Table 1. The top 40 most frequent nationalities found in Russian jokes

1.	Russian	53840	21.	Greek	1187
2.	Chukchi	17522	22.	Turk	1176
3.	Jewish	16674	23.	Moldavian	1146
4.	American	10006	24.	Spanish	901
5.	Georgian	8240	25.	Uzbek	777
6.	German	6481	26.	Byelorussian	775
7.	English	5454	27.	Kazakh	761
8.	Chinese	4500	28.	Dutchman	719
9.	French	4309	29.	LATVIAN	669
10.	Ukrainian	3946	30.	Chechen	666
11.	ESTONIAN	3847	31.	Azeri	619
12.	Armenian	3483	32.	“PRIBALT”	600
13.	Japanese	2901	33.	Korean	565
14.	Pole	2393	34.	Khant	477
15.	Arabian	1818	35.	LITHUANIAN	456
16.	Italian	1522	36.	Persian	389
17.	Gypsy	1429	37.	Vietnamese	386
18.	FINNISH	1377	38.	Bulgarian	358
19.	Tatar	1245	39.	Eskimo	330
20.	Czech	1226	40.	Komi	277

The thirteen best positions are held by

1) Russians themselves (presumably including ‘Russians in anecdotes’, as well as ‘Russian anecdotes’);

2) old favourites from the Soviet times (Chukchi, Jew, Georgian, Ukrainian, Armenian);

3) representatives of the biggest Western and Eastern nationalities (American, English, French; Chinese, Japanese), perhaps at the expense of a certain amount of translated texts of these nationalities again;

4) Estonian, the successful newcomer.

Perhaps the multitude and rank order of Russian contemporary ethnic butts as a whole reflects nearly the same process of widening as we saw in Laineste’s “Estonian case”. Anyhow, the rise of Estonians to the top ten has been notably sudden and sharp.

OUR “PRIBALTIC”-FINNIC SAMPLE AND SOME SPECIFIC FEATURES OF INTERNET JOKES

In creating my sample of Russian Internet jokes, I tried to be painfully objective towards the four target nationalities – Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians (and “Pribalts”, which is a fuzzy common denominator for native inhabitants of the three former Baltic Soviet republics in Russian language and jokelore). I started from the above-mentioned searches in Rambler, got a preliminary draft of texts and addresses, compiled a preliminary list of “plot units” (technically: tables) where the texts belonging to one and the same narrative or formulaic plot were brought together (technically: as rows of one and the same table), and made a number of additional spontaneous searches based on various criteria, in order to find representatives of possible new, hitherto unregistered plot units. When the searches seemed to become practically inconclusive, the resulting list of **582 plots** was considered final.

The next logical step was then to try to estimate the “total power” (familiarity / productivity / frequency) of each joke as a plot unit. The only available parameter for that was, in my case, the sum of frequencies / occurrences of any textual variant throughout all plot units. I found the sums (including those of texts occurring in so-called “very similar sites”, but registering the numbers of sites, not separate documents), but the results turned out to be devastatingly uninterpretable.

Internet joke sources may be divided into four main categories based on their context-free / context-bound and/or static / dynamic nature:

1. **Static context-free** sources, i.e. sites containing lists of contextless joke texts created by private individuals or organisations, mainly through the copying of texts from other previously created joke sites, digitalised publications or other sources. Once created, such static joke collections change little or not at all.

2. **Static context-bound** sources, i.e. jokes “told” in the context of various larger texts, like newspaper articles, stories, tales, novels etc. published on the Internet.

3. **Dynamic context-free** sources, i.e. various “joke departments”, “joke books”, etc. hosted by various portals, digital newspapers and magazines, that encourage users to add their jokes to their collection, permit one to read them and request that one rate the latest jokes that have been submitted. Such sites also often create and manage their own joke archives, the chronology of which occasionally spans several years. The expansion of these sites depends on texts copied from elsewhere and on those reproduced from memory.

4. **Dynamic context-bound** sources, i.e. various chat rooms and mailing lists where live communication takes place, during which jokes are also told, and witticisms are recounted or referred to. In contextual e-humour sources, jokes copied from elsewhere are logically ruled out, and are also actually very rare.

This categorisation also broadly reflects the folkloric value of Internet jokes as texts and “types” (i.e. plot-level units). Copies are certainly of lower value than texts reproduced from memory, although on the whole and in a statistical sense, the intensity of the copying of texts (frequency, the number of copies that have been made) is certainly one parameter of the value attached to a joke, and should not be ignored. Furthermore, the value of copies depends on whether someone has selected and copied from a broader collection individual joke texts that in his/her opinion are “good”, or copied whole lists of texts that belonged to the topic he/she was interested in, or copied practically everything he/she found with the purpose of cumulating some “integrative” personal archive or an institutional database of jokes. Very frequently joke duplicates emerge simply due to “extra-humorous” reasons, for instance creating mirror pages or other permanent connections between different sites and portals.

By and large, though, Russian, Estonian and other joke sources on the Internet leave the impression of a huge pile of lifeless, mechanical copies.

Table 2. General parameters of the discussed joke sample at the plot and text level

(Abbreviations here and henceforth:
EST = Estonian; FIN = Finn; LAT = Latvian; LIT = Lithuanian, BAL = “Pribalt”))

	<i>P</i> (lots)	<i>T</i> (exts)	<i>T/P</i>
EST	356	34,757	97.5
FIN	265	8577	32.4
LAT	87	5269	60.6
LIT	32	1595	43.8
BAL	28	1444	51.6
Σ		51,642	

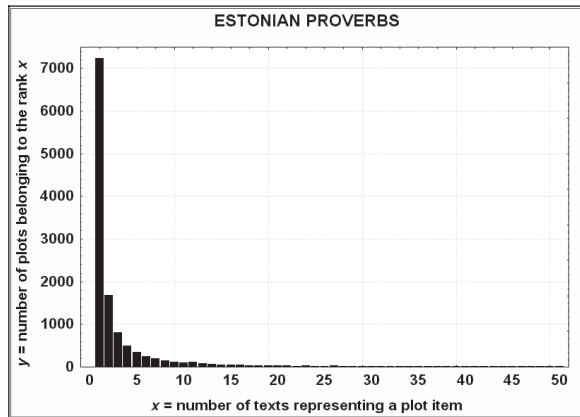
Table 2 provides some general parameters of my joke sample at the plot and text level. The only significant information that I can read out of these statistics is the somewhat reduced status of FIN on the textual level. On the synchronic level it is quite difficult to find a good reason why the Finn as an ethnic target should produce less repetitions than plots. The reason most likely lies in diachrony, i.e. the fact that the Finn began his career in Russian jokelore much earlier than the other three nations, but has in recent decades surrendered much of his former relevance to the new “Pribaltic” competitors.

The distribution of the “power ranks” of the specimens of many natural populations tends to follow Zipf’s law: a great deal of small (rare, weak, poor, ...) items, a very small number of big (frequent, strong, rich, ...) items, and a medium amount of middle-sized ones. The distribution of the ranks of textual productivity of plot items in our Russian joke sample remains nearly Zipfian too, but is remarkably flat (see Graph 1c) – the speed of decay of *y*-frequencies through the 50 lowest *x*-ranks is, for example, more than ten times slower than in the source material of Estonian riddles (Graph 1b), and about a hundred times slower than in Estonian proverbs (Graph 1a). The presence of a cloud of unique, improvisatory, challenging “trial” plots is a reliable indicator of the vitality of a folklore genre, like any other natural population. Data concerning minor Estonian genres are based on corporuses of authentic records, from which duplicates and other falsified texts were preliminarily filtered. Seen from this perspective, Internet joke sources begin to look paradoxical: very extensive in their overall physical extent, but with quite a limited “actual core”, and, despite the above-mentioned concessions, it continues to seem necessary to separate cases of real “retelling” (why not via keyboard) from cases of “simply distributed” jokes. Considering the specificity of web sources, however, the task is difficult to perform.

Finnic and Baltic Nationalities as Ethnic Targets in Russian Jokes

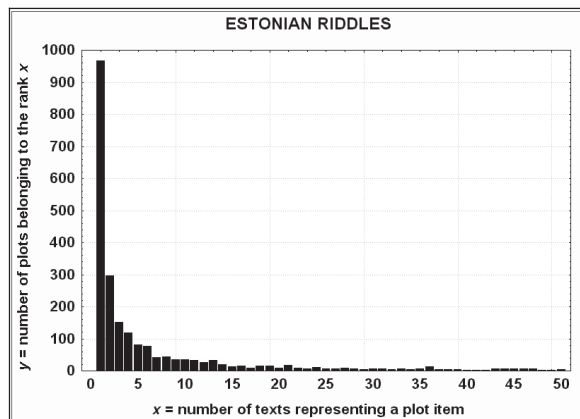
Graph 1a. The distribution of the ranks of textual productivity of plot items.

The decay of y-frequencies through the 50 lowest x-ranks in the source material of Estonian proverbs



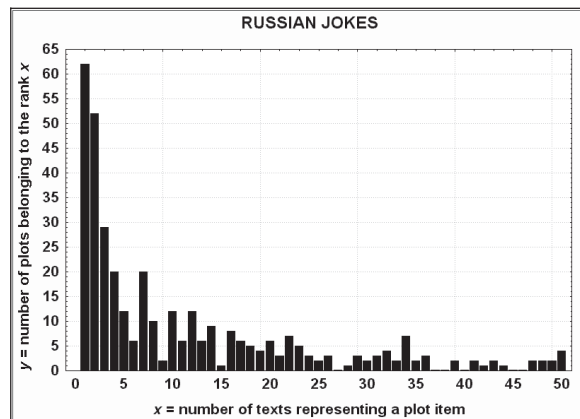
Graph 1b. The distribution of the ranks of textual productivity of plot items.

The decay of y-frequencies through the 50 lowest x-ranks in the source material of Estonian riddles



Graph 1c. The distribution of the ranks of textual productivity of plot items.

The decay of y-frequencies through the 50 lowest x-ranks in our Russian joke sample. The distribution remains nearly Zipfian too, but is remarkably flat



SYNONYMITY OF TARGET NATIONALITIES

Victor Raskin (1985) has claimed that it is impossible to transform a non-ethnic joke into an ethnic one by simply changing the “name labels” of some characters and adding some linguistic or other ethnic colouring. On the other hand, folk narrative plots reveal a great variability in terms of characters, including the TARGET level constituents of jokes (cf. Attardo & Raskin 1991).

For example, there is the following item in our Russian Internet material:

A Latvian is blowing bubble gum bubbles in a café, and trying to mock an Estonian: Do you eat the entire loaf of bread? – Yes, of course. – Well, we gather the crust in a container, make muslix out of it and sell it to Estonia. The Latvian continues: Do you eat your bread with jam? – Yes, of course. – Well, we in Latvia use only fresh fruit, but we gather the seeds, skins and other rejects in a container, make jam out of it and sell it to Estonia. The Estonian loses his patience: What do you do with your condoms after you’ve used them? – We throw them away, of course. – Well, we gather them in containers, make bubble gum out of them and then sell it to Latvia.

An alternative pair of characters in Russian jokes can be the Finn (+) and the Swede (–). In Russia the joke is evidently a recent loan. In any case, Google indicates occurrences of the same plot with dozens of other combinations of peoples, e.g. the Canadian and the American, the American and the Canadian, the Filipino and the American, the Irishman and the American, the Frenchman and the American, the American and the Frenchman, the Greek and the American, the Indian and the American, the Thai and the American, the Asian and the American, the Kenyan and the American, the Mauritian and the American, the South African and the American, Nelson Mandela and George Bush, the Australian and the American, the Irishman and the Englishman, the Frenchman and the German, the Croatian and the Serb, the Lebanese and the Syrian, the Indian and the Pakistani, the Singaporean and Malaysian, the Thai King and the Singaporean, the New Zealander and the Australian, the Jamaican and the Trinidadian, the Guyanese and the Trinidadian, etc.

A similar synonymity holds between the Finnic and Baltic butts in Russian jokes. 143 (i.e. about ¼) of our 582 plots turned out to have two or more and 31 plots three or more different ethnic targets.

The list of plot items with three or more alternative ethnic butts (which in a few cases co-occurred in one and the same joke) is provided

in the appendix at the end of the paper. More detailed data on the frequencies of target nations can be found in Table 3.

<i>n</i>	1	2	3	4	5	Σ
<i>p</i> (<i>n</i>)	439	109	26	7	1	582

Table 3. The frequencies of target nations

(*n* marks the number of different nations in a plot item and *p*(*n*) the number of plots of the given *n*-rank; the rank *n* = 5 includes BAL as a separate “nation”)

Further, an attempt was made to evaluate the degree of similarity of the four target nationalities. In order to do that, the cases of alternative or simultaneous co-occurrences of different butts were summed in pairs for all 143 plot items involving more than one single butt, and thus a two-dimensional array of intersections generated. The values of the diagonal cells of the matrix were reduced to zero and the “coefficients of similarity” were calculated for all pairs of target nationalities using the formula

$$\lambda_{AB} = \frac{A \cap B \times \sum_{tab}}{\sum A \times \sum B}$$

(Here $A \cap B$ means the size of the common part (number of intersections) of events *A* and *B*, \sum_{tab} – the sum total of values in all cells of the matrix, $\sum A$ – the sum total of occurrences of event *A* and $\sum B$ – the sum total of occurrences of event *B*. If $\lambda = 1$, events *A* and *B* are independent; if $\lambda > 1$, then *A* and *B* are positively correlated, if $\lambda < 1$, then their correlation is negative)

The initial matrix of pairwise co-occurrences is shown in Table 4a, the field of λ -coefficients in Table 4b. Thus, λ -calculation successfully divides the field of our target nations into two clearcut clusters – Finnic (EST + FIN) and Baltic (LAT + LIT).

Table 4a. The initial matrix of pairwise co-occurrences

	EST	FIN	LAT	LIT	Σ
EST	135	234	80	26	475
FIN	234	121	54	16	425
LAT	80	54	45	22	201
LIT	26	16	22	18	82
Σ	475	425	201	82	1183

Table 4b. The field of λ -coefficients

	EST	FIN	LAT	LIT
EST	0.00	1.96	1.30	1.03
FIN	1.96	0.00	0.98	0.71
LAT	1.30	0.98	0.00	1.90
LIT	1.03	0.71	1.90	0.00

The large relative proportion of plots shared between the figures of Estonians and Finns, as well as between the three “pribalts”, is not the only characteristic of their synonymity. Russian jokelore in general does not make a clear-cut distinction between Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, and the elements of their languages, their proper names, geographic places etc. are often confused. For example:

The ESTONIAN (sic!) dog does not react to its master’s call “Sharik!”, but reacts to the call “Sharikas” with merry barking “Gavs, gavs!”

I am sure that Estonians have never had dogs bearing the name Sharik, let alone Sharikas.

ESTONIANS (sic!) finally translated the fairy tale “Peter Pan” – in it they have named him “Иударас Пенис” (“Pitaras Penis”).

[“Pitaras” is apparently also an allusion to the vulgar slang word *nudapac* (= homo)]

In the texts above the Estonian is confused with the Lithuanian and Latvian. Besides, there are a lot of jokes in Estonia (and certainly elsewhere) proceeding from the fact that the masculine substantives in Latvian have the ending *-s* and in Lithuanian the ending *-as*:

‘Cat’ in Lithuanian is “Kurnäuskas”

(*kurnäu* is one of Estonian counterparts for *miaow*).

The hare (jänes in Estonian) and peni (i.e. ‘dog’ in the Southern Estonian dialect) discuss moving to Latvia. The hare says: “In Latvia I will be called “Janis”.” The peni (dog): “Oh? Mmm... I see... I guess I will give up moving to Latvia...”

Likewise, Estonian schoolboys can have Latvian or Lithuanian names, such as Janis, Mihalis, Peters, Vitas, Estonian farmers can have Finnish family names, like Kaakinen or Toivanen, etc.

The indistinguishability of the “pribalts” is well expressed in a Russian (self-ironic, I guess) joke:

A Russian says about Lithuanians: “Well, they are those who live in Riga and speak Estonian...”

THE DOMINANT OF SLOWNESS

Accordingly to Raskin (1985), Davies (1990; 2002) and others, slowness is not among the most widespread features of ethnic characters in jokes. It has originally been ascribed to several Scandinavian peoples like the Finns, Norwegians and Swedes. Under Urho Kaleva Kekkonen’s long rule, Finland had friendly political relations with the Soviet Union. Finns were often tourists in Russian cities, especially Len-

ingrad, and also in Estonia since 1965, when regular ferry traffic began between Helsinki and Tallinn. For Finns who were sober at home, Russia and Estonia became traditional places for relaxed drinking, and Finland was one of the few foreign lands that were easily accessible to Russian shopping tourists. Perhaps in the seventies, the traditional proverb formula ‘A is not a B’ found a new Russian modification *Курица – не птица, Финляндия – не заграница* (Chickens aren’t birds, Finland is not a foreign land).

It is difficult to retrospectively determine how outstanding an ethnic figure the Finn was in the Russian jokelore of the Soviet period. There is, however, a good reason to think that it is probably the image of the Finn that has initiated and mediated the process of the further southward expansion of the slowness stereotype in Russian jokelore, but later, in the 1990s, a great deal of slowness motifs were transferred to the now more current Estonian, who thus took over the role of the emblem of slowness.

I extracted the feature of slowness from a total of 244 plots from our Russian sample (i.e. 41.3% of the total plot supply). The division of absolute and relative frequencies of slowness between the four target peoples is shown in Table 5.

	total	slow	%
EST	357	210	58.3
FIN	264	105	39.8
LAT	87	19	21.8
LIT	32	3	9.4

Table 5. The division of absolute and relative frequencies of slowness between the four target peoples in 244 plots from our Russian sample

(the column *total* marks the total number of plots including the given nationality, the column *slow* the number of plots referring to slowness, and the last column indicates the relative share of slowness jokes for each target nation)

From this it also becomes evident that shared slowness is the main factor to which the Estonian and Finn owe a great deal of their strong similarity.

Here I provide some further examples of Finnic slowness in Russian Internet jokes.¹

★ In contemporary Russian slang, the mocking name for Estonians (sometimes also for Finns, and slow people in general) is “stick-in-the-mud” (*тормоз*) [literally ‘brake’], the symbol of Tallinn is “Старый Тоормоз” [“Old Toomas” → “Old Brake”], an EFian behind the wheel is an emergency brake, EF vodka is brake oil and EF brake pads are the most effective in the world.

★ All EFians' reactions are extremely slow. They only beat up people who tell unpleasant jokes the next day. Their hangovers begin three days after drinking alcohol, their erections begin three days after looking at a pornographic magazine, and ejaculation comes three days after having sex.

★ An introverted EF looks at the tips of his own shoes while talking with others, and an extroverted EF looks at those of his conversation partner. An EF boss asks his Russian secretary to type a little slower, because he can't dictate that fast. EFians are the wealthiest nation in the world, because they are unable to spend their salary fast enough, and EF rally drivers are successful because they are unable to raise their foot from the gas pedal while in curves. EF ambulances bear the text 'Time heals all wounds' (*Время лечит*), and EF buses the sign 'Please speak to the driver to wake him up'. Physics has been removed from EF school programmes, so as not to traumatise children with the concept 'speed'. In EF casinos, stakes can be placed for the next day. In the EF version of the game show 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' there is an additional lifeline – 'Write to a friend', and a new class of service has been created in EF-land – 'postal Internet'. An EF cyclist comes third in a running marathon, the EF ski team freezes at the start of the competition so as to wait for the first snows, and an EF Olympic winner only realises by evening that he has won first place. In EF hunting shoots, the figure of the 'running wild boar' has been replaced with the 'sleeping sloth', and EFians' favourite pastime is to watch frolicking sloths in the zoo. The slow waltz is EFians' rap music.

★ In EF-land slowly dissolving coffee has been invented, the EF hound is a breed specially designed to hunt wounded snails and tortoises, and the army of EF-land has slow reaction forces that kill their enemies with boredom.

★ In EF-land, natural processes in general take place much more slowly, time passes more slowly, and gravity is not as strong. NATO sends a dirigible to protect Estonian airspace. In EF-land, a new and harmless strain of the AIDS virus has been discovered – its incubation period is longer than a human lifetime. The EF Internet is so fast because seconds are longer there. Even in St. Petersburg, the tempo of life is slower than in Moscow, because the proximity of EF-land influences the city.

★ Also, there is a parody of proverb: *If you chase two Estonians, you could end up catching a third.* (Original: *If you chase two rabbits, you won't catch either*).

As on many previous occasions, I must once again complain about the absence of an ATU-like register of contemporary jokes. While working on this topic I repeatedly found myself in a constant helpless need to know how broad was the actual area of distribution of this or that joke plot in other languages and cultures outside the given Baltic-Finnic-Russian region, which other ethnic butts could be in use there, etc.

Using search engines Rambler and Google, I made, just for fun, an attempt to observe which ethnic constants can substitute the variable *X* in the globally known expression “**hot X(-ian,-ish) guys ~ boys**”, and how frequent those constants were in the Russian and Western web world. The numbers of responses for the first 17 positions are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. An attempt to observe which ethnic constants can substitute the variable X in the globally known expression “hot X(-ian,-ish) guys ~ boys”

Rambler: горячие X-ские парни			Google: hot X(-ian,-ish) guys ~ boys		
1.	FINNISH	8524	1.	Indian	2895
2.	ESTONIAN	3206	2.	Russian	1647
3.	German	1288	3.	French	1538
4.	American	444	4.	Mexican	1174
5.	Russian	372	5.	English + British	2733
6.	Swedish	309	6.	American	1593
7.	Georgian	288	7.	FINNISH	1166
8.	LITHUANIAN	239	8.	Spanish	1383
9.	LATVIAN	231	9.	German	1475
10.	Norwegian	168	10.	Chinese	1249
11.	Mexican	96	11.	Jewish	384
12.	English + British	70	12.	Swedish	264
13.	Armenian	44	13.	ESTONIAN	274
14.	French	34	14.	Norwegian	51
15.	Jewish	33	15.	LATVIAN	15
16.	Chinese	28	16.	Georgian	13
17.	Cuban	25	17.	LITHUANIAN	9

The obtained rank sequences seem to be the result of several different factors:

a) perhaps some guys are hot simply because they are members of big, well-known and authoritative nations (Americans, Russians, Englishmen, Germans);

b) some other guys, especially southern ones, appear to be regarded as hot in earnest and literally (Indians, Georgians, Mexicans, Spaniards);

c) yet other guys, especially Scandinavian ones, are ironically referred to as “hot” (Finns, Estonians, Swedes, Norwegians).

The positions of the Baltic and Finnic nations differ considerably in Rambler and (English) Google, although their mutual arrangement is the same in both. The Finn holds the highest position (and is immediately followed by the Estonian) in the Russian ranking, but is only the seventh in Google. Other “pribalts” are also located much higher in Rambler than in Google.

The strong shift upwards of the former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union hardly needs any further explanation.

RESIDUAL ASPECTS: ASEXUALITY, STUPIDITY, LANGUAGE, POLITICAL MATTERS

As mentioned above, slowness in and of itself is not very salient among the universal features of the objects of ethnic mockery. Finns' and Estonians' slowness is, however, evidently associated with dull-wittedness, linguistic incapability and sexual inertia, i.e. with the mainstream ethnic topics described by Raskin (1985: Ch. VI) such as ASEXUALITY, DUMBNESS, and LANGUAGE DISTORTION.

These and other content constituents often coincide in one and the same joke. The motoric, physiological, mental, emotional and intellectual expressions of slowness are densely connected and overlap.

Asexuality

★ As already noted above, an Estonian or a Finn gets angry three days after being told an insulting joke, has an hangover three days after drinking, gets an erection three days after looking at a pornographic magazine, and ejaculates three days after having sex.

★ On his wedding night, an EFian is only able to take so much initiative as to say good night to his bride. Sex seems to him to be more pleasant than Christmas, but then again, Christmas happens more of-

ten. An EFian girl prefers sex to be ‘either back or forth’, not ‘back and forth, back and forth’. An EF woman asks her husband to kiss her after having just returned from a long business trip; he is surprised: ‘what is the need for such orgies!’

Dullness

EFians in Russian jokes are not only physically slow, but their cognitive processes are sluggish and dull as well.

★ They think that their parents or grandparents never had children; look for dead crows in the sky and flies from the inside of their cheek; finding a friend’s dismembered body parts by the road, an EFian worries that something bad may have happened to him; beats his car down because it won’t fit in the garage with fully inflated tyres; an Estonian border guard thinks that the Audi Quattro is so named because it can only accommodate four passengers, etc.

★ An old Hant ~ Chukchi says on his deathbed: “Respect the forest – it gives us warmth. Respect the moose – they provide us with food. Respect the Estonians – otherwise we would be the only stupid people on earth.”

★ As in the case of slowness, stupidity seems to extend to Estonian animals too: an Estonian wolf chewed off three of his paws and was still unable to get out of the trap he was caught in.

Unlike slowness, stupidity is the most central feature of ethnic targets in contemporary jokes, preceded by the long lineage of ancestors in the multitude of older folk jokes with a large variety of target characters that can be specified not only ethnically, but also by their social status, wealth, profession, gender, age, etc. Therefore, wherever stupidity is involved in jokes, one should expect an especially wide range of name labels of characters, especially long historical pedigrees behind certain plots, etc.

For example, the two following plots were, among others, formerly connected with the Soviet militia:

Estonian policemen. One of them asks the other to check whether the strobe lights on the roof of their car are working. The other policemen gets out, looks up and says: “It’s working... it’s not working... it’s working... it’s not working...”

An Estonian suffering from heat or a hangover asks a friend to bring him some lemonade. The friend returns and says: “There wasn’t any lemonade, but I brought you some cookies.”

The Estonian (or Finn) in Russian jokes is tardy and dull-witted, though not lazy, but orderly and sparing.

Two Estonians ~ Finns go to a brothel and ask the madam what they could get for \$5. The madam says that for \$5 they could fuck each other outside in the bushes. They do so, return and ask: "Who should we pay the \$5?"

An Estonian ~ Finn picks up a dead crow "just in case"; a year later he takes it back to the same place, because he has discovered that he does not need it.

Language: stretched speech and accent

Telling jokes to a native Russian audience generally only takes place in Russian. In that sense it differs diametrically from telling jokes to Estonians in Soviet Estonia (and presumably also elsewhere in the USSR), where jokes of Russian origin were typically told in macaronic language, maintaining the necessary untranslatable fragments of text in Russian – first of all elements of direct speech, such as puns, punch-lining formulae, etc. (cf. Krikmann 2006).

Shmeleva & Shmelev (2002: 47 ff., 75 ff.) draw a distinction between the two main types of ethnic objects in contemporary Russian jokes – “aliens” (*иностранцы*) and “foreigners” (*иностранцы*), and claim that Estonians are only “foreigners” who have evolved a linguistic specificity that is more characteristic of the “aliens” like Jews, Georgians, Chukchis, etc.

Take, for example, the joke which in English translation is roughly as follows:

A Russian customer attempts to speak to an Estonian salesperson in broken Estonian. The salesperson: "You can speak Russian, I understand your language!" The customer: "We listened to your Russian for 50 years – now you listen to our Estonian!"

One of the Internet variants of this in the original Russian looks like this:

*Заходит русский покупатель в эстонский магазин. За прилавком стоит продавщица, эстонка. Покупатель начинает на ломаном эстонском объяснять чего он хочет. Эстонка: **Посалуйста, коворитте по-русски, я все понимаю.** – Мы пятьдесят лет слушали ваш русский, теперь вы послушайте наш эстонский.*

Language: misunderstandings and puns

Estonians' or Balts' linguistic incapacity can result in a number of puns or other linguistic jokes. For some reason, dialogues between Russian travellers and Estonian customs officers have been especially prone to inspire such confusions. Sometimes the outcome is obscene. Some examples:

An Estonian says: Russians are odd people, everything is 'sapor' for them, church is sapor, fence is sapor and when they're constipated, that's also sapor [this refers to the Russian words собор, забор and занор respectively].

A Russian customs official asks an Estonian truck driver: What are you hauling? – “Трунны!” (i.e. he means to say truby = pipes, but the Russian hears trupy = corpses, and asks:) “Are they in coffins?” – “No, in piles.”

A female Russian taxi driver asks an Estonian customs official to do the paperwork for her cargo as fast as possible. The customs official says that things don't go that quickly, and adds in broken Russian: “Ну-у, если хот-муме, мо-жете взя-ать у меня-я ра-ас-пи-иску.” The woman says she is not satisfied with that. The Estonian answers: “Ну-у, возмим-те два-а-ра-аса!” [the woman understands: можете взять у меня расписку = you can get a receipt; the Estonian apparently thought: можете взять у меня раз письку = you can suck my dick].

Kalev complains to Ilya Muromets that his horse does not want to walk. Muromets recommends shoeing it (подкүй) [sounds a little like pod hui, which would mean 'under the dick']. The Estonian does not understand what Ilya said and answers: I've already hit it “под күй и под яйца” [very literally: 'under its dick and under its balls'], but it still won't move.

A Latvian tells a Russian that his name is Vilis Skuja [sounds a little like vylez s huja, which would mean 'climbed out from the dick']. The Russian answers: “Я не спрашиваю, откуда ты вылез, фамилия твоя как?” [“I am not asking what hole you climbed out of, I asked you your name!”].

The Latvian asks Russian about someone: “Kur viņš?” (Where is he/she?). The Russian answers: “But we do not have anyone called Kurvinsh on our staff!”

The mail address of the Estonian Institute of Experimental Biology is really and truly **ebi@ebi.ee** – which, spelled in Russian computer slang, sounds like “**fuck, doggie, fuck, point, ye-ye**”.

Political matters

Surprisingly enough, the strained political relations between Russia and the Baltic states are only quite modestly represented, mainly through Estonians' and Latvians' painful attitude to Russians' poor knowledge of Estonian and Latvian.

The restoration of Estonian independence, as mentioned by Shmeleva & Shmelev (2002: 78), the dissatisfied Russian diaspora, the entry of Estonia and the other Baltic states into the European Union and NATO, problems with the implementation of the language law, border treaties and the 'Bronze Man', the Russian media, politicians, state institutions' reactions to them – all of this has definitely created a favourable background for political-ethnic humour towards Estonia. Yet all of these circumstances have, nevertheless, yielded relatively few direct anecdote motifs.

There are only a few jokes on the Russian Internet that refer to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gaining national independence. For instance:

★ An Estonian child asks his mother to buy a tin of Baltic sprats, and his mother agrees to buy even two tins, because we are now sovereign and can afford it. Or, for instance, 'pribalts' ask a Russian who has hoarded toilet paper when Russians began using toilet paper, and the Russian answers 'ever since pribalts stopped licking our asses'.

There are more jokes that criticise 'pribalts' for being painfully sensitive about language matters, and demanding that Russians living in their countries speak in their languages.

★ The joke in which the stubborn 'pribalt' refuses to communicate his three wishes to a Russian-speaking goldfish seems to be one of the most widespread of all jokes involving Estonians.

One can also find some genuinely evil nostalgia for earlier times, clear references to deportation, imprisonment and invasion.

★ In response to Estonians' request to spell the name "Таллин" (*Tal-lin*) with two *n*-s, Russians recommend spelling "Колыма" (*Kolyma*) with two *a*-s. In answer to an Estonian's question how long it takes a Russian to pack up his things, the Russian answers that he doesn't know, but it takes him about 45 seconds to assemble a Kalashnikov machine gun.

The joke about the colours of the Estonian flag is particularly cruel, but “objectively” witty and well-structured. Here Vovochka is obviously a positive character.

Teacher: What does the blue on the Estonian flag symbolise? – An Estonian student (Peeter): ... the blue Estonian sky that before was polluted by Russian fighter planes, but is now clean once again. – And what does the black symbolise? – An Estonian student (Aino): the sacred soil of Estonia, which was once trampled by the boots of Russian soldiers, but is now clean once again. – And what does the white in the Estonian flag symbolise? – A Russian student (Vovochka): It symbolises the white snow of the steppes of Siberia, which for decades was trampled by the feet of the ancestors of the present Estonians ... and they’ll trample it again, just as soon we return here!

In the next two examples the ‘pribalt’ is an obviously negative (cruel, unjust) character:

A Russian asks an Estonian or Lithuanian for directions to get to a particular street. The response: left, right, straight, left again and you’ll be at the railway station.

A young man saves an Estonian child from a pool of crocodiles. The journalist writing about the event considers this to be a genuine Estonian heroic deed, but hears that the young man is Russian, and writes a news item entitled “Russian steals crocodile’s breakfast”.



I have not yet found any reflection in Russian ethnic humour of the events that took place in April and May, 2007 in Tallinn in connection with the so-called Bronze Man, at the Estonian Consulate in Moscow, and elsewhere, unless the sign NO ESTONIANS AND DOGS that truly hung on the door of a restaurant in Yaroslavl for a while can be considered humour.



Only very rarely are Estonians, Latvians or other inhabitants of the former Soviet camp allowed to be positive (clever, witty, victorious) characters in Russian jokes, but almost never against a Russian antagonist. The examples below actually represent the Soviet and not the contemporary stratum of jokes.

As an experiment, the Soviet Union decides to grant Estonia national sovereignty from 6 o'clock in the evening to 6 o'clock in the morning. At 7:00, Estonia declares war on Finland. At 8:00 the Finns capture Tallinn. At 9:00 Estonia signs an act of complete and unconditional surrender.

Members of three nationalities throw out of an airplane everything they have enough of. The Frenchman throws a bottle of wine, the Russian a case of vodka, but the Estonian throws the Russian out of the plane – we truly have enough of them.

(See also the quoted above joke above about making condoms out of chewing cum)

Note

1. Since slowness is characteristic of both Estonians and Finns in Russian jokes, and I have not wanted to use the collective name “Smogarians” or distinguish which motifs are connected with both, and which with only one or another, in the following review of examples the characters are identified by the abbreviation EFian and the corresponding countries by the abbreviation EF-land, and also, where necessary, EF-language, etc. These motifs are, however, more often associated with Estonians than with Finns.

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Appendix

EST	FIN	LAT	LIT	Σ	PLOT
1	1	1	1	4	Quarrelling about unimportant trifles (the possible “prototype narrative” of the now globally known expression [<i>Don't fight,</i>] <i>hot Xian guys</i> ~ ... <i>горячие Хские парни</i>)
1	1	1	1	4	At first, a hitch-hiker is told that Tallinn ~ Helsinki ~ ... is not too far, and, after several hours of driving, that it is now far indeed
1	1	1	1	4	<i>Пустатый паспорт</i> (obscene-sounding dialog between Xian and Russian customs officials)
1	1	1	1	4	Xian parachutists hovered above the town for three days
1	1	1	1	4	Russians went into space? – Really, all of them?
1	1	1	0	3	Sex is better than Christmas, but Christmas happens more often
1	1	1	0	3	An Xian suffering from heat or a hangover asks a friend to bring him some beer or lemonade. The friend returns and says: “There wasn’t any lemonade, but I brought you some cookies.”
1	1	1	0	3	Two Xian guys in a brothel are told that for \$5 they can fuck each other – they do so and ask whom they should give the \$5
1	0	1	1	3	An Xian refuses a goldfish’s offer to fulfil three of his wishes, because the offer was made in Russian
1	1	1	0	3	On the day after telling jokes about Xian’s slowness, the Russian who told them is beaten up by two Xians
1	1	1	0	3	A whole village has come to observe how silently and invisibly a group of Xian scouts is crawling towards enemy positions
1	1	1	0	3	Enjoying the romping sloths in Tallinn Zoo is the favourite pastime of Xians
1	1	1	0	3	An Xian picks up a dead crow “just in case”; a year later he takes it back to the same place, because he has discovered that he does not need it
1	1	1	0	3	The secret of the Matrix’s bullets disclosed: the bullets were Xian
1	1	1	0	3	In an Xian casino, roulette stakes are taken for tomorrow
1	1	1	0	3	Xians have invented slowly soluble coffee
1	1	1	0	3	Xian policemen. One of them asks the other to check whether the strobe lights of their car are working. The other looks up and says: “It’s working... it’s not working...”

Finnic and Baltic Nationalities as Ethnic Targets in Russian Jokes

1	1	1	0	3	The Xian border guard thinks that the names Audi Quattro and Fiat Uno refer to the number of seats in the respective cars
1	1	1	0	3	Verbal contest between Xian and Yian: the first round – about eating an entire loaf of bread vs. making muslix of it; the second – about eating jam vs. making it from fruit rejects; the third – about throwing used condoms away vs. making bubble gum out of them and then selling them to Y-land
1	1	0	1	3	A pale untanned Xian explains: I just had to be at work on the Wednesday when summer happened
1	1	1	0	3	One of the oldest barber's shops was discovered in Xland. Instruments, mirrors and a queue of three people were well preserved
1	1	1	0	3	If in Latvia you are overtaken by an Estonian, you must be a Finn
1	1	1	0	3	Mom, do we have Finnish ancestors? – No. – How about Estonians? – No, sonny. – But why the hell then am I such a stick-in-the-mud?
1	1	1	0	3	Text on Xian ambulance: 'Time heals all wounds'
1	1	1	0	3	The Xian Urmas ~ Kaarlis ~ Hekka stands in a queue, repeatedly reacts when the names "Toomas!" ~ "Valdis!" ~ "Mikka!" are shouted, repeatedly abandons the queue and finally shouts desperately: "I am not Toomas, I'm Urmas! ~ ... ~ ..."
1	1	1	0	3	Eczema does not stop an Xian kissing the Queen's hand: Clinton ~ Bush even had haemorrhoids
1	0	1	1	3	The devil caught representatives of different nationalities and put them in a sack. When they escaped, they behaved differently: e.g. the Estonian did not understand what was going on, the Latvian held a political protest, etc.
1	1	1	0	3	How can one make a Xian laugh on Monday ~ ... - Tell him a joke on Friday ~ ...
1	0	1	1	3	Gorbachev orders that his stolen wife be returned immediately, or else the whole of Siberia will soon speak Xian
1	1	0	1	3	Пень 4 (i.e. Pentium 4, literally: Stump 4): assembled in Estonia, with Finnish video card, for viewing Lithuanian DVDs

LITHUANIA

HYBRID ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION: VIEWERSHIP OF THE LITHUANIAN “Dviracio Sou”

Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė

Abstract

News and current affairs programming on one hand and entertainment television on the other are generally considered to be antipodes in terms of their potential to serve a civic mission of mass media in modern liberal democracies. The article argues that traditional generic conventions overlook the substantial transformation of present entertainment television and the effects of its growing complexity, multi-dimensionality and intertextuality of the hybrid blend of comedy and documentary. The article addresses the nature of the “Dviracio Sou” (“Bike Show”), a conspicuous Lithuanian television program that combines sketch comedy, political satire and spoof news. It also argues that the discursive ambiguity of hybrid entertainment television makes it relatively open to a variety of readings and modes of pleasurable experiences. Sceptical arguments about entertainment television are tested in an empirical qualitative audience research conducted on the “Dviracio Sou” viewership. The research aimed to reveal a scope of motives to watch the program, expectations of audiences, received gratifications, perception of humorous, intertextual and non-fictional elements of the “Dviracio Sou” as well as to describe the degree of enjoyment when watching the program. Finally, a typology of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership is established with an intent to unveil the perception of the (ir)relevancy of the “Dviracio Sou” for political life and civic empowerment.

Key words: entertainment media, hybrid popular television, intertextuality, play, media enjoyment, pleasure, humour, viewership, “Dviracio Sou”

INTRODUCTION

Long ago a notorious classic made a powerful statement, Ask not for whom the bike signals... It signals for you. It reminds us that the “Dviracio Sou” continues, and it’s upon you to puzzle out on which side of the screen you are. Clink clink...¹

This is a trailer of a popular Lithuanian television program called the “Dviracio Sou” (“Bike Show”). What does its “signal” mean? Whom does it address? The “Dviracio Sou” is a piece of infotainment, continuously aired on national commercial television since the mid 1990s. The English version of the trailer disguises a verbal play with Hemingway’s cultish phrase *Ask not for whom the bell tolls... It tolls for thee*. Nevertheless, the reference invites television viewers to the tricky universe of Lithuanian sketch comedy, political satire and mock news. Evolving on the borderline of an artistic imagination and serious reinterpretation of non-fictional daily realities, the program is ambivalent in terms of conventional classifications of television genres. Its ambiguity and playfulness seduces the viewer with a constant challenge to reflect upon its nature and the meaning of its messages. What does the “Dviracio Sou” tell us? What does it reveal? What is plausible and true? What belongs to the field of fantasy or creative fiction? What can be laughed at? What must be pondered upon?

Intertextualities of the program and the complex nature of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership are the main subjects of discussion presented below. The article addresses the relationship between the “Dviracio Sou” and its audiences, social encounters, and the uses of a particular type of entertainment programming. What do evenings with the “Dviracio Sou” mean for its viewers? How do audiences approach and classify the program? What do they expect and look for? Why is the “Dviracio Sou” appreciated? However, to launch the analysis, a commonly shared puzzle must be overcome. Why should academic research care about such a frivolous matter? The answer is relatively simple. We are to study television production à la “Dviracio Sou” as long as we care about a well-known eschatological claim: beware; the television will amuse us to death! (Postman 1995).

Traditionally, the civic mission of mass media – to safeguard and promote liberal democracy – is entrusted to “serious” genres of journalism, i.e. news and current affairs programming, pundit talks, investigative reporting. The role of vaguely defined “entertainment me-

dia” is downplayed in this respect. Entertainment genres are considered to be unable to serve civic tasks; contrarily, they threaten the public sphere and bring about its degradation (Grindstaff 1997). Entertainment turns communal problems, conflicts and other serious issues into commodities of media business, matter of leisure time, private comfort, emotional experience and amusement. Mass media production à la “Dviracio Sou” draws critical attention as long as it is perceived to have negative social and political effects on its viewers (Gripsrud 2000). However, does all entertainment television cause a perversion of political life, giving birth to a “decadent citizen” – either a cynical pleasure seeker and/or an impotent, manipulated subject surrendered under the hegemony of the powerful?

The article argues that the scepticism towards “entertainment television” often downplays two important aspects of media production and consumption practices. First, “entertainment media” is not a single genre but rather a loose and growing cluster of mutating formats which need to be differentiated and analysed on an individual basis, focusing on their variety of functions and effects of the peculiar codes of intertextuality. Second, arguments about the negative social and political impacts of entertainment television must not be based solely on the analysis of television texts – style, structure and content. The ambiguity of communication style demands an active participation of viewers to disentangle its multi-dimensional codes. Therefore, sceptical arguments must be grounded on the results of television audience research, empirical analysis of viewership practices. A further presented analysis focuses upon these conceptual issues plunging into the complex universe of the Lithuanian “Dviracio Sou”.

TELEVISION GENRES, INTERTEXTUALITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

Genres are convenient tools to organise and structure the immense field of constantly evolving television production. A *genre* means a *type* and implies a conventional code, an unwritten instruction, circulating among producers of media contents and their audiences, on how to read the message, approach and use media texts. In television, genres are “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between an industry, text and subject” (Neale 1980: 19). To put it simply, we expect different things of a sitcom if compared to political debates, we find docu-dramas and current affairs programming meaningful and appealing in distinct ways. For purposes of our discussion,

two elements of generic tools are of vital importance. First, television genres are not stable, constant configurations of features intrinsic to texts but rather “cultural products, constituted by media practices and subject to ongoing change and redefinition” (Mittell 2004: 1). Therefore we should not ignore their unstable characteristics and consider the conventional nature of generic systems. Second, television today celebrates the mixing of genres evident in a conscious erasure of generic distinctions between its various sources and types of production. New frameworks are constantly produced in reality TV, talk shows, docu-soaps, audio-visual reconstructions of daily tasks of the police, rescue forces or private detectives and televised mimics of legal processes. All seem to participate in several genres simultaneously.

In an attempt to position the “Dviracio Sou” in the generic universe of television, we must start from the following question: how do genre debates qualify hybrid entertainment television? The answers are rather contradictory. Neo-Marxist theories of mass media treat entertainment as a manipulative strategy of the dominant group, as a means to seduce and subjugate popular audiences. The delivery of pleasure is seen as the main function of the television industry in modern societies, acknowledging that television producers “appeal to the playful, imaginative, irresponsible aspects of adult behaviour” (Hartley 1992: 11). This view recognises no distinctions in the universe of entertainment production, as all television entertainment is taken as human degeneration. Entertainment television is accused of producing passive, empty-headed audiences – “coach potatoes”: “[...] television viewers, seeking pleasure and entertainment, unconsciously wish to regress to a childlike state” (Bignell 2008: 278). Classical modern genre theories, established in theatre, film and literature studies, are also quite weak to qualify some of the production created by the present television medium (Mittell 2004: 1–2). In ancient Greece, entertainment was intimately linked to comedy. However, in a tripartite division of poetic genres, comedy stands as a low genre depicting the ridiculous in a non-insulting manner. It lacks dignity because, contrarily to epic and drama, it does not stimulate reflection and introspection on behalf of the audience (Aristotelis 1990).

Such arguments are based on the simplistic understanding of media-derived pleasure; they bracket a variety of sources that make us appreciate television. The impotence of traditional generic conventions is due to their aesthetic “purity”, their insensitivity towards overlapping discursive spaces. The mechanisms of *intertextuality* of television production are still to be discovered and considered, as “the degree of

hybridity and overlap among and between genres and areas has all too often been underplayed” (Neale & Turner 2000: 2). On the one hand, blurring of the boundaries between fictional and documentary programming does receive scholarly attention (Hill 2005). On the other hand, entertainment genres are interesting as long as they cause a mutation of traditional documentary and factual genres of television: the presence of entertainment logic in news and current affairs programming is a hot topic in the field of political communication (Brants 1998; Lee 2002). However, it is rarely asked: how does intertextuality change the meanings and social functions of entertainment media?²² In general, entertainment television seems to remain locked in a fictive, imaginary, utopian space, basically detached from the reality that might threaten the established social order.

It is noted that “entertainment genres, such as sketch shows and situation comedy, also have theatrical roots in music hall and variety, which were adapted for radio and later became established in television” (Bignell 2008: 116). Binding entertainment television to theatre brings the former discursive universe closer to the field of art: entertainment genres just *imitate* real life and play upon social realities but, contrary to documentary genres, have neither the right to *convey* nor the potential to re-produce the orderly world behind the playground of creative invention and imagination; in other words, the rule holds that “[...] the work of any given genre will accomplish genre-specific ends” (Stewart 1989: 50). Moreover, it may be argued that an idea of the trivial nature of the comic genres prevents a closer look inside the world of contemporary entertainment television programmes, as it establishes a one-sided view towards the social functions and effects of ambivalent and multi-dimensional mass media discourses. Is comedy just a careless entertainment? If a Greek comedy is contrasted with Roman satire, a strong positive answer is shaky. Particular humour-involving discourses may nevertheless be serious, committed and meaningful only in the relationship with their social contexts, in a way that goes beyond the sphere of art or private leisure.

The sensitivity to peculiarities of hybrid entertainment production is essential. It allows us to identify and to evaluate those distinct roles, which different composite formats of the entertainment media play in our daily social environment. We are to recognise their intertextualities and distinctions if we are to measure their social and political impacts on television audiences:

Before there can be serious empirical assessment of the varied roles of the entertainment media in politics, political communication scholarship first needs to ground itself conceptually in how to approach such a diversity of media messages and the potential political outcomes that derive from these messages.

(Holbert 2005: 436)

If we agree that television today no longer confines itself to the role of entertainer and claims to have new social and political significance (Pečiulis 2004), one should explore the salience of peculiar hybrid entertainment discourses in our common, “serious” public life. The following chapter presents and discusses basic characteristics of the Lithuanian humorous entertainment programme, the “Dviracio Sou”.

“Dviracio Sou” AS A TEXT: TROUBLED GENERIC IDENTITY

It is a challenge to introduce a non-Lithuanian reader into the discursive universe of the “Dviracio Sou”. One must share daily experiences of the local community and watch the program to master the interpretative schemes when reading the complex and ambivalent narrative. Contextually embedded, the “Dviracio Sou” resists the traditional generic classifications of television discourses. Moreover, “the significance of the events in the everyday life is created by assuming a contiguous relationship between “text” and “context”, between meaning and the occasion of its manufacture” (Stewart 1989: 9).

The format of the present “Dviracio Sou” originated in the mid 1990s together with the establishment of the national commercial television channels after the restoration of Lithuanian independence. The initial title of the program was slightly different – “Dviracio Zyy-nios”. It bore a direct resemblance to the traditional news genre and accommodated the name of an amateur comedy troupe “Dviratis” (“Bike”), members of which formed the core of the creative team of the newly established television program. The scope of this article precludes a detailed tracing of program evolution, temporary outgrowths of the program (“Dviracio kabaretas”, “Dviracio Sou panorama”, etc.) and the split of the team. However, in public announcements, the program has been always attributed to a comedy genre (humorous programming) or classified as a piece of infotainment. A peculiar label of *info-show*, indicating a mixture of information and entertainment, was popularised in Lithuanian popular television guides.

A fragment of narrative may give a primary impression about the nature of the “Dviracio Sou”. Here is an English version of a dialogue

from the two main comic characters of the “Dviracio Sou” who talk about a recent annual report from Valdas Adamkus, a current president of Lithuania:³

Surskis: Mauzeris, have you listened to the speech of the President?

Mauzeris: Of course, I have! [...]

Surskis: Was [Valdas] Adamkus obliged to paint the vision of the country? Where do you get colourful felt-tips in the grey of present times?

Mauzeris: When [John F.] Kennedy gave a speech, he used to draw a vision for the following twenty years. He neither whimpered nor groaned. Even the black [Afro-Americans] acquired a hope for a better life after his annual reports.

Surskis: Back to Kennedy’s times, Adamkus also had a vision of the Lithuanian future, but the real life in Lithuania ruined it.

Mauzeris: Well... Even [Nikita Sergejevich] Khrushchev was able to squeeze out a vision in his annual speeches. He neither whimpered nor moaned... A vision, actually, was all the same each year – to catch up and overtake America, but it still was a vision...

Surskis: Listen, perhaps the Lithuanians do not need any vision? Maybe they are sufficed with Presidential rigging of the Government and Seimas, also Parties and oligarchs.

Mauzeris: It sounds reasonable. The Lithuanians in Ireland cherish one vision, the Lithuanians in America – another one. Can you satisfy needs of everyone...

Surskis: Lumme... Nineteen years have not passed and we already dish dirt on our President.

Mauzeris: Yep... Maybe it’s a clear symptom of crisis of confidence in the state, to listen to Adamkus’ words.

On the discursive “surface”, this is a playful and incoherent prate of two buffoons disguised in masks of mice, named *Surskis* and *Mauzeris*. Whom do the mice represent? The couple might be conceived as a metaphor of the common sense, popular wisdom, the political philosophy of ordinary people. It can also be taken as the subversion of traditional political expertise confined to the elite of pundits, commentators and politicians, a vernacular wisdom outplaying the sophisticated opaqueness of pundit rhetoric. Moreover, for a fellow Lithuanian, the narrative opens up a vast discursive space. The dialogue reflects upon the Presidential address with a critical edge as far as it raises issues of a proper political leadership, good governance, responsibility and active political commitment to the improvement and change. On the other hand, it also concerns both the possibilities and limits of “visionary politics”, susceptible to unrealistic or risky utopian pursuance. The characters of the “Dviracio Sou” make a reader ponder about the

sources of a viable “national dream” under the conditions of the present massive emigration of the Lithuanians. The last line of the dialogue represents the double-voiced nature of the narrative. It embodies both a self-reflective and critical standpoint of its inventors. However, does the scepticism of show characters merely illustrate and *support* the alarming rhetoric of the President? Or is it a satirical move, an attempt to “bite” the state leader for his political stance: Valdas Adamkus accuses other political actors of maladies of Lithuanian democracy; however, does he offer any solutions to the present burning problems? Does the state leader himself not reproduce and deepen the “crisis of confidence” in the state?

Let us leave the semantic micro-level structures of the “Dviracio Sou” and turn towards the general features of the program. In terms of content – chosen issues, topics and subjects – the “Dviracio Sou” reminds us of a news format as far as it provides a playful overview of the latest or recent events, processes and salient issues in the public, political, economic, social and cultural life in Lithuania on a daily basis. However, in terms of the structure and content, the “Dviracio Sou” is a pastiche that does not meet the requirements of the Habermasian public sphere (Habermas 1989). Although structural elements are continuously revised, the program remains a fragmented collage of different generic pieces. This television format does not discriminate between the public and the private, between matters of civic consideration and trivial gossiping. The rubric “Apatiniai baltiniai” (“Underwear”) and the dialogues of two blondes nurture on the issues of the celebrity culture, they focus on the national (and sometimes international) industry of pop-culture and show business.

For nearly fifteen years the same person, a member of the creative team, Vytautas Serenas, plays the role of the “Dviracio Sou’s” “newscaster”. The role of the newscaster is similar to the one of the host who orders the discursive space of the programme. He appears on television announcements, reports on the contents of the daily broadcast, presents “news” topics, combines individual performances into a consistent sequence of news-like television flow and guides audiences through each night performance. The announcement of news is accompanied by pre-staged comic sketches performed by a team of actors, including a number of professionals. Sketches rally and ridicule well-known public figures – Lithuanian politicians, officials, businessmen or popular culture personages as well as other public figures. Parodies often have an evaluative edge that addresses the flaws and mismanagement of political power, dubious outcomes of public deci-

sions or indecisiveness, vanity of show business and the personal vices of the mocked individuals. However, the program does not use the strategy of personification. Besides a number of political leaders, the “Dviracio Sou” has several permanent fictive characters to embody well-recognised local social stereotypes.⁴ These characters are an artistic means to address *abstract*, non-personified issues of current affairs, to bring to the fore the political and economic decisions or conflicts, to reflect upon social processes and problems. A similar role falls upon the aforementioned characters – *Surskis* and *Mauzeris* – who take notice of various aspects of life in the state and reflect upon daily issues in a dialogical manner. These dialogues break the principles of a newscast and switch the “Dviracio Sou” to a format resembling public debate programming or talk shows. The latest invention of the “Dviracio Sou” is a piece of “chronicler time”. It is a short humorous sketch featuring a character who gives a short and inventive review of allegedly the most memorable events of the day in the manner of a television announcement or prompt radio news of 100 seconds. To summarise, the “Dviracio Sou” embodies an inventive implosion of political and non-political topics, issues and problems, and celebrates the hybridity of entertainment that is to be differentiated both from tabloid television and traditional comedy.

Besides the structure and the content of the “Dviracio Sou”, the nature and style of the communicative strategies are important elements to produce a generic ambivalence of the program. Here a special role is given to artistic invention, figurative and metaphorical language. Comic strategies such as parody and wit are also important for the paradoxical, but apt and insightful construction of the arguments. In other words, an ingenious reframing of public life and ordinary newscasts gives a primary impression of light entertainment. An affluence of aesthetic elements in the discourse poses a challenge for audiences: can serious public issues be addressed in a seemingly non-serious and playful manner? The stylistic elements of comedy and entertainment television are misleading because “the transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but it also violates or renews the given genre” (Stewart 1989: 88).

To summarise, the “Dviracio Sou” violates the most important norms of realism (as in a documentary) and values of current affairs programming in terms of both *content* (addressed topics, subjects and issues) and *form* (style, mode of communication, stance towards the audience, and means of expression). The format does not commit itself

to strictly dividing the factual and the fictional, the true and the invented, the fact and the rumour; instead, it plays with values of objectivity, neutrality and fairness. The program implodes spheres of politics and popular culture, urgent communal discourses and personalised human interest stories, it does not prioritise, does not stress the salient problems at the expense of the trivial ones. The “Dviracio Sou” violates the basic principles of traditional political communication both in its style and content. However, at the same time it refrains to deny an ambition to represent and revision the condition of public life and culture in Lithuania in its own specific ways – by invoking humour and public critique through play.

TELEVISION VIEWERSHIP AS PLAY

As social and artistic conventions, television genres have a *contractual* nature (Atifi & Marcoccia 2006). The television industry continuously searches for a new production that would use familiar and successful formats to attract the attention of an audience. Television audiences explore mediascape to identify, select and consume programs according to their interests, tastes and preferences. The norms and values of each particular genre prescribe to television production strategies, and they also direct viewership. In other words, genres and generic typologies are means by which media and viewers can meet one another’s expectations and develop their mutual symbolic ties. An establishment of a communicative contract is significant for the success of newly developed hybrid genres. Labels of *docu-soap*, *reality show*, *comedy-drama*, *tabloid talk show* help the viewers to orientate themselves in a vast universe of television during times when traditional classifications of broadcasted production are no longer informative.

However, there are some well-known experiments which deliberately reject a generic contract. “The Blair Witch Project” (Haxan Films, 1999) is a notorious example of the purposive mixing of a documentary and a horror movie⁵ that pushes the ambiguity of the genre to the extreme. A tremendous amount of attention and the stormy reactions of film viewers were caused by the general confusion about whether the disappearance of three student filmmakers in the haunted woods is true, or is it just a crackerjack act of deception. In other words, audiences were at a loss as they were not sure if they faced fact or fiction. However, can hybrid entertainment television be built upon a similar strategy? In the case of the Lithuanian “Dviracio Sou”, the nature of the generic contract is bizarre. It was already said

that the Lithuanian TV guides present the program as a comedy piece (humour program) or info-show, and the producers do not object to such a public image. However, they neither explicate what kind of comedy – sketch comedy, political satire or buffoonery – the “Dviracio Sou” is, nor do they reveal the aims that this combination of a comedy and a newscast serves. In other words, the creative team of the “Dviracio Sou” has an ambiguous stance towards a symbolic agreement with television audiences. Program producers avoid serious public talks about the objectives and purposes of the program. They prefer puns instead of a direct answer about the mission of the program: “We laugh about things, and I can’t say that we have a task, our task is our mission” (Vyšniauskas 2007: 14). It may be argued that the inventors of this television format sidestep a final contract with its viewers.

Discussing the dialogic nature of language, Bakhtin argues that every utterance carries on the speaker’s *standpoint towards an addressee*, and an employed conception of the addressee is vital to understand the nature of a communicative event: “Unless one accounts for the speaker’s attitude towards the *other* and his utterances (existing or anticipated), one can understand neither the genre nor the style of speech” (Bakhtin 1999: 93). However, we cannot imagine life situations in which the stance of a speaker towards the other is consciously ambivalent or opaque. Can we determine how the producers of the “The Blair Witch Project” imagined their audiences to be? How would we treat a speaker who is a jester? How shall we understand someone who may allow himself / herself to treat a dialogic situation playfully, who is ready to face a potential failure of a communicative How shall we understand a speaker who searches for inventive strategies to address a variety of distinct audiences simultaneously? Given ambiguities return us back to the main question: who sets a *relationship* between the text and its audience? What is the role of the text producer, the initiator of communicative endeavor?

A single abstract element stands out in the public stance of the “Dviracio Sou” team towards their audiences. It is a never-ending playfulness. During its long period of existence, the “Dviracio Sou” developed a rather coherent public self-image and intimate relationship with their viewers. On the national mediascape, the program claims the role of a special *playmate* for television viewers. Although this public image does not preclude that the program producers have other (undisclosed) interests and motivations,⁶ the concept of *play* is vital to understand the popular engagement and enjoyment of watching the “Dviracio Sou”. In this case, a play means neither the involvement into

a strategic game nor a contest where the participants pursue their settled goals and the victory. A playmate is a partner, but first of all he/she is a *friend* who may challenge you, be it in jest. In the case of the “Dviracio Sou”, a play resembles involvement in riddling as an attempt to create a discursive ambiguity. The viewership is a play in terms of the nature of relationships between audiences and the ambiguous multi-vocal discursive universe of the “Dviracio Sou”: it is a process of *meaning production*, a way to cope with the suspense that the overlap of fiction and non-fiction, the Aesopian arguments and joking generates.

Humorous discourses involve an implosion of truth and nonsense, sobriety and playfulness, sincerity and treacherousness, wisdom and foolishness. In other words, “humour gives reason room to play” (Basu 1999: 388). Participants of a tricky discourse are to articulate its meaning, to decide what counts and what does not, where the line between the “real world” and a creative fantasy should be drawn; in other words, they are to manufacture the boundary between the “domains of meaning” (Stewart 1989: 15). Moreover, humour manipulates the *conditions* of a communicative event. For example, every joke has its proper “reading” and one is usually amused if one gets the punchline. However, telling a joke may have a particular covert intention: it can be an instance of derision, i.e., a communicative act that may change the relationship between a joke teller and a listener if the derision addresses him/her. In other words, “Play involves the manipulation of the conditions and contexts of messages and not simply a manipulation of the message itself. It is not, therefore, a shift within the domain of the everyday life; rather, it is a shift to another domain of reality” (Bateson 1972). The communication grounded in play is paradoxical: “[...] the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant and what is denoted by these signals is nonexistent” (Stewart 1989: 29). In the case of the “Dviracio Sou”, viewership is a practice of continuously coping with such paradoxes: for the viewer, the discourse presupposes interpretative work, a constant move between the domains of “reality” and artistic invention. It is a challenge on numerous levels. What is the intention of a communicative gesture? Does it pose a truthful argument, a metaphorical reflection and a revelation of the everyday world? Is it a mere product of artistic imagination, frivolous and soon to be forgotten after the moment of viewership?

“LUDIC TEXTS” AND PLEASURES OF VIEWERSHIP

The “Dviracio Sou” falls under the category of “ludic texts”, a term proposed by Stewart to describe texts which “[...] increasingly rely on metaphorical thought, and often, humorous, they reveal contradictions in the very process of interpretation by which they are accomplished” (Stewart 1989: 39). Being voluntary and complex, an engagement with “ludic texts” bears an element of *enjoyment* to play. Dominant sociological conceptions of play “[...] certainly imply that part of play’s enchantment rests in the pleasure it provides” (Masters 2008: 860). The pleasure emerges from the interpretation of work that may be personally meaningful. It is especially salient for the processing of humorous discourses. “Humour keeps the process of reasoning open-ended, and the pleasure thereby obtained makes it habitual. There is an element of Barthes’ *jouissance* in all of this: the experimental suspension of self in ironic enjoyment” (Basu 1999: 388). Pleasure involves not only processing multilayered and open-ended messages but also positioning them in a relationship with social contexts and empirical realities.

Nevertheless, the given concept of television viewership is not satisfactory to understand the consumption of hybrid programming similar to the “Dviracio Sou”. One may argue that “someone who is seeking entertainment does so for its own sake, that is, to experience something positive as enjoyment, suspense, amusement, serenity, and so on” (Vorderer & Steen et al. 2006: 6). To put it simply, “juggling of realities” (Masters 2008: 861) is the most important element of pleasurable experience of particular hybrid entertainment narratives, including the “Dviracio Sou”. However, we should face the fact that the program is conceived to deliver more than a comedy. A public survey, conducted in June 2006, revealed the salience of the news format in the popular understanding of the “Dviracio Sou”.⁷ The survey revealed that the Lithuanians consider this program to reveal public affairs of the country *best* if compared to various genres of standard quality television – investigative journalism (“Paskutine instancija” on LNK), political pundit debates (“Spaudos klubas” and “TV forumas” on public broadcaster LTV), public debate programs (“Prasau zodzio” on LTV), etc. Nearly twenty percent of respondents prioritised the hybrid humorous program as a “mirror” of the current affairs.⁸ Therefore, the presented concept of play does not fully reveal the causes and aims of popular involvement with such a complex mediated universe. We lack a more elaborate explication of sources for the appreciation of the “Dviracio Sou” and of the *mechanisms* of pleasure production. In her

analysis of sociological theories of play, Masters notes that “[...] sociologists are much more interested in the outcomes of play for social relationships than in the experience of play for individuals and groups” (Masters 2008: 862). However, a focus on the experience of play is vital to understand a number of important issues. How does the hybrid and humorous television discourse work? What does it accomplish?

An analysis of *media texts* is insufficient to make plausible conclusions about the social uses and effects of media production. Here I support the view that “Studies of television texts and narratives are not a self-sufficient set of approaches in Television Studies”, moreover, “they need to be supplemented by studies of real viewers’ relationships with television, to explain how some positions for the viewer are taken up while others are not” (Bignell 2008: 107). In the case of “ludic texts” of television, producers of which avoid a communicative contract, viewership is the main site of the production of the meaning and the construction of the identity of dubious TV discourses.⁹ Although their inner mechanisms are complex, television viewers find their own ways to cope with the ambivalence of humorous discourses. It becomes important to investigate “how the polysemy range of meanings in a television text might be actualised in practice by viewers” (Bignell 2008: 297). Further on I presume that “ludic texts” are relatively open to a variety of games to be played due to their multi-vocality and open relationship to social contexts. In the case of the “Dviracio Sou”, it follows that different audience groups may play different “games” while watching the same program. Enjoyment and pleasure accompanies the play, whereas the sources and nature of pleasure may vary according to the meanings that distinct viewership types ascribe to the multi-dimensional discourse.

The uses and gratifications approach in the mass media audience research studies address the experiences and pleasures of television. The approach concerns itself with the social and psychological origins of needs that generate expectations about the mass media which lead to differential patterns of media exposure resulting in need gratification (Gunter 2000: 16). The consumption of entertainment media is among important research issues in this branch of study. A motivated area of research “tries to reach beyond a simple description ‘who is doing what in which kind of situation’ and attempts to explain *why* things are done as they are done” (Vorderer & Steen et al. 2006: 3). It explains why people seek and enjoy entertainment media and rests on the assumption that inner human motivations are accessible: respondents, participating in a research, are fully aware of their own motives, and

they are able and willing to reveal those motives. Moreover, considering a multi-dimensional nature of “ludic texts” of television, *media reception* analysis, explaining how the media content is processed, potentially adds important insights. It is argued that a pleasant experiential state includes physiological, cognitive, and affective components (Vorderer & Klimmt et al. 2004). It involves distant reflection, critical evaluation and emotional participation in the media discourse. Disposition-based theories also stress affective disposition and moral judgments concerning the actors for media performance. Overall, an examination of the reception of “ludic texts”, analysis of viewership motivation and expectations towards the program enables us to reveal, at least to some extent, the “projection of personal meaning in the interpretation of multilayered artefacts” (Cupchik 2001: 69). The next chapter is based upon an argument that the pleasures of the “Dviracio Sou” derive not only from the stimulation of the senses, but also of cognition as well as from the endorsement of personal normative values.

DVIRACIO SOU” AND POLITICS: TYPOLOGY OF VIEWERSHIP

*If you laugh you must know what you laugh at. [...]
Laughter has its meaning.
(Vilmantas)*

The results of an empirical qualitative research of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership are presented below. The research was implemented in December 2007 – January 2008, in collaboration with the leader of market the research and business consulting company *TNS-Gallup*. It aimed to reveal a variety of reasons as to why Lithuanian television viewers watch the program, strategies to cope with the intertextualities of the “Dviracio Sou”, as well as the nature of the appreciation and enjoyment of the program among the audiences. The task was to define the basic types of viewership, focusing on the potential of the “documentary readings” of the discourse. Two main questions were posed. In what terms is the “Dviracio Sou” a “ludic text” that is conducive to civic disempowerment and disengagement? Can it promote or contribute to the development of civic culture? This part of the research, relevant for the present discussion, employed a qualitative audience research method – semi-structured interviews. A group of interviewees was selected according to the following variables: the intensity of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership at the moment of the research, age of respondents, their political engagement and their geo-

graphical location.¹⁰ In the next paragraph, the discussion about the results of the research starts with a number of general insights and then proceeds to the established conceptual typology of viewership, focusing on its relevance to civic culture.

Asked to position the “Dviracio Sou” in the Lithuanian television market, respondents *almost* univocally claim that the program has no analogous competitors: “I cannot indicate a similar program. [...] the “Dviracio Sou” is exceptional as the only one of its kind [of television programming]. Nobody creates anything like it. There are no other entertainment programs with jest” (Juozas, Vilnius). Although the format of the “Dviracio Sou” is conceived as being based on humour, the program is designed to be more than a comedy: “[...] there is space left for thinking, feeling and laughter” (Janina, Vilnius). It seems it would be a mistake to attribute the program to light entertainment or tabloid television. Various types of sketch comedies and popular anecdote competitions are considered to be incompatible with the “Dviracio Sou”:

“Dviracio Zinios” provides more information than those [other entertainment programs] [where] people demonstrate their skills and their ability to tell jokes well. You don’t need a brain for that. Contrarily, “Dviracio Zinios” asks for a second thought about whether the acting character is eloquent, whether the truth is told. I could not stand that couple of little mice [characters] at the beginning because I didn’t listen to them carefully, I didn’t like their appearance, that playing the ape. However, I was told to sit and listen to what they talk about – I started to listen and was pleased. Their biting arguments, their sneer [...]. Sometimes they bite politicians in addition to just telling about some event. It seems to me that they offer a focused view... They touch the spot. I started to be fond of them.

(Regina)

The latter program not only fulfills requirements of both low-brow and refined humour, but also meets a wider range of needs and expectations on the side of the public: “I would say it is a rather funny and inventive humorous program that brings forward various maladies, with a substantial dose of humour. [...] Some politicians are exposed to ridicule, events are revealed in a humorous manner” (Regina); “Eighty percent of the content of the “Dviracio Sou” is non-fictive, and twenty percent is invention and exaggeration” (Sigita). Although television critics occasionally label “Dviracio Sou” as a “theatre”, it is a newscast in another form, “newscast upside down” (Juozas). The humour is often more pleasurable if audiences, involved in discursive play, con-

ceive it as transgressing the domain of aesthetic manipulation and addressing their social *contexts* – real life, personalities, issues, processes and policies, *relevant* for audiences in their everyday life. Moreover, respondents often unconsciously use the old title, “Dviracio Zinios” (“Bike News”), instead of the “Dviracio Sou” (“Bike Show”). They treat the “Dviracio Sou” as a type of “embellished documentary”, a peculiar counterpart of ordinary news and current affairs programming. Asked to present the “Dviracio Sou” to a foreigner who has no idea about the nature of the program, respondents commonly distinguished its potential to reveal the events of Lithuanian political life, “mirror” the domestic affairs, pinpoint the flaws and maladies of politics, and disclose the abuses of political power.

The research revealed substantial differences among viewers in terms of their relationship with the “Dviracio Sou”, as well as the perception, uses and enjoyment of the hybrid programming. The pleasure derived from humorous stimuli was the basic motive to become involved in viewership for a majority of respondents. However, they differed in the ways they perceived and qualified the humour of the “Dviracio Sou”, were dissimilar strategies for coping with the ambiguity of playful discourse and had varied conceptions of the relationship of the discourse to daily “real life”. It does not need to be said that the sources and nature of the appreciation of this television format was also different. According to the results of the qualitative research, the typology of the viewership of the “Dviracio Sou” was developed.¹¹

The first group of viewers was named *Serious-minded Aesthetes* who consume the “Dviracio Sou” for aesthetic experience and revelation. Such viewers treat the program as a piece of artistry, a product of artistic imagination, the pre-staged spectacle: “The parody is beautiful, it is free of derision, and the actors remind [of persons performed]” (Ruta). They mostly enjoy the stylistic features of the discourse, mastery of the actors, world play and other expressive means of the performance. Most importantly, they think the “Dviracio Sou” belongs to the fictional world of invention that has barely any relationship with the “real” political life:

What I would miss if the program stopped? Well, there would be news, politics. But we need such a program. Why do we need it? We need humour. [...] It has so much positive emotions. [...] We receive a lot of information from the press, and this is pure comedy, a program for leisure time, not a political one. [...] It portrays politicians but does not involve politics. [...] It picks me up, and I do not look for any policy there. It is just for fun – somebody did something and was shown [on TV]. If I wish to

watch something serious, there are special programs such as “Spaudos klubas”, news, etc.

(Ruta)

Such viewing practices are distanced from civic engagement, not so much on the basis of personal disinterest in politics, but on the conservative belief that a humour-involving, non-serious, “light” mode of discourse is a *play* that should not be treated as otherwise. In other words, where jest and fun rule, no place remains for a truthful political argument or civic involvement: “Politics concerns a serious tone, and this program is not as such [serious]. Is it political?” (Stase). Viewership of the “Dviracio Sou” belongs to the realm of private leisure and personal disinterested pleasure.

The *Serious-Minded Aesthetes* should not be confused with the second group, the *Civic Escapists*, a substantially different type of viewers for whom watching the “Dviracio Sou” seems to be a means of “political therapeutics”. This is a peculiar type of audience that basically buys into the critical edge of the personified parody, i.e., political *satire* of the show; they heavily focus on jeering, critique of public figures and political power in general. Superiority and release theories of humour would explain an appreciation of such derision best. *Civic Escapists* appreciate the “Dviracio Sou” because the bitter disclosure of vices of political power embodies a symbolic revenge of the powerless; here laughter relieves frustration aroused by the feeling of lost control, futility of their civic voice and choice:

What happens if we laugh? Nothing on my side, it’s just a laugh. [...] I can do nothing, I cannot make an influence upon a decision but I can deride them sincerely. The more harm they do to me and to other people in Lithuania with their decisions, the stronger my laugh is.

(Vilmantas)

The last resort of the weak is laughter that brings a temporal relief, relaxation, a discharge of discontent, but also allows oneself to distance oneself from the “dirty” realm of politics, to refuse a burden of responsibility for what is going on in the state. Moreover, it seems that the meaning of the “message” of the “Dviracio Sou” is less a function of digging into the jest and wit of the program creators than a mere projection of negative preconceived notions, stereotypes and general disillusionment with political power and civic engagement:

The “Dviracio Sou” presents current affairs of the day or the week, and ridicules the situation. [...] When they report daily events, I think “oh my God” – they [“Dviracio Sou”] ridicule but there is no one to draw conclu-

sions. They [politicians] do not come to any conclusions though they are laughed at every single day. [...] [What is your viewpoint after watching the “Dviracio Sou”?] Nobody reasons, that is my viewpoint... or perhaps they do not watch [the program]... I think they might watch, but do not draw any conclusions. People see that, and the news without humour will address it. They behave as if they are immune, allowed to behave according to their wish. They lost morality. [...] [Do you get emotionally involved while watching the “Dviracio Sou”?] No, I rather get angry that the government does not take any measures. [...] It is laughter through tears. We live in a society where nobody takes measures against maladies, nobody reacts, and nobody fights corruption, license and egoistic decisions. The “Dviracio Sou” is not light humour.
(Sigita)

To some extent, *Civic Escapists* would like to believe that the “Dviracio Sou” is a more effective expression of their own voice: “If any of our politicians watch [“Dviracio Sou”], maybe their conscience awakes... if they have any conscience, they would watch and think...” (Valdas). On the other hand, these viewers are often pessimists who do not expect changes and avoid harsh criticism of politicians and public figures. In their opinion, the “Dviracio Sou” “is not a predator” (Bernardas), thus the television program is imagined as a leashed watchdog – barking but not biting. The presented modes of viewership – *Serious-Minded Aesthetes* and *Civic Escapists* – do not reveal much potential of the program in terms of serving public and civic engagement. However, two other types of the “Dviracio Sou” public, keep the hope for fostering civic engagement alive.

Third, the theories of the usage and gratification in the mass media audience research mention surveillance among most the important motives and benefits sought by the media audience. In the case of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership, the surveillance of communal life and public affairs, following the course of events, is most important for the third group, the *Distrait Information Seekers*. For this particular type of viewer the value of the program is based upon the principle of realism, its ability to reflect and review ongoing dynamics of the “real world” using peculiar discursive means – parody, satire, wit. It is often conceived as a substitute of, though more often a complement to, traditional current affairs programming. In other words, the “Dviracio Sou” performs the role of news:

If you watch ordinary news you can skip the “Dviracio Sou”. On the other hand, you can watch the latter [program] instead of the former [the news]. [...] If I am late for news, like today, I turn on the “Dviracio Sou” and see

if anything happened. They mock, but do not touch without any reason, thus something happened.

(Juozas)

The appeal of such a communicative format is three-fold: first, it is perceived to facilitate orientation in the flow of information – selection of relevant information, timely reaction and notification about the most important events and processes; the format of the news seems to attract individuals who do not share the pessimism of *Civic Escapists* but are not keen to invest much of their time into close following of public affairs on a daily basis. Second, the “Dviracio Sou” talks in the vernacular language; literary, humorous, metaphorical discourse is attractive because it is perceived to be more a comprehensible, accurate and effective way to convey the meaning or opinion: “I would say that the vernacular, humorous and comprehensible discourse lets you know what happens in our Lithuania” (Nemira). Third, the perception that humorous discourse helps to acquire a critical distance, offers to view the politics “from another angle” is an important added value of the program:

I do not think it is negative to see things from a different angle. [...] You see things in one way, and the creators of the program show them from another way. One may say, they look through a different lens, from the other side. They investigate a particular situation, a problem or an event from different angles [...] They [“Dviracio Sou”] inspire an interest in those issues. Perhaps an issue raised in a humorous manner makes a person see it in a different way. Its light form stimulates thoughts [...].

(Inga)

The “Dviracio Sou” does not demand such a deep involvement, preparation for viewership and political expertise in the way a pundit talks or political debates on television. The program supplies shorts and hints to direct the ordinary viewer’s attention towards matters that are possibly important to know, to consider and decide upon for him/her as a citizen: “[...] You get a hint which urges you to dig in and get an explanation” (Nemira). It also gratifies us with pleasurable experiences based on the use of wit, discovery of hidden normative judgments and indirect messages of creative critique, the humorous exposure of the truth. Pleasure is born not out of the emotional involvement, but critical reflection – the joke must be decoded, and understood to be found amusing.

Fourth, *Sophisticated Engaged Surveyors*, the last type of viewership of the “Dviracio Sou”, is similar to *Distract Information Seekers* in terms of the significance of non-fictive generic expectations and subordination of the discourse for daily political orientation. However, unlike facile information seekers, such an audience is more sophisticated, less trustful of the “Dviracio Sou” informative potential, and better aware of the situations and limits of such a commercial endeavor:

I think [the program has] a double task, I suppose that's how it is. First, it's an appeal to popular consciousness, civic spirit, and a presentation of public maladies that the society has to consider. On the other hand, every commercial television needs a feeling [what attracts audiences]. The other thing is a zest of politicians who wish to have their fictive characters on television; they actively cooperate and make an influence on television. [They] prefer any appearance on television to their absence there. That's a double bind. It is a pursuit of popular success, profit [...] plus the influence of politicians.

(Janina)

They are better aware of the ambiguities and biases of the discourse, multiplicity of ways to read parody and make sense of humorous normative judgments. Such a viewer is more self-reliant and confident about his/her personal opinion due to a diversification of information channels, deeper and more persistent interest about things going on behind the fence of one's yard. The viewership of the “Dviracio Sou” is meaningful in terms of otherwise unavailable or limited information, rumors about the backstage of political processes, witty, implicit stances, interpretations and opinions that are not to be relied upon but which occasionally serve as a means to compare, inspect and probably revise your own personal positions and preferences. The political satire is not entrusted as the mission of carnivalesque false emancipation and symbolic restoration of justice under the conditions of degraded politics. The sophisticated viewer appreciates satire in other ways: one does not share the idealistic hope that the “Dviracio Sou” is to tame, control and prevent the abuse of the political power, nor feel that that comedians are to overtake a citizens' job and duty:

[When I watch critique] I know that I again took the wrong decision in general elections. [...] You get interested, make inquiries, read a newspaper, watch [television]. That person earns a minus for the abuse. [...] The first thing is political engagement, the second one – participation in general elections.

(Mindaugas)

Sophisticated surveillance is engaging in terms of civic responsibility. Viewing and appreciation of the “Dviracio Sou” is not only a matter of awareness of what is going around, i.e. passive citizenship; it is more importantly a matter of active citizenship, competence and readiness to take decisions and make civic choices in life outside the TV screen and the private living room. Such uses of satire are not so clearly prone to civic cynicism. As long as political life is perceived to be based upon choices, mistakes and corrections, public visibility of the performance of political power is important in terms of the evaluation, revision of one’s political affiliations, support and future decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

The article raises an issue of hybrid entertainment television and complex patterns of its viewership. It emphasises the need to differentiate between a variety of mutating television discourses that celebrate a mixture of fictions and factuality, jest and serious deliberation, leisure time and civic engagement. The nature of generic hybridity and mechanisms of intertextuality are an important, however, downplayed element of entertainment television, waiting for the thorough scholarly debates and investigations. We should again raise the same question: is all comedy just meant for careless entertainment? The sensitivity to peculiarities of hybrid entertainment production allows an identification and evaluation of the distinct roles it plays in daily social environments.

Particular types of hybrid entertainment television have an ambivalent generic identity. The ambivalency is due to both an avoidance of its producers to step into a symbolic contract with their audiences and to the multi-vocal nature of communicative playfulness. “Ludic texts” are relatively open to a variety of games to be played, thus different viewers may approach, perceive and use the same hybrid programming in different ways. Enjoyment and pleasure accompanies the play. However, the sources and nature of pleasure may vary according to the meanings that the distinct patterns of viewership ascribe to the multi-dimensional discourses. The viewership is a play in terms of the nature of the relationship between audiences and the ambiguous, multi-vocal universes of humorous television formats. In the case of the “Dviracio Sou”, it is a process of meaning production, a way to cope with the suspense that is presented through an overlap of fiction and non-fiction, of Aesopian arguments and jest generates. Therefore, the analysis of media texts is insufficient to make plausible conclusions

about the social uses and effects of media production. In the case of “ludic texts” of television, viewership is the main site where the social identities of dubious television discourses evolve. Viewership practices should be an important element of mass media research.

In terms of generic textual features, the “Dviracio Sou” violates some important principles of public journalism in terms of content and form. The program implodes the spheres of politics and popular culture, urgent public deliberation and personalised stories of human interest; it does not draw a line between the real and the fictional, the true and the invented, the fact and the rumour, the argument and a joke. The “Dviracio Sou” violates the basic principles of traditional political communication; however, the audiences see it as a peculiar, conspicuous discourse concerning public affairs, and they often look for something extra to only comedy. The results of the qualitative audience research show that viewers of the “Dviracio Sou” consider the program to be a unique Lithuanian product that is difficult to compare with other genres of humorous entertainment as it is ambiguous in terms of its generic identity (purposes, aims, gratifications).

The typology of the “Dviracio Sou” viewership reveals that an amalgamation of politics and popular culture, public life and private trivialities, brinkmanship between jest and serious argument, creates a multi-layered communicative structure that attracts those television viewers who seek aesthetic experience, those who look for the symbolic means to express their civic disillusionment, as well as those who are interested in a political message, insight, opinion, or those who search for a means to orientate themselves in the dynamics of political affairs of their community and state. On the one hand, the substantial differences in the perception and appreciation of the “Dviracio Sou” by the established types of viewers tend to refute a one-sided alarming story about the defective impacts of all entertainment television. On the other hand, the research shows that hybrid programming à la Lithuanian “Dviracio Sou” might not be a panacea for the civic distrust and disengagement in striving democracies. The following argument is posed for future research: this type of hybrid entertainment television deepens the divide between active / engaged and passive / disengaged citizens, empowering the former and strengthening the cynicism and apathy of the latter.

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Notes

1. The source of the trailer is a website of the LNK channel broadcasting the “Dviracio Sou”, see <http://www.lnk.lt/index;shows;view>, id. 29,item.17
2. However, one should note that scarce analysis concerning particular types of non-fictive entertainment, e.g. production of Discovery Communications Inc. See Fürsich 2003.
3. This is a transcript of a personal audio-visual record of the “Dviracio Sou” (21 April 2008). However, texts of the “discussions“ of these characters are also accessible on the news website www.alfa.lt
4. These are a couple of farmers from the South-Western Lithuania (Suvalkija), a gangster from Šiauliai town, former characters: twin villagers (*bratkos*), a conservative teacher and a representative of the newly rich (Zita from Mžeikiai town), etc.
5. See “The Blair Witch Project”, <http://www.blairwitch.com/>
6. However, one should note the ambiguous role of a playmate because it does not imply reciprocity between the participants in a game. If the “Dviracio Sou” is a playmate for a viewer, this does not mean that a viewer is treated as a playmate by the production team. For example, during a performance of a stand-up comedy, a comedian is a playmate to the gathered public, however, the public is not a playmate for a comedian if he performs not so much for personal pleasure as for the money.
7. The survey was ordered and publicised by the Civil Society Institute (Lithuania) in 2006. See <http://www.civitas.lt>
8. News and current affairs programming are excluded.
9. One can theoretically imagine a peculiar type of viewer who simply enjoys permanent encounters with new and bizarre television formats as riddles he/she has to solve. However, such a viewer would not be motivated to watch the same, known program continuously.

10. The group of “loyal” viewers of the “Dviracio Sou” was composed of individuals who watch the program at least two times a week, and are from 30 to 55 years old (the population of such an age interval watch the program more actively if compared to the share of such viewers among the younger or older population). A majority of the semi-structured interviews were conducted with citizens of Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania, and several respondents were interviewed in a little town in the North-Eastern part of the country (substantial numbers of viewers are located outside the capital city and big towns).
11. Considering the fact that typologies are conceptual systems of ideal categories, they imply the reduction of complexity of the social reality.

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POLAND

POLISH JOKELORE IN THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

Dorota Brzozowska

Abstract

The aim of this paper¹ is to show the main tendencies of script changes in jokes that were popular in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century. The observable types of changes are connected with the political, social and economic situation of Poland after 1989 and the fall of communism. The content of and developments in the three most numerous groups of jokes, i.e. political, ethnic and sexual jokes, are examined.

Key words: ethnic, humour, jokes, Polish humour, political jokes, post-socialism

INTRODUCTION

Kawał, one of the Polish equivalents for *joke*, is said to be “firmly rooted in Polish history” and “plays a colossal role in Polish culture” (Wierzbicka 1991: 189). According to Wierzbicka, the prototypical *kawał* is political. It promulgates group identity, solidarity and social integration vis-à-vis certain outsiders. The traditionally largest group of jokes has recently decreased rapidly. For many years the main aim of jokes in Poland was to mock socialist structures, the people who governed the country – especially the first secretaries of the PZPR (Polish United Workers’ Party), the Soviet Union and the ordinary citizens’ way of life. Due to this feature of group identity, even nonverbal jokes were difficult to understand without additional background information.

The first anthologies of political humour appeared at the beginning of the nineties (e.g. “Dowcip surowo wzbroniony”), and even the political jokes published ten years later were actually about the situation in Poland before 1989.

Ethnic jokes are also different than they used to be. There was a tradition of telling jokes about three men of different nationalities who for years were known here as *Polak*, *Rusek i Niemiec* (a Pole, a Russian and a German). They are no longer as popular as they used to be. Furthermore, they ceased to include Polish neighbours as obligatory

heroes. Presently, the place of the Russian and the German is usually taken by the American, the Frenchman, the Dutchman etc. Additionally, the Pole was always the cleverest hero in the old jokes, while new jokes of this type are more similar to Polish jokes in which the Pole is the butt of the joke.

In earlier times, typical Jewish humour was very widespread in Poland, and Jewish jokes were one of the most numerous groups in collections published before the Second World War. The percentage of Jewish jokes is now very low. Jokes about Scots seek to fill the gap caused by the absence of Jewish humour. As a result, there are more jokes about Scots than about Jews in new Polish anthologies, even if the latter nation was not even mentioned in the old collections.

Enormous changes are also easy to notice in jokes with the SEX/NO SEX opposition, as a considerable number of them followed the opening of sex shops and broader access to pornography. The role of female characters has also changed. Women are very often described as sex objects or portrayed as stupid or sexually aggressive.

Traditionally, some jokes were popular with certain social groups of people, and the subject of those jokes depended on the audience's background, i.e. occupation, status or age. Currently, the new type of pop culture promotes low culture jokes. Such jokes have become most common in Poland in the last few years. Political jokes have been substituted by politically incorrect jokes: sick, vulgar or tasteless – printed in booklets or published in dailies and magazines. In the mid-nineties the “truly tasteless jokes” offended and disgusted people. A few years later telling, e-mailing and collecting sick and dirty jokes became part of the Polish sense of humour.

One of the sources of jokes is the Internet, which influences not only the quantity, but also the quality of the transmitted jokes. The new fashion of sending jokes by e-mail is also present in Poland. Jokes were originally perceived as mainly oral texts, but this has recently changed. New jokes spread much faster, and humorous books are also increasing in popularity. There are easily available booklets and pocket-size paperbacks, as well as thematically arranged hardback collections of anecdotes and jokes. Jokes in Poland in the period of transition are becoming similar to those that are popular in other countries. They are losing their national style and becoming more and more international and universal. The 21st century is a period of rapidly travelling jokes sent through e-mail accounts as spam, and these jokes definitely different from those Poles used to tell their friends even a decade earlier.

POLITICAL JOKES

The prototypical Polish jokes used to be political. They promote group identity, solidarity and social integration vis-à-vis certain outsiders (Wierzbicka 1991: 188). The outsiders were the foreign partitioning powers in the nineteenth century, the Nazis occupying Poland during World War II and the Soviet-imposed communist regime of post-war Poland. For many years the main aim of jokes in Poland was to mock socialist structures, the people who governed the country – especially the first secretaries of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party), the Soviet Union and the common citizens' style of "living" (cf. Banc & Dundes 1990). Due to this feature of group identity, even nonverbal jokes were difficult to translate without additional background information.

Strict censorship made the publishing of political jokes impossible. Therefore only collections of folk humour could be printed (Simonides 1976). There was a time when even telling certain jokes was illegal, dangerous and punishable:

- *Czym się różni Warszawiak od Paryżanina?*
 - *Paryżanin, jak tylko usiądzie, zaraz opowiada kawały antyrządowe, Warszawiak, jak opowie dowcipy polityczne, to zaraz siedzi.*
 - ★ – *What is the difference between a Varsovian and a Parisian?*
 - *A Parisian tells anti-governmental jokes as soon as he sits [down], and a Varsovian sits [in jail] as soon as he tells political jokes.*
- (Xsięga Humoru 1999)

Anthologies of political humour appeared at the beginning of the nineties (e.g. "Dowcip surowo wzbroniony") ["Jokes Strictly Forbidden"] and even the political jokes published ten years later were actually about the situation in Poland before 1989:

- *I have a rope and a neighbour who is a communist. What should I do?*
 - *Wait.*
- (Xsięga Humoru 1999)

Taking into consideration the great richness of the political jokes that were forbidden in communist Poland, as well as the fact that as early as the Middle Ages, their forefathers were characterised by the saying: "A Pole would sooner lose his friend than his joke", it is not surprising that they were regarded as "the funniest barrack in the camp" (Rosenbusch 1987: 221). Poles still exchanged jokes, even though the situation did not encourage laughter.

From time to time, the problem of the authorities' lack of education re-
curred in political jokes, especially those about first secretaries of the
Central Committee of the PZPR:

At a party meeting, the secretary is saying:

*– Comrades, soon socialism will rule over the whole world. Today it covers
one fifth of the Earth, in a year it will cover one sixth, in two years one
seventh, then one eighth... Yes, comrades, the progress of socialism cannot
be stopped!*

(http://humor.dyk.pl/show_dowcip.php?id=1197)

– Jaka jest różnica pomiędzy pociągiem a Gomulką?

– Taka, że pociąg ma dwie klasy, a Gomulka cztery.

★ *– What is the difference between a train and Gomulka?*

*– The difference is that a train has two classes, and Gomulka four [i.e.
four years' education].*

(Szeptanka 1990: 65)

Another topic of jokes in communist Poland was the Soviet Union it-
self and the grim reality of the average citizen, who was “waiting for
old age” standing in lines, crowding for many hours in front of a shop
in which there were only empty shelves instead of any products.

An old woman comes into a butcher's store.

– I'd like some ham.

– We don't have any.

– Then some cured pork shoulder, please.

– We don't have any of that either.

– How about some loin of pork or a pork knuckle?

– We don't have it. We don't have anything!

The old woman leaves the store and the shop assistant tells her friend:

– Look at her! She is so old and has such a good memory!

(http://humor.dyk.pl/show_dowcip.php?id=1141)

– Why aren't there any fish at the market?

– In order to divert people's attention from the lack of meat.

(http://humor.dyk.pl/show_dowcip.php?id=1141)

At a greengrocer's a customer asks for one Brussels sprout.

– One? The shop assistant asks, surprised.

*– Yes, because it is for the stuffed cabbage dish made from the meat
ration.*

(http://prl.dowcipy.pl/index.php/humor_prl_3)

It was not only meat that was in short supply. Non-smokers could get a few extra decagrams of chocolate-like products if they gave their coupons to those who were addicted to nicotine. One could be glad if one was lucky enough to be able to buy rationed sugar, shoes or other basic products.

- *What are we going to do this autumn?*
 - *We are going to play coupons.*
- (Rosenbusch 1987: 143)

Jokes created in the communist era were difficult to translate, as they were deeply immersed in the knowledge of everyday reality. They were well understood by the other inhabitants of the Eastern Bloc, however, since they had similar problems.

Telling jokes was dangerous because of intensified censorship and the state defence decree that allowed people to be arrested and punished with several years of imprisonment for spreading so-called “whispered propaganda”. This was treated as an illegal activity, i.e. “lowering the dignity of the main authorities of the Polish State” (cf. Kmiecik 1998).

- The secret police announced a competition for the best political joke.*
 - The first prize: 5 years in a forced labour camp.*
 - The second prize: 3 years in a forced labour camp, and a few consolation prizes of 6 months to 1 year.*
- (Rosenbusch 1987: 18)

“The forbidden laughter” did not stop, however, as long as it was “strictly forbidden”. In the jokes comparing conditions in Poland and abroad, a Polish dog boasted that even though it did not have enough to eat, it was at least free to bark.

One of the more important series of this period was jokes about militia-men (police), ridiculing the stupidity of those whose position depended only on physical strength or political loyalty. In this way the political system was criticised as irrational, and jokes were the expression of society’s rebellion, as there was no other possibility to protest. These texts served as a protective mechanism and were a social satire – they allowed the frustrated society to abreact at the militia-men as the representatives of the repressive and hated authority. Their actual causes lay in the social situation: they were revenge against those who did not refrain from showing their strength using truncheons and tear gas, which could affect any random passer-by. Popular since the 1950s and revived after scuffles between people and

the militiamen in the subsequent years, they reached their peak of popularity in the 1980s after the introduction of martial law. During martial law the militia were not only more conspicuous but also more dangerous. At that time, separate militia units were created, and these gave rise to corresponding jokes about ORMO (members of the reserve militia) and ZOMO (the anti-riot militia). ZOMO became a particular target of hatred, as it was a symbol of brutality and terror. Students were a particular target of repressions by the militia:

A Polish riot policeman grabs hold of a young man and, while holding him tight, asks:

– Are you a student?!

– No, a hooligan...

– Oh, I'm very sorry...

(http://humor.dyk.pl/show_dowcip.php?id=1123)

In March 1968, a farmer was asked:

– Are you going to send your son to university?

– No, I'm not. I'm going to beat him myself...

(www.dowcipy.listonosz.net/o_prl.html)

Militiamen walking in pairs or in groups of three, driving around in prowling cars, were ever present in the streets, and patrolled the towns:

– Why do militiamen walk in groups of three?

– Because one of them can write, another can read, and the third one keeps an eye on the intelligentsia.

(klatu.w.interia.pl/pl/kawaly/policjanci.html)

– Why do patrols consist of a militiaman and a dog?

– Two heads are better than one.

(<http://rozrywka.ropczyce.info/humor/links.php?category=6&order=title>)

Citizens could be afraid of having their IDs checked, being arrested or searched. Meetings and larger groups of people were dispelled, and ZOMO cordons, smoke and water cannons were not rare in the streets. The aim of ridiculing all of this was to decrease or even eliminate the fear of “the beating heart of the party”.

The basic quality of the political joke before 1989 was the scoffing commentary on the government's activity. After the abolishment of censorship, this function was assumed by articles in the press and statements by politicians and journalists on radio and TV. Thus a joke no longer functioned as polemics, “it lost the significant role of being the only possible form of resistance to the official propaganda, speaking unanimously” (Kamińska-Szmaj 2001: 189). The lack of common

agreement resulting from the unequivocal division into “us” versus “them” caused the decrease in the popularity of political jokes which stopped being “a mass genre interesting for all social strata” (Kamińska-Szmaj 2001: 203). Politics was no longer a taboo topic, and anthologies of jokes could be published freely. Political jokes became unnecessary, since their function was taken over by a medial discourse of a frequently negative emotional character. “The corpus of winged words of the last ten years primarily offers evidence of the general politicisation and ideologisation of the Polish cultural context in the 1990s” (Chlebda 2005: 296). After a momentary stagnation, the political joke was revived with new strength in the so-called 4th Republic as a complement to, instead of a replacement for dialog between the government and those governed what it used to be. Its main topics are the PiS [Law and Justice] party, which used to hold power when twin brothers were heads of state: Lech (the President) and Jarosław (the Prime Minister) Kaczyński:

- *What makes Poland special in the world?*
- *It is the only country that has a spare president.*
(<http://www.drozda.pl/index.php?menu=dowcipy>)

A woman [“baba”] comes into a store:

- *A kilo of potatoes, please. But I want every one of them to be different, because I can't stand twins any more.*
(forum.o2.pl/temat.php?id_p=5193427)

- *What is the ultimate in loutishness?*
- *To vote for PiS and then leave the country.*
(<http://rozrywka.57.pl/kawal,876.html>)

The humorous predilections were moreover also shifted from current affairs and politics to morals and the absurd. Hence it was not the Polish sense of humour that had changed, but the social conditions in which jokes were created. Along with the loosening of morals and a wave of pornography, there was more demand for sex-related jokes. Better and faster access to information caused the appearance of heroes imported from the USA (e.g. blondes or Chuck Norris), and jokes in circulation in Poland are no longer as difficult for foreigners to understand. The universal character of the jokes that are popular in the new era can be regarded as a proof of progressing globalisation. Although Poles remain under its influence, they still appreciate the native ability to laugh, claiming to be “still the funniest barrack, but in another camp now!”

ETHNIC JOKES

The Russians

After World War II, children in the ruins of Warsaw used to sing a song to the melody of a Russian song “Kazaczok”: *Apple and pear trees were blooming, the German escaped, the Russian barged in...* (Kmieciak 1998: 184). “Anti-Soviet” jokes were also created as early as in 1944, when the Red Army was crossing Poland:

A curse from 1945: “May the Germans occupy you and the Russians set you free”.

(Rosenbusch 1987: 13)

- *Why are there so many Russians in Poland?*
- *In order to protect our country.*
- *From what?*
- *From the Poles taking control of the government.*

(Rosenbusch 1987: 21)

The script A RUSSIAN DRINKING VODKA appears in many jokes. In most cases it is neither drinking for the sake of drinking nor lonely drinking, but a ritual in which a particular group of people have to participate:

A Russian, a German and a Pole washed up on a desert island. They were sitting and thinking how they could get back to civilisation. Suddenly they caught a goldfish, which promised to grant them three wishes. The Pole said:

– I want a bottle of vodka and to go home.

And his wish was granted. The German said:

– I want a case of beer and to go home.

He also got what he wanted. The Russian stayed there alone. He kept on thinking and then said:

– I want a box of vodka and those two back here!

(http://www.rosjapl.info/rosja/dowcipy_o_rosjanach.php#pozostale)

Russians’ drunkenness can be seen in a positive way, especially in jokes in which there is an element of respect or admiration for Russians’ ability to “hold their liquor” (Lappo 2002: 161):

An American comes into a bar and said:

– Anyone who drinks a litre of vodka at once shall get 500 million dollars from me!

A Russian leaves the bar and goes to another one across the street. One minute later he returns and says: “I can do it!”

The waiter gives him a litre of vodka and the Russian drinks it.

The American gives him the money and asks:

– Why did you go to the bar across the street?

– Aaaaa... I wanted to see if I could do it...

(http://www.rosjapl.info/rosja/dowcipy_o_rosjanach.php#pozostale)

In jokes, vodka is often a reference point that helps to explain the world:

A Russian officer has to explain to his soldiers the destruction that can be done by an atomic bomb. He starts like this:

– Soldiers! Imagine twenty..., no, fifty..., no, a hundred cases of vodka and no one to drink them.

(http://www.rosjapl.info/rosja/dowcipy_o_rosjanach.php#pozostale)

In the period of the People's Republic of Poland there were attempts to create a new positive stereotype of the Russian – the Soviet man. Nevertheless, people in Poland at that time used to laugh not at the Russians but at the “Soviet People”, the Communist system, the Soviet Union and its leaders, the political commissars and the officially advocated “Polish-Russian friendship” (Kmieciak 1998: 186):

– Russians have gone into space!

– All of them?

– No, just one – Gagarin.

– So why are you bothering me?!

(Kmieciak 1998: 187)

Symbols, slogans, holidays and ceremonies of the communist regime were also reflected in jokes:

– Why is the hammer one of the communist symbols?

– So that people could knock it out of their heads that things will ever get better.

(Kmieciak 1998: 187)

In 1945 at the Potsdam Conference the process of forming “the new deal” in Europe was brought to a conclusion. In 1946 the first Soviet atomic reactor was built. Soviet isolationism and the capitalist states' desire to contain communism launched the “cold war”. In March 1946, Churchill made a speech in which he confirmed the drawing of an “iron curtain” from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic. An arms race began throughout the world in connection with rivalry between the United States and Russia in various fields:

- *Is it really true that the USA does not equal us in technology, the economy and military science?*
- *Actually, yes. It is difficult to explain that to the Americans, though.*
(Na erewańskiej fali 1990: 50)

Jokes created during the “cold war” explicitly expose the real weakness hidden behind the slogans of welfare, by contrasting the Soviet Union and the USA:

An American delegation came to Russia. They were getting off the plane when suddenly one of them said:

- Everything is so small here in Russia, look at all of those old mud huts. In America everything is big and new.

The annoyed Russians went to America. Sasza left the plane, and he could see that everything was indeed big and new. Suddenly he spotted a small old mud hut. He told the American:

- What's that? Everything was supposed to be big and beautiful here.

The American answered:

- That is your embassy.

(<http://www.dowcopy.net.pl/?s=dowcopy&kateg=5&strona=4&aid=0>)

The Russian language itself was treated as an allusion serving humorous effect in jokes, anecdotes and the cabaret. In the latter, the frequency of jokes about Russians was incomparably less than in colloquial speech, because cabaret performers had to take into account the institution of censorship. The appearance of Russian elements in Polish texts was common. Since the Russian language was taught as a compulsory subject in Polish schools, these texts had a wide audience:

Szeregowiec przychodzi do dowódcy:

- Towariszczy tanki jadą!!! - Skolko ich? - Wosiem.- To bieri granat i rozgoni tanki.

Po chwili: - Rozgonił tanki? - Rozgonił. - To oddawaj granat!

★ *A private comes to his commander: - Comrade, the tanks are coming!!!*

- How many? - Eight. - Then take a grenade and disperse the tanks.

After a while: - Did you disperse the tanks? - I did. - Then give me the grenade back!

[The dialogue is partly in Polish and partly in Russian]

(forum.gery.pl/index.php?showtopic=44661)

In communist Poland one could only officially say about the Soviet Union and its people what they said officially about themselves (Głowiński 2002: 17). The language that functioned as the official ideology (*newspeak*) was a barrier that made it impossible to exchange ideas. The adjective “Soviet” underwent a great deal of ideologisation; it was

expected that positive evaluations of the system would be given in official statements, and thus it became almost an article of faith. In colloquial speech it was equally consistently carnivalised – it had a grotesque, ironic, dissonant coloration. Because of their doctrinal propagation of Polish-Soviet friendship, the communist authorities in Poland achieved the opposite effect. Wilful Poles identifying Russians with the ideological system represented a return to the negative historical stereotype. For instance, the addition of the adjective *Soviet* to the noun *scientist* had the power of crushing irony as it resulted from propaganda directives according to which Soviet dwarfs were the biggest in the world, and Soviet progressive paralysis was the most progressive (Kępiński 1995:157):

A Soviet scientist crossed an earthworm with a hedgehog and the result was barbed wire.

(<http://www.dowcipy.net.pl/?s=dowcipy&kateg=5&strona=4&aid=0>)

- *What is the difference between democracy and people's democracy?*
 - *The difference is the same as that between a chair and an electric chair.*
- (humor.dowcipy.pl/index.php/humor_31)

The events of December 13, 1981 were associated, among other things, with the Soviet Union's influence on Polish affairs:

– *Jaki jest związek między wprowadzeniem stanu wojennego a „Solidarnością”? – Radziecki.*

★ – *What is the connection between the introduction of martial law and “Solidarity”? – Soviet.*

(Rosenbusch 1987: 169)

In 1986 the Chernobyl power plant exploded; in Poland this disaster is associated with disinformation, the Lugol solution administered a few days after the accident, i.e. a few days too late, and a mass fear of radiation. These emotions were reflected in jokes:

– *Why is it so easy to pick mushrooms at night?*

– *Because they glow.*

(wiadomosci.onet.pl/1330257,2678)

– *Is it true that after the disaster in Chernobyl one should not eat apples?*

– *No, it's not. One can eat as many apples as one wants, but the apple cores should be buried at least two meters below ground.*

(www.dowcipy.net.pl/?s=dowcipy&kateg=5)

– *Long live Chernobyl! Two heads are better than one.*

(www.ciapek.pl/index.php?go=text)

Socially consolidated points of view referring to Russians (cf. Bartmiński 2007) are somewhat unevenly represented in jokes. The most popular is the point of view of the simple man – to which the folk profile of the “brother-enemy” corresponds (“a Slav” and simultaneously “an Asian”). It is composed of features corresponding to “the Slav familiarity”, “the Russian soul” (lack of moderation, alcohol abuse, a dash of madness, openness, cordiality, hospitality, a penchant for fun, perseverance – are all perceived positively, as being common to the Russian and the auto-stereotype of the Pole) and the images of the Asian – wild, two-faced, an aggressor and a slave. The dominant features are physical strength, aggressiveness, and a psychical affinity with the Pole connected with the avocation for alcohol. “The brother-enemy” is the worst and the most dangerous kind of enemy, as he is attributed with betrayal, hypocrisy and fratricide. Ambivalently judged, this is the most important prototype profile. This profile is mainly represented in the above-quoted jokes about the Red Army and vodka, and temporarily connected with people trading at so-called *Russian* markets.

In the eyes of young Poles, Russians have lost their traditionally understood “Russian soul”, and are now perceived more from the point of view of everyday life (as someone trading at a market place or working illegally) than of ideology (Lappo 2002: 162). “The sight of a Russian trading at the Tenth Anniversary Stadium in the remnants of the Empire’s glory is more effective in relieving the old Polish traumas and complexes than the long-lasting activities of the TPPR (The Polish-Russian Friendship Association) and all the celebrations dedicated to mutual friendship” (Tazbir 1998: 139):

– *You know, I bought a map of Europe from the Russians at the market-place yesterday.*

– *So what?*

– *Imagine, blast it, we aren’t on it!*

(Xsięga humoru 1999: 210)

*Była plama nie ma bluzki,
bo ten proszek był od Ruskich.*

★ *There was a stain, but now there is no blouse, / because the washing powder was Russian.*

(www.dowcipy.net.pl/?s=dowcipy&kateg=5)

Nowadays, the country’s considerable social stratification has resulted in a series of jokes about “the new Russians”. These achieved great popularity in the republics of the former Soviet Union, and reached

Poland as well. They include the following scripts: INFINITE WEALTH, STUPIDITY, EXTRAVAGANCE, CONCEIT, IMPERTINENCE, referring to the characteristics of the main characters:

A new Russian is asked:

- *Can you afford to buy a Volga?* [a brand of Russian car / a river]
- *Yes, I can, but what am I going to do with all the water and the ships...*
(http://www.rosjapl.info/rosja/dowcipy_o_rosjanach.php#pozostale)

Doctor's offices and exotic holiday locations are also popular scenery connected with the New Russians:

A New Russian goes to the dentist's. The dentist examines him and sees only gold teeth and bits of diamonds, and eventually he cannot help it and says:

- *Actually, I don't know what I am expected to do here.*
- *I'd like to install an alarm.*

(www.dowcipy.net.pl/?s=dowcipy&kateg=5)

Majorca. The airport. A New Russian is getting off a plane; he is decked with gold and watched over by two bodyguards. He has skis on his shoulder.

- *Excuse me, but it seems you have come to the wrong place, an airport worker tells him. – Here in Majorca it is hot, and there is no snow.*

The Russian smiles cynically.

- *Take it easy, pal, my snow will arrive on the next plane.*

(www.humor.imro.pl/humor.php?id=11)

The Germans

Poles have a long tradition of telling jokes about Germans, who are one of the three characters – the Pole, the Russian and the German. The German is the last to be mentioned in the name of this series. The last one is always the most important – the one that does not fit. However, the German takes the second position in the jokes themselves, giving the third place to the Russian. Perhaps the answer to this incongruence lies in the joke:

The devil gives two bullets to a Pole and tells him that he can kill two of his enemies. The Pole thinks for a while and then shoots dead a German and a Russian. He murmurs to himself:

- *Duty first, then pleasure.*

(Heard)

The geographical position of both Poland and Germany in the middle of Europe has had a strong influence on the history of both countries.

Poland's location between two powerful neighbours – Germany and Russia – was a curse for Poland. The Germans treated Poland's location as “fate” and a “special burden” – the reasons for their political expansion.

The Poles were afraid of the Germans, and had good reason to be. Ever since the 18th century, when Prussia gained power in Germany, Polish-German relationships were rarely peaceful. At the end of the 18th century Prussia, Russia and Austria took part in the three partitions of Poland. Nevertheless, until the 1880s it was Russia and not Germany that was seen as the most dangerous of the neighbours.

Only at the end of the century did the strong anti-Polish policy in the area annexed by Prussia make Poles realise that Germany was dangerous. That was when the following saying appeared: “As long as the world exists, Germans shall not be Poles' brothers” (Wolff-Powęska 1993: 41).

Later the alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union also gave Poles good reason for concern. First Prussia and next Hitler wanted to erase Poland from the map of Europe. Then there was World War II and the German occupation of Poland. After that, it was difficult to overcome the bad memories. German National Socialist propaganda purposely disseminated negative stereotypes that derided Poles as dirty, stupid, inferior people. The Poles perceived the Germans as the enemies who had invaded Poland and were responsible for the genocide. Even when they denied their past, they were condemned as faithful supporters of Hitler:

A German grandpa and his grandson are looking at a photo album together.

– Grandpa, who is the young man in this photograph?

– It is me when I was young and beautiful.

– And the man with the moustache next to you?

– That was a very bad man: Adolf Hitler.

– Grandpa, why are you raising your outstretched hand towards him?

– Because I am just saying “Hey Hitler – beware!” [Hola, hola, panie Hitler!]

(“Nowa Trybuna Opolska” 26–27.10.2002)

In the 1970s the strong hatred was replaced by the mistrust of “a wolf in sheep's skin” (Sakson 1993: 408), and two separate stereotypes of Germans came into existence. One was connected with the citizens of the German Democratic Republic and the other with the inhabitants of the Federal Republic of Germany. There is an old traditional story about the Polish Princess Wanda. She was the daughter of Krak, the

legendary founder of Krakow – the former capital of Poland. She decided to throw herself into the Vistula River and commit suicide so as not to marry a German Prince who had offered her valuable presents, but when rejected had threatened to invade Poland. The newer version is now a joke²:

- *Dlaczego Wanda nie chciała Niemca?*
 - *Bo dowiedziała się, że jest z NRD.*
 - ★ – *Why didn't Wanda want [to marry] the German?*
 - *Because she found out that he was from the DDR.*
- (Heard)

The Federal Republic of Germany was seen much more positively than the DDR. The official Warsaw Pact ally was perceived as an enemy. The situation changed for the better at the end of the 1980s. Poland and Germany came to have common interests. The two Germanys created after the war wanted to be reunified. At that time the Poles were struggling for their independence from the Soviet Union. Poland was experiencing the period of the “Solidarity” movement, martial law and a changing political system.

The FRG was supporting the “Solidarity” trade union, and German citizens were sending parcels with food, clothes and medicine to help the Poles. The relationship with the GDR was different. Socialist propaganda used to present the striking workers as lazy idlers, and the term *Polnische Wirtschaft* was used with contempt. The border on the Odra and the Nysa Rivers was closed to avoid the “solidarity plague” from spreading, and this was done with social approval (Hajnicz 1996: 167). The Poles who stayed in the GDR were accused of causing internal market problems. This led to acts of discrimination, e.g. notices *Nur für Deutsche* in shops, which had also been used during the German occupation of Poland in WW II (Sakson 1993: 420).

The fall of the Berlin Wall evoked old fears among Poles. They felt insecure to be neighbours of a strong and united Germany. For many years after the war, the border itself was a touchy problem till 1990. The treaty on border recognition and the document on good neighbourly relations and peaceful cooperation were signed in 1991. Both documents were ratified in 1992, and since then the relationship could be called normal – for the first time in the history of both nations since the 18th century (Hajnicz 1996: 190).

For many years, however, the endangered Poles not only perceived Germans as a threat but also respected their abilities, namely: reliability, conscientiousness, accuracy, economic status, organisation and

order (Sakson 1993: 411). The appreciation of Germans' superior economic status is seen in this joke from communist times:

– *How do you form the comparative and superlative of the adjective “good”?*

– *Good, better, German.*

(Heard)

– *Who invented / discovered the electric shaver?*

– *Ivan Ivanovicz Aleksandrov, while clearing up a German's attic.*

(Xsięga Humoru 1997: 185)

Germany is often referred to as the *Land der Mitte*. This fact is connected with the lack of natural boundaries that would make a geographical definition of German nationality easier. There was also no continuity of political institutions that would make a political definition possible (Watson 1998: 135). The problem of identity and being in the middle was frequently discussed by German “Dichter und Denker”: “Our mistake is that we are neither really stupid nor really prudent. Always in the middle, like apes amongst branches. It's tiring and makes us sad. One should know where one belongs” (Erich Maria Remarque in: Glensk 1994: 34).

“Is it that the German spirit identifies itself always with the middle, average and intermediary attitude? Isn't the German the most typical man in the middle? Yes, the one who says “German” says the “middle”, and the one who says the “middle” means bourgeoisie and simultaneously – let's put it clearly – something as immortal as Germanness” (Thomas Mann in: Glensk 1994: 25).

Also in the Polish jokes about the three characters, the Germans are mainly in the middle. Being the middle one, they are the ones who are rarely strongly characterised – they are not those on whom all the aggression focuses:

There was a competition in driving nails into a board using one's head. There were three competitors: a Pole, a Russian and a German.

The German starts first: He hits one... two... three... the nail has been driven in.

The Pole is next: one... two... stuck.

The last is the Russian:

One... – stuck!

The results are announced:

– *The German is second, the Pole is first and the Russian is disqualified for sticking the nail in the wrong end.*

(<http://www.steress.com/humor/humor%20polak>)

The German is losing his position in newer Polish jokes – as neither the clever one (the Pole) nor the more stupid one (the Russian), the German is very easily replaced by an American, a Czech, a Frenchman, a Chinaman, an Italian or any other nationality.

The history of conflicts between nations is, however, slow to disappear. One example is the victorious battle with the Order of Teutonic Knights at Grunwald, the anniversary of which is celebrated even today on the battlefields, by organising tournaments of brotherhoods of knights. The related date (1410) was evoked many times (e.g. it was written on walls during the occupation) as a reminder of the power of the Polish-Lithuanian state. National stereotypes together with the GRUNWALD script present in jokes and referring to the history of both states have been revived after the election of a German pope to the Holy See. The news of his planned visit to Poland was immediately commented in a joke:

In May 2006, Benedict XVI will visit Poland. The place of the pope's meeting with the faithful will be Grunwald – the traditional place of Poles' meetings with the German clergy.

(<http://forum.chem.uw.edu.pl/printview.php>)

The very fact that jokes are told about Germans can be taken at face value, and it may mean that Germans are perceived as being similar to joke tellers. It is believed that it is not difficult to create ethnic jokes about those who are total strangers to us and about whom we know nothing. Not infrequently, there are German linguistic elements in jokes which prove that there is at least a minimum knowledge of the German language among Poles:

Two Germans visiting a French restaurant pretend to be English, because they had heard that the French did not like Germans:

– *Two martinis, please.*

– *Dry?*

– *Nein, nein! Zwei!*

(forum.unreal.pl/archive/index.php/t-1146-p-2.html)

Comic stereotypes do not cover all features of the widespread national stereotypes. Most frequently they do not expose positive features, which can also be seen in the case of jokes about Germans. These texts change over time, since they are strongly dependent on political, historical and economic realities, but most often the scripts that have once entered them remain in them, and even if they are not permanently present, they can easily be revived. What can be observed in them is the transition from relatively negative judgments through

very negative ones (reaching their peak during World War II and soon thereafter) and through positive ones (at the time of the development of the German economy) to neutral ones.

The Jews

The Jews as a community that have been living in Poland for ages have had a strong influence on the development of Polish jokelore, and they were *per se* very much present in it. Popular examples of traditional Polish jokes are texts in which there is a priest, a pastor and a rabbi:

A priest comes into the barber's shop. The barber cuts his hair and says: – I don't take money from clergymen. The priest sends the barber a box of Cuban cigars.

On the next day a pastor went to the barber. The barber did his job and said: – I don't take money from clergymen. In the evening the pastor sends him a splendid bottle of cognac.

On the third day a rabbi comes to the barber's. The barber cuts what can be cut on the rabbi (the side-locks and the beard cannot be cut), and tells him about the rule in his shop. The following day the rabbi sends him his friend – another rabbi.

(www.duzohumoru.pl/kawaly/kawaly_dowcipy_o_ksiezach.html)

The rabbi traditionally emerges victorious from skirmishes with the pastor and the priest, mainly thanks to his smartness and sharp tongue. The situation is similar in modern jokes, even when there are only two antagonists:

There was a priest and a rabbi. They did not like each other very much, so when they were both involved in a car accident, the rabbi took a bottle of vodka and said:

– Maybe we should finish with these stupid arguments and make up at last???

– No problem, the priest says, and takes the bottle.

He drinks quite a lot and then asks the rabbi:

– How about you? Don't you drink???

The rabbi answers:

– No, I'm waiting for the police.

(<http://forum.gery.pl/index.php?showtopic=6102>)

Another script connected with religion and appearing in jokes is assimilation. Both those who do not assimilate enough and those who assimilate too much and too willingly are laughed at. “The environment guaranteed equal rights on the condition that the Jews them-

selves would give up isolation and would adjust to the behavioural forms and norms that applied there. For the traditional Jewish world, aware of its otherness, that was an existential challenge that made every individual take independent decisions. This led to deep and long-lasting conflicts within the religious community” (Rexheuser 1999: 39):

Three neophyte Jews meet.

– *Why have you become a convert? – the oldest one is asked.*

– *I passed my maturity exam with a gold medal. I've waited a few years for the state post, so...*

– *OK. And you?*

– *I fell in love with a beautiful Polish woman from a devout family. My denomination was an obstacle that could not be overcome...*

– *OK. And you?*

The third neophyte throws out his chest with pride:

– *I have become a convert because of my convictions!*

The other two neophytes tell him:

– *You can tell such fairy tales to the goys [Gentiles]!*

(<http://forum.wprost.pl/ar/?P=6&O=229689>)

In jokes from different epochs, Jews are mainly presented as traders. This refers both to inside and outside group texts, both old and modern. This is a stereotype that is most permanent and resistant to change. According to this, Jews are not always honest, but they always tend to achieve the greatest profit, and they perceive everything in the context of earnings.

The scripts connected with trade appear also in jokes told by Jews about themselves. SMARTNESS does not lead to success, CRAFTINESS is exaggerated, and MEANNESS becomes absurd and unreal (cf. Raskin 1985: 212):

Stall-keeper Jechiel is in his death throes and asks in a barely audible voice:

– *Malka, my wife, are you with me? – I am, my husband.*

– *Dwojra, my daughter, are you with me? – I am, my father.*

– *Jojlik, my son, are you with me? – I am, my father.*

– *Binem, my son, are you with me? – I am, my father.*

– *Chajka, my daughter, are you with me? – I am, my father.*

The dying man jumps up and calls out with his last breath:

– *So who, goddammit, is at the store?!*

(Serafin 1988: 164)

The outbreak of the Palestinian-Jewish conflict was the background for jokes with a new subject matter, but similar scripts:

An Israeli tank drives slowly behind a Palestinian who is running away from it. The Palestinian, becoming more and more breathless, turns back from time to time and shoots in the direction of the tank. Finally he falls down, resigned, and just waits for his death. The tank stops in front of him, the hatch opens, and a Jew looks out of it:

– Hey, you... Arab? Why aren't you running away?

– I have run out of bullets...

– Do you want to buy some???

(www.501.pl/sms-era.php)

Elements of specific practical wisdom and logic are strongly present in jokes about the Jews. This is so because the Jews brought to Polish culture reflectiveness, intellectualism, criticism and a predilection for rational analysis (Hertz 2004: 310). The Jews were attributed, among other things, with the ability to find a cutting retort immediately.

Standard jokes referring to the CRAFTINESS script were transformed into the refined script of JEWISH LOGIC, connected with the Talmud and Talmudic research, reasoning and sophism (Raskin 1985: 214). This shows that there is a meaning in every thing or thought, even those that are seemingly stupid. That is why in this type of text the opposition between logical and illogical, wise and stupid is so common. Moreover, the Jews presented in such jokes have a characteristic approach to life. This assumes an unconnected common sense attitude to everything, irrespective of whether it is great or minute and trivial. In Jewish jokes there are many wise fools. These are, for instance, the fools from Chełm or legendary Herszele from Ostropole:

A dignitary once came to Chełm. He was welcomed by a delegation of the local Jews. After the customary greeting the dignitary asked one of the Jews:

– Tell me, was any famous Jew or great man ever born in your town?

– Unfortunately not, sir, only little babies are born here.

(Fuks 1993: 227)

Herszele is speaking:

– I was born with a twin brother who resembled me to such a degree that even our mother could not tell us apart. We were so alike that when one of us drowned, I still don't know who it was – me or my brother.

(Same cuda: 34)

The Talmudic spirit permeated all of Jewish intellectual life. This reasoning is known for the effortless changing of points of view and the connecting of contradictory views such that there are sensible links between them (Benton 1988: 51). This way of thinking (so-called pilpul), in which never-ending argumentation takes place for the sole

purpose of argumentation that may lead anywhere, was very much appreciated. Questions appearing at the beginning of answers have become established in Poles' awareness as a trait permanently integrated with the linguistic stereotype of the Jew (Brzezina 1986: 314):

- *Zys, you are so wise! Tell me, why are noodles called noodles?*
 - *A strange question. Aren't noodles made from flour and eggs, like noodles? Aren't noodles as long as noodles? Aren't noodles cooked like noodles? Don't noodles taste like noodles? Then why shouldn't noodles be called noodles?*
- (Same cuda: 19)

Jewish logic portrays the issues of truth and falseness in a specific way:

- Two competing salesmen, Mr. Cymerman and Mr. Akerman, meet on a train.*
- *Where are you going? – Mr. Cymerman asks.*
 - *To Radom.*
 - *Tell me, what kind of a crook are you? You assure me you are going to Radom so that I will think that you are going to Kielce. But I know that you are really going to Radom, so why are you lying?*
- (Same cuda: 67)

Jews' specific philosophy of life requires that they safeguard tradition, be glad and see the good side of every situation:

- Melamed reb Zajnwel receives a letter from his son.*
- *What does our Awrumek write? – his wife asks.*
 - *Oh, oh, oh! His mother in law, of blessed memory, has died. His wife has broken a leg. His child is very ill. His house is falling apart. And his stall is empty... But the letter is written in beautiful Hebrew. One's heart rejoices to read it!*
- (Serafin 1988: 167).

It should be emphasised that Jews had been multilingual for many generations – they spoke Yiddish at home, Hebrew at the synagogue, and the language of the community in which they lived at work.

Jews are attributed with humour that is full of self-irony and in fact touches upon the problems of the human condition and contains a lot of general human wisdom. The main feature of Jewish humour is SELF-DEGRADATION.

In Poland, Jewish jokes are connected with a specific genre described as *szmonces*, “a type of absurd joke permeated with a surrealist sense of humour, based on a specific barbarised language of the

Jewish lower middle class". It is also a cabaret form, very popular before the war. It related the lives of Polonised Jews in a funny way. Szmonces was only occasionally present on the shelves of communist Poland's bookstores. Today the word *szmonces* is accompanied by such words as *good, old, pre-war, Jewish*. In many cases it is a synonym for the word *joke*. It always has positive connotations. "We like *szmonces* and Jewish jokes, but this genre of abstraction has a huge dose of self-irony. Only those who are quite well off or those who have no chances at all can make fun of themselves" (Englert 2000).

In communist Poland the government was fond of so-called manifestations of "political pornography". The authorities distributed leaflets with anti-oppositionist texts, which included many "fakes from the zone of political jokes", i.e. Secret Police materials that were to be taken as authentic jokes told by Polish workers. Anti-Semitic motives were very often consciously and purposely used therein (Kmieciak 1998: 233).

In these jokes, Jews were accused of collaboration with the communist authorities:

Goldberg meets Rosenbaum in Red Square in Moscow. Reminiscing about old times, they start talking about their children. Goldberg starts boasting:
– You know, I have four sons. The eldest is a party secretary here. My second son is in Poland – also as a secretary – he is building communism there, and my third son is in Berlin, where he is also building communism. My youngest son is in Israel...

– And he is also building communism? – Rosenbaum asks quietly.

– Are you crazy?! In his own country...

(Dowcipy z PRL-u po raz drugi 2005: 91)

– Czy dużo jest Żydów w Komunistycznej Partii Polski? – Około 60 procent. – A reszta? – Reszta to Żydówki.

★ – Are there many Jews in the Communist Party of Poland? – About 60 percent. – And the others? – The others are Jewish women.

(Kmieciak 1998: 170)

The proclamation of the state of Israel (in 1948) and its financial links with the USA led to the Soviet Union losing hope for the formation of "a communist stronghold" in the Middle East. The authorities of Poland, which was then part of the socialist block, followed the example of the Soviet attacks on the Zionists. Politics towards the Jews had changed; they were becoming redundant. This situation, together with certain political events, contributed to the emigration of a group of Jews from Poland (Szaynok 1995: 86):

At a POP [Basic Party Organisation] meeting, a question is asked about the differences between criticism and party self-criticism.

– It is not complicated at all, Rabinowicz answers. – If I tell you now: “Comrades, Goldberg was one of us, he belonged to our party, but he betrayed our trust because he betrayed his socialist fatherland and went to Israel”, this is party criticism. And if I tell you: “Comrades, what a fool I was not to go to Israel with Goldberg”, this is party self-criticism.

(Dowcipy z PRL-u po raz drugi 2005: 94)

Anti-semitism itself is also gladly laughed at:

Icek [Isaac] sells ice-cream. There is a sign on the carriage that says:

– We don’t sell ice-cream to Jews.

An indignant Rabbi approaches and asks:

– Icek, are you an anti-Semite?

– Rabbi, have you tried this ice-cream?

(Xsięga Humoru 1999)

Four cars collided at an intersection. All of them were emergency vehicles – an ambulance, a fire engine, a Military Intelligence car and a police car. Who was responsible for the accident?

– The Jews.

(Dowcipy z PRL-u 2005: 108)

The so-called *Auschwitz Witze*, jokes about the Holocaust, are a special kind of anti-semitic joke. They are closely connected with the period of occupation and the Holocaust, although they were told after the war. The Jews are portrayed as disadvantaged people, VICTIMS. According to Alan Dundes (Dundes & Abrahams 1987), the origin of these jokes in the countries of the Eastern bloc lies in Western Germany, where they appeared in their most refined form. They confirmed once again that all pre-war and wartime propaganda activity was carried out very efficiently and effectively.

In communist Poland the history of the Polish Jews was neither taught in schools nor written about in newspapers. Censorship meant that the Jewish issue was present only in the concentration camp subject matter and in the oral tradition of political jokes (Dunin 1998: 322). Since the late 1940s there had been silence around Jewish matters – with the exception of the year 1956 and the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. As a result of censorship, they were pushed beyond the framework of social discourse. It was only in the “Solidarity” era that a radical breakthrough took place in this matter, and publications about Jewish history and culture and collections of “Jewish humour” began to appear in rapid succession.

Today we can observe a kind of fashion for Judaica – starting from charity concerts in Kazimierz in Kraków, through the production of kosher drinks and such activities as the building of the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews. The image of the Jew is undergoing considerable changes nowadays. The Jews’ “flair for commerce” and “head for business”, which were previously laughed at, are admired today. These phenomena also influence currently circulating jokes about Jews, which to a large extent, refer to a world that has already disappeared. Hence they are not only based on known scripts but sometimes serve educational functions by presenting vocabulary connected with history and culture, frequently in the form of mini-dictionaries included at the end of published collections. In more recent jokes in Polish circulation, Jews are presented in a completely different way from how they were presented before World War II. The modern stereotypical image does not include any elements of external looks and customs attributed to Jews, but instead concentrates more on their psychic and social qualities.

The most esoteric jokes about the Jews have disappeared from common circulation, while the more general ones have undergone “assimilation” – the scripts appearing in them have not disappeared but live their own lives, assimilated by the texts of jokes with different subject matter. Some of them have been replaced, among other things, by jokes about Scots (the MEANNESS script) and about *baca* [the head shepherd] (PRACTICAL WISDOM). Similarly, some jokes about Jewish women function as jokes about women in general.

The Americans

Collections of jokes published in Poland in the past do not contain a significant number of jokes about Americans. Even if they functioned as individual texts, for some reasons they did not constitute a separate class that was strong enough to become an object of scholarly interest. It is therefore worth having a closer look at contemporary jokes in which the popularity of Americans is a certain novelty that could be interpreted as a sign of the times or another element in the processes of globalisation or so-called McDonaldisation. Thus the presence of the American hero in Polish jokes is an element of a wider phenomenon that can be analysed on different levels. Firstly, such jokes are texts of foreign origin that filter into Polish culture. Because of Poles’ ever improving knowledge of English, especially among the younger generation, such jokes frequently circulate in the original. Thanks to the rapid flow of information, they are also quickly translated. Secondly,

they quite often become an impulse for the invention of local jokes – with other or the same protagonists (e.g. jokes about blondes have been readily adapted in Poland). Thirdly, their popularity is usually related to current political events publicised by the media (as in the case of jokes about Clinton, the World Trade Center or the war in Iraq), which give rise to long series of jokes. Lastly, there are jokes which can be presumed to have been invented locally or jokes based on local reality, without many traces of their American origin, although they refer to America and its distinctive features. This last group of jokes, which do not form any series, is the object of my particular interest. In presenting these, I will give consideration to the chronology of the events they refer to.

At the beginning of the twentieth century and in the period between the world wars, large numbers of Poles emigrated to America “in search of their daily bread”.³ The Poles who emigrated across the Atlantic mostly came from the southern part of Poland.⁴ Therefore mountain folklore and the flagship series of jokes “about the head shepherd” were permanently enriched with plots concerning Poles in America, “good uncles” sending money to Poland, families that had been left behind and families that had returned from America:

Little John asks his mother:

– *Mom, the new car is from Dad, from Chicago?*

– *Oh, dear son! If I counted on your father, I'd have neither the car nor you.*

(Super humor spod Giewontu: 7)

Jokes presenting Poles' problems with communication in a foreign language are especially popular:

Przyjechał baka do Ameryki i okradł bank. Siada w rowie przydrożnym, wyciąga z worka pieniądze i zaczyna liczyć. Nagle zjawia się przy nim amerykański funkcjonariusz i pokazuje służbową oznakę z napisem “Police”.

Na to baka: – Dziękuję panoczku, sam se police.

★ *A head shepherd came to America and robbed a bank. He hid in a roadside ditch, took money out of the sack and started counting. Suddenly he saw a uniformed official who showed him a badge saying “POLICE”.*

The head shepherd said: – No, but thanks for your help, mister. I can count it myself.

[An untranslatable play on words: “police” in the Polish mountain dialect means “I will count”]

(Góralskie jaja 2002: 99)

Although Americans are not among the nationalities ridiculed in “Komizm” [“The Comic”] published in 1939, America is mentioned in the chapter presenting the influence of foreign languages on Polish. Bystron (1939: 521) writes: “Of course, at the level of the permanent contact between Polish and English, i.e. among Polish emigrants in the USA, there is a long series of such words that permanently enter the lexicon. [...] It suffices to read any Polish-American newspaper, the editorial section of which is written in correct Polish, but the classified ads contain a peculiar mixture of Polish and English words,” e.g. *stryt* (street, ‘ulica’), *tryn* (train, ‘pociąg’), *kara* (car, ‘automobil’).

In jokes referring to World War II, American protagonists occasionally appear in texts about the allied forces. They constitute a counterbalance to the German occupier and represent hope for the liberation of Poland:

Program gospodarczy na rok 1943: Roosevelt – orze, Churchill – sieje, Stalin – młóci, Hitler – wieje...

★ *The economic program for 1943: Roosevelt ploughs, Churchill sows, Stalin threshes, Hitler winnows / cuts and runs.*

[A wordplay in Polish: the verb “wiać” may mean ‘to winnow’ or ‘to escape hurriedly’]

(Jastrzębski 1986)

The real popularity of jokes about Americans began to grow after World War II. They already appeared in the Stalinist period, when the telling of political jokes was punishable by imprisonment:

– Wiesz, zbieram dowcipy o sobie – mówi prezydent USA do sekretarza generalnego KC PZPR. – Ja też zbieram. A ile już masz? – Ja mam cały zeszyt. A ty? – A ja cały lagier.

★ *– You know, I collect jokes about myself, says the US president to the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. – Oh, me too. And how many have you got? – I have a notebook full. And you? – I’ve got a gulag [concentration camp] -full.*

(Zakazany wic czyli polski dowcip polityczny... 1990: 31)

Americans were perceived by Poles as enemies of the Soviet “Big Brother”. The constant attacks by communist propaganda against the “imperialist” enemy had the unintended result of enhancing the image of America as a positive protagonist, a symbol of a high standard of living and an embodiment of the dream of success and freedom. Thus Americans frequently appeared in jokes relating to the cold war, the iron curtain, “star wars” or the arms race:

There was an exchange of secretaries between the US and USSR [Soviet] embassies. Two weeks later, the American secretary is typing a message to the Americans:

“Dear Sirs,

It’s terrible here. No new technology. I keep making chai [tea] for my boss, and I got such a long skirt that I can hardly walk.”

At the same time a message is being sent to Russia:

“Dear Sirs,

It’s terrible here. There are computers, lights, buttons all over the place and I have nothing to do. I am getting bored. And they gave me such a short skirt that my balls and Kalashnikov are visible.”

(<http://tonybeta.w.interia.pl/39.htm>)

Jokes frequently emphasised the enormous technological and economic gulf between the competing superpowers. They revealed the deeply concealed truth about the countries of “glorious socialism”, which allegedly was a step towards an ideal social system: the progress was in fact much slower, and living conditions under communism were incomparably worse than in the countries of “bloodthirsty capitalism”:

– Why are Russian cosmonauts able to spend more time in space than American ones?

– They have nothing to hurry back to.

(Zakazany wic czyli polski dowcip polityczny... 1990: 68).

One of the symbols of the American way of life was Coca Cola, which still remains an icon of American civilisation. For many years of communist rule it could not be bought in Poland; at best one could get Pepsi Cola produced for the markets of the socialist bloc:

An irritated head of a reconnaissance brigade runs into the office of the head of NASA’s Space Flight Center. – Boss! The Russians have landed on the moon! – OK, take it easy, that’s not a problem.

He leaves. A few minutes later he dashes into the room again. – Boss, they’ve been painting the moon red! – That’s not a problem. Relax.

He leaves. A few minutes later: – Boss! They’ve already finished!

– OK. Now send our people up there to paint the words “Coca Cola” on it.

(www.smirnof.isp.net.pl/html/archiwum_kawaly)

Wide open spaces and big American cities, especially their awesome skyscrapers, are easily discernible and therefore frequently included in jokes:

Rabinovich immigrates to the USA. A month later he phones his wife from New York:

– *Everything is all right. I have found a job quite close to where I live – not even half an hour away ...*

– *By tram?*

– *No, by elevator.*

(Humor polski 2003: 122)

The United States is stereotypically perceived as the place where the “American dream”, “from rags to riches” comes true:

A sad shoeshiner is sitting in front of a hotel in Chicago. The hotel owner comes out onto the street, taps him on the shoulder and says:

– *Don't worry. I started out as a bootblack as well and now I have this big hotel. This is America!*

– *I am not worried at all. I used to own this hotel and now I am just a shoeshiner. This is America ...*

(Dobry Humor 6/1999)

In the communist period, westerns were almost the only type of movies that circulated without much restriction.⁵ Therefore the strength of the stereotype that identified America with cowboys, Indians and Texas (*teksas* was even the Polish name for jeans) should not be surprising:

Two cowboys are talking:

– *Can you see that tall blonde man over there? Bill asks.*

– *No I can't.*

Bill pulls out a gun and shoots.

– *Can you see him lying on the ground now? Yesterday he saved my life.*

(Humor polski 2003: 127)

A young Indian in Arizona is watching the smoke signs he uses to communicate with his girlfriend. Suddenly a huge nuclear mushroom cloud appears in the distance.

– *Forget about the girl, – an old and experienced Indian advises the young one. – She is a chatterbox.*

(Humor polski 2003: 123)

This image was created by films produced in Hollywood, which itself is a symbol of America. It is characterised by its specific customs, as described in tabloids and popular women's magazines:

Two film stars meet at a party in Hollywood.

– *Oh, I see your husband has changed his hairstyle?*

– *No, it is me who has changed husbands.*

(Dobry Humor 6/1999)

Some other topics frequently raised by the media are the American right to carry arms, litigiousness and the death penalty, which is still in force in many states. They appear in numerous thrillers, court comedies or court dramas. Lawyers are popular as major characters, not only in the novels of the most popular writers (e.g. J. Grisham), but also in a large number of typically American lawyers' jokes. These subjects are also present in jokes told in Poland:

The defendant in an American court of justice is found guilty and gets a total sentence of 130 years in prison. The judge consoles him.

– You don't need to worry. We are not bureaucrats. You will only stay in jail for as long as you can.

(Dobry Humor 6/1999)

For many years the official propaganda claimed that all possible evils had their origins in the "rotten West". Even the plague of the potato beetle was used for the purposes of the media "war against the imperialist enemy", who had allegedly used tons of insects as a biological weapon. Depravity, debauchery, corruption, AIDS and drug addictions were also the products of American intervention:

A customs officer asks a Pole during the customs control in the USA.

– Hashish, marijuana, LSD?

– No, thanks, but a cup of tea would be nice.

(Xsięga Humor 1999: 306)

After having sex, an American woman asks her partner:

– Have you got a certificate that you aren't HIV positive?

– Of course I do.

– You can tear it into pieces now.

(<http://bobo.fuw.edu.pl/~dgarm/txt/?Dowcipy01>)

Another weakness of Americans that is readily exploited by scoffers is the relatively short history of their state and a certain complex about Europe as the "old continent". Such sentiments and ignorance related to them are a plentiful topic for jokes:

A school in Chicago. A history teacher tells the students about the wars between the Romans and the Jews. Suddenly, little John asks:

– Which side were the Americans on?

(Dobry Humor 6/1999)

Recently the hypocrisy of American political correctness – which also began to be reflected in the Polish media – has become the butt of many a joke:

There were four shipwrecked persons in a raft: an American, a Pole, a Russian and a Negro. After some time they began to run out of food. Therefore they decided to throw the Negro overboard. The American thought this was not fair, and he invented a competition. The one who did not answer a question would be thrown overboard. Thus the American asked the Pole:

– When was the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki?

– In 1945.

– OK. You will stay on board.

Another question was given to the Russian:

– How many people lost their lives?

– 6 hundred thousand.

– OK. You will stay on board.

The Negro was asked:

– NAMES! Quickly!

(http://www.smirnof.isp.net.pl/html/archiwum_kawaly)

In Polish jokes, Americans frequently appear in the company of characters representing other nationalities. During World War II they were the allies, but in the period of the cold war they were mostly Russians. Nowadays the pattern of nationalities in a group can be very diverse. It is interesting that in the traditional series of jokes about “a Pole, a Russian and a German”, the American frequently takes the place of the German:

Cannibals have captured 3 white tourists: a Russian, an American and a Pole. They hold a tribe meeting on what meals they will make out of them. The Russian protests the loudest, so it doesn't take them long to make soup of him. The American wants to contact his consulate – so they roast him.

The Pole keeps silent.

– And what about you? Where are you from? – asks the tribe chief.

– From Po... Po... Poland.

– Poland! My son studies there! Be my guest, brother. What would you like to eat – the soup or the roast beef?

(<http://home.elka.pw.edu.pl/~knowakow/zarty/polak>)

To conclude, the importance of American motives in contemporary Polish jokes cannot be denied. The presence of Americans in this type of texts can prove the increasing importance of their image in Poland's collective consciousness as fragmentarily reflected in the texts quoted above. It must be admitted that the general image of an American that emerges from the jokes presented above is largely positive and definitely more colourful than the image of the Pole in American jokes. It also indicates a certain degree of familiarity with the reality of liv-

ing in a particular society. In the case of Polish jokes, the opposite is the case. Their characters can be – and frequently are – substituted by the representatives of other nationalities. Using scripts which are usually not culturally embedded, Americans tell jokes about Poles, while not knowing much about them. Nevertheless, contextual references included in jokes about Americans indicate Poles' knowledge of America. It does not matter whether this knowledge sometimes seems to be only a reflection of the image created and spread by and for the use of Americans themselves.

JOKES OF MANNERS – ON THE EXAMPLE OF JOKES ABOUT WOMEN

Jokes about mothers

An important group of Polish jokes are those about mothers. This fact is quite interesting, as mothers have an exceptionally important position in Polish culture. It is even said that mothers are in the sacred sphere and have only positive connotations, so they cannot be found in either proverbs or anecdotes (Jędrzejko 1994: 169). As far as jokes are concerned, this approach does not apply. One of the features of jokes is that they desecrate that which is sacred. Thus joke tellers do not hesitate to make mothers the butts of their jokes.

Most mother jokes do not belong to one strictly defined structural series, although in some jokes the same initial formula is used. Some jokes begin with an expression: *mamo* [mother] or *mamusiu* [mummy], repeated in some cases to underline its expressive character. This happens in jokes belonging to the black humour series about the corpses of family members:

– *Mummy, Johnny is biting grandma's nails! – Johnny, don't bite your grandma's nails! – Mummy, he is still biting her nails! – Johnny, stop it! Otherwise I will shut the coffin!*
(www.pol.pl.humor)

In Polish jokes, it is mostly the mother who helps her child – usually a son, as boys appear six times more often in Polish jokes than girls – to do his homework and asks how things went at school:

– *Mum, the mathematics teacher praised me today! – little Johnny says.*
– *Oh, that's very nice. What did he say?*
– *That we all are a bunch of idiots but I am the biggest one.*
(Xsięga Humoru 1999: 51)

Mothers are not only a butt of jokes but are sometimes even victimised by their own children:

The worst hooligan was asked by the headmaster to come to school with his mother, but he came alone.

– *Where is your mother?*

– *She is dead.*

– *What happened?*

– *Yesterday she was run over by a moped.*

– *Poor boy, please accept my deepest sympathies. Tell your father to come to school, we will talk about your future.*

– *My father was also run over by a moped.*

– *Poor you, what will you do now?*

– *What do you mean “what”? I will continue to ride the moped!*

(Angora 11.02.96)

Polish jokes confirm the results of research into the linguistic conception of the world (Bartmiński 1998). They indicate that the most important aspect of the stereotype of a mother is her educative function, which is of great value, especially at a time when the role of fathers is becoming less and less important. Sociologists claim that the average Polish family has ceased to be patriarchal. “Children are brought up almost exclusively by mothers. Fathers’ share in raising children is minimal if any” (Worach-Kardas 1988: 161):

– *My wife claims I don’t take care of my children. I can’t stand it any more!*

– *How many children have you got?*

– *Two ... or maybe three?*

(Coś z dowcipami 11/97)

The diachronical study of stereotypes performed in the years 1980–1990 underlines the differences between mother and father connotations (Panasiuk 1998). The results show that we associate *kindness* and *love* with mothers, and *money*, *strictness* and *work* with fathers.

Jokes confirm the opinion that the stereotype of a *mother* is opposed to that of a *stepmother* and a *mother-in-law*. These stereotypes are highly negative. *Strangeness* and *hostility* are the dominant features in their picture (Bartmiński 1998). The qualifications of the term mother-in-law are: *witch*, *wicked*, *snooper*. The picture of a father-in-law is much more positive and is associated with such words as: *good*, *hen-pecked husband*, *father* and *serenity* (Panasiuk 1998).

Joke type “A woman goes to the doctor”

The formula *Przychodzi baba do lekarza* (A woman goes to the doctor), is an initial part of a characteristic series of Polish jokes. Due to their long tradition, distribution and strictly determined structure, jokes of this type became an integral element of Polish popular culture and a compulsory set of jokes for Polish anthologies. The same characters repeatedly appear in the jokes. The setting, i.e. the surgery, does not change either. The recurring beginning allows recognition of the sender's humorous intentions. The prototypical joke of the series does not go beyond one pulse (cf. Brzozowska 2000).

This is a group of jokes that uses word play, and therefore it is often sophisticated, and is considered to be a more subtle kind of entertainment. They are an example of pure intellectual humour – they are not aggressive jokes, as they attack neither the *baba* nor the doctor; instead, they provide joy with their surprising abstract punch lines and surrealism.

The coarse shade in the meaning of the word *baba* refers to Polish folk literature. It used to have a neutral meaning, i.e. ‘a mature woman’, ‘an old woman’ or ‘a married woman’. Nowadays it is treated as a humorous or augmentative expression. It is a ‘colloquial or contemptuous name for a woman, in local dialects also of a wife’. In Polish folk stereotypes *baba* is associated with such notions as *cunning*, *malice*, *gossip*, *trickiness*, *talkativeness* and *stubbornness*. The *baba* in Polish collocations can mean *rustic*, *healthy* or *hale*. That may be why the *baba* frequently goes to the doctor to be cured of her more or less imaginative problems:

A baba comes to the doctor with a pain in her back.

Doctor: – What's your problem?

Baba: – A sailplane.

(http://przychodzi-baba.dowcipy.pl/index.php/przychodzi_baba_6)

Abstract humour allows one to maintain a proper balance in city life, which is full of anonymity, loneliness and automation. Always surprised and a little at a loss, the *baba* tries to understand the world with the help of her trusted doctor, and she is simply willing to chat. She has survived numerous operations including a sex change attempt, but one of the most popular examples involves the revelation that the doctor is also a female:

Przychodzi baba do lekarza.

A lekarz też baba.

★ *A baba comes to the doctor.
And the doctor is also a baba.*
(rotfl.pl/reklama.php)

It was not a coincidence that the doctor⁶ in the jokes is a man, and that a woman performing his duties evokes surprise. Although this profession has a relatively high number of female practitioners, the predominant male position therein is still strong, especially in the top posts in the healthcare service. Women mostly perform only ancillary functions. It is also women who usually visit their relatives in hospitals or take care of them at home. Thus it is not surprising that the *baba* feels responsible for the health of the whole family. Especially, if we take into account the fact that the word *baba* used to mean a ‘medicine woman’ or a ‘midwife’, i.e. a person close to a doctor.

The attempts to make the series “A man goes to the doctor” popular were futile, but they keep reappearing in journalistic texts. Reference to this cycle of jokes may be found at the beginning of a press article dealing with men’s health. The jokes’ initiating formula makes up the first sentence of the article:

*A man goes to the doctor ...
... and the doctor is an andrologist.*
(<http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/1253389,242,kioskart.html>)

JOKES IN CONTEMPORARY JOURNALISTIC CONTEXT

One can observe that in Poland many of the winged words originating from jokes are based on jokes that date back to the period before the fall of communism. Political jokes were most popular at that time, together with abstract linguistic jokes based on puns. These two main categories were very prolific. In terms of the number of political jokes, socialism and all people and institutions related to it were criticised. Polish jokes also borrowed from cycles of Russian political jokes – among others, the most popular Radio Yerevan jokes from the days of the “iron curtain”. These are eagerly used, as they refer to ways of omitting or silencing the truth, and are strongly connected with the language of propaganda. Because of the wit, brevity, universality, twisted thinking and philosophy of life that is portrayed therein, which shows a distance from reality and contemporaneity, they are easily reused in everyday conversation and become part of contemporary journalistic style.

The multifunctionality of jokes and their pragmatic aspects (cf. Attardo 2001) is connected with their usefulness and ability to occur in different genres and fulfil different functions. Jokes are present outside the non-formal environment. When they are used as illustrations in journalistic style, their ludic function is accompanied by an informative one – through reference to common knowledge. They enforce in-group solidarity and common thinking. Jokes have a persuasive function that is used to draw the attention of the recipient. They are attractive and original, and enable condensation of the message. It is because of this multifunctional character that they are so eagerly used.

Not only are entire jokes quoted or transformed, but also parts of them, e.g. punch lines. The *punch line* is ‘a defining feature of the joke’ as it is ‘a device that triggers the perception of an appropriate incongruity’. It reveals that what is seemingly incongruous is appropriate, or what is seemingly appropriate is incongruous. The punch line must come at the end of the joke because the abrupt and surprising revelation of an appropriate incongruity marks the end of the joke as a discourse. A punch line is usually no longer than a line (Oring 1989: 353), and its brevity is what makes it an appropriate element to become a winged word.

Jokes often become a source for winged words, but they do not belong to the same genre. Winged words are recalled in statements, with the assumption that they are known, and in jokes it is the surprise element (i.e. the fact that they are not known) that plays a major role. Winged words melt into statements as reported speech, whereas jokes appear preceded by introductory phrases of indirect speech (e.g. “Do you know this one?”). Unlike winged words, jokes are authorless (Chlebda 2005: 56). *Winged words* are “quotation-derivative language formations with language unit features (relative autonomy, givenness, reproductivity, with a single- or multi-lexemic structure, though they are limited by their properties as carriers of social memory, and the function of independently defining concepts, evaluations and opinions or supporting (illustrating) concepts, evaluations and opinions of already expressed statements” (Chlebda 2005: 163). Winged words fill in notional and conceptual gaps.

Punch lines tend to become winged because they are compact phrases that condense in themselves the clue of the joke or clichéd initial formulas (Chlebda 2005: 56). Sometimes references to a joke may appear with an announcement almost at the beginning of a text. References to a joke are accompanied by the joke’s description, but the

joke itself is not included; instead the information included in the joke is treated seriously.

Not only do jokes appear at the beginnings of larger texts, but they may also initiate separate paragraphs. The below example illustrates the use of a few different jokes in close proximity. The second of the quoted texts ends a certain thought, but not the whole exposition. Therefore it may be recognised that it occurs in the middle part of the longer text.

The caption: “And in your country they beat reformers” is related to the following joke:

Some Russian and American scientists are boasting about their new computers. The Russian scientists ask an American computer in which country steel production is higher per capita – in the Soviet Union or in the United States. After a while the computer prints out a page.

– In the Soviet Union! – the Russian scientists read the words with pride.

After a while the American scientists ask the Soviet computer in which of the two countries there is a higher national income per capita. The computer squeaks and blinks for quite a while and finally prints out a page: – But in your country Negros are beaten.

(1001 dowcipów sowieckich 1992)

Here is the following part of the text after the above-mentioned caption:

[...] *W niektórych gazetach ukazał się bowiem (za agencją Reutera) taki oto komunikat: “Duże kraje unii – Niemcy, Francja, Hiszpania, Włochy, Wielka Brytania i Polska – są mocno zapóźnione w porównaniu z mniejszymi we wdrażaniu strategii lizbońskiej, mającej poprawić konkurencyjność”. Niby to i prawda, tyle że nie w Leningradzie, tylko w Moskwie, i nie rozdają rowerów, tylko kradną zegarki.*

★ [...] *In some newspapers the following news item was printed (after Reuter’s Agency): “Large countries of the Union – Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Great Britain and Poland – are very backward in comparison with the smaller ones in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy, the aim of which is to improve competitiveness”. This is supposedly true, only not in Leningrad, but in Moscow, but they do not give away bikes, they steal watches.*

(Wprost 2.04.2006)

In the above text, references to the following joke were made.

– Is it true that they give away cars in Yerevan?

– Supposedly, yes, it is. Only not cars, but bikes, and they do not give them away, they steal them.

(Na erewańskiej fali 1990)

The first of the quoted texts is among those that were eagerly told during the arms race, dealing with American – Russian rivalry, and the second is a part of the series of jokes that were popular during the days of Communism and involved Radio Yerevan. The plot of the jokes revolves around the exposing of the lies in the official propaganda. Russian jokes about the fictional Radio Yerevan quickly found their way into Polish circulation. They also formed a peculiar series for other reasons. Due to their brevity and witty ripostes, they differ from the older political jokes of a more leisurely style. They are a typical example of big city humour (Benton 1988: 53). For many years they were so popular and realistically told that some even believed that they were really created at the Armenian broadcasting station. For dozens of years *naczalstwo*⁷ was deceived and informed of successes that had never been; the truth about the condition of the economy, social moods, the existence of mafia groups led by the heroes of socialistic work who had been awarded many medals was hidden (Rakowski 2003: 118). As the above-mentioned example shows, in contemporary journalism references to this type of texts are still valid. They appear when one talks about the deception of reality.

The authors of journalistic texts eagerly use old and well-known jokes parts thereof in articles in the press. Allusions used in jokes are only understandable when there is not even any need to recall the original joke. They refer to certain ideas in a given text, and though they are to make the exposition more attractive, their main function becomes illustrative, not a ludic one. Unlike in the prototypical jokes, in the unofficial style the potential for freshness and novelty does not count. This category has become revalued to a great extent. As a result, the ageing of jokes affects their usefulness and functionality in journalistic texts. Thanks to jokes' intertextual function, it is paradoxically true that "the old jokes are the best jokes".

Jokes can perform various functions. Their parts and recalls and also references to whole texts are eagerly used in contemporary journalistic discourse. In addition, some joke elements are to a large extent susceptible to "getting winged", and in this modified form they often appear in press publications. The journalistic style itself changed a great deal after the fall of communism. The official and serious style became replaced by a more casual and humorous one. Headlines in particular are meant to attract attention, and even non-tabloid newspapers began to use more puns. At the beginning of the 21st century we can observe the further tabloidisation and iconisation of the Polish press. Articles become shorter, and pictures and illustrations get big-

ger; the frequency of pun and joke use keeps growing. The language used in the mass media is becoming more and more colloquial. This is related to a radical withdrawal from “newspeak” and the language of official propaganda. This tendency was strengthened by a generational change in the mass media – young journalists, immersed in popular culture using colloquial language, began to work for the press and for radio and television broadcasters (Bajerowa 2003: 107). Therefore one is increasingly likely to encounter old punch lines in new surroundings and functions, such as new beginnings and endings.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper is to show Polish jokes in the period of transition in the context of the main scripts and stereotypes that appear therein. The synthesis is made on the assumption that it is possible to reconstruct from the particular ludic texts the elements that shape contemporary Polish jokelore. The opportunities created by contemporary linguistics make it possible to fulfil the postulate of interdisciplinarity and to use the results obtained in relevant disciplines in linguistic research. Combinations of such methods as the semantic theory of verbal humour, profiling, and critical discourse analysis are used. In order to understand the grounds on which these texts have developed and to discover the effect of the information included therein on their tellers and recipients, I have presented the main historical, social and political context of the jokes.

The corpus of over two thousand mostly contemporary jokes drawn from various sources makes up the material base of the work. It contains joke books and texts published in the press, in brochures and on numerous Internet websites, and jokes in oral circulation.

The changes the jokes have undergone are most clearly evident in the transformations concerning the representatives of the groups they discuss. In the pre-war period, the most popular characters in Polish ethnic jokes were the Jews as important co-participants of the social life of the time. During the Second World War, Jews were replaced by the Allies and Germans, and later, until the fall of communism, it was mainly the Russians who became the butts of jokes. The representatives of the latter two nationalities, who had been Poland’s closest neighbours for centuries, appeared in classic Polish ethnic jokes with the central traditional series of the texts about “a Pole, a Russian and a German”. During the Cold War, Russians were accompanied by Americans, who were presented as positive characters. In the newest

jokes, the Americans have begun to take the dominant position. Either they complement the classic triad or replace a character of another nationality – mostly Germans.

In the post-war period in Poland, jokes about some nationalities and ethnic groups began to fall into oblivion. Some jokes about Jews were replaced by texts about Scots, and some others, lacking characteristic elements (e.g. linguistic ones), became absorbed by texts of general circulation. In recent years, however, interest in Jewish culture has been revived, and so has the Jewish joke, partially. The representatives of some other nationalities, which are earlier hardly ever mentioned in the jokes, increasingly often become the heroes of the ethnic jokes. When Poland joined the European Union, EU officers and the inhabitants of the EU member countries began to appear in more jokes. Internet communication and increasing mobility has allowed these jokes to move quickly to a global audience. Thanks to this, jokes about local communities are acquired by larger communities, and some Polish jokes began to have a much wider circulation.

Notes

1. This paper is a synthesis of material I have published in Polish or English language versions in the publications listed in the References.
2. Nowadays the situation has changed considerably. Polish women are the largest group of all foreign wives of Germans. There were four thousand Polish-German marriages in 2003, with Polish wives in three out of four couples (“Nowa Trybuna Opolska” 10–11.01.2004).
3. “The really massive influx of over a million Poles into America occurred for economic reasons during the period between the American Civil War and the First World War with a peak of 140,000 Poles emigrating to America in the year 1913. [...] Chicago by 1914 was the home of 360,000 Poles and the third largest Polish city in the world” (Davies 2002: 163). In spite of the fact that a large number of Polish immigrants arrived in America in the years 1890–1914, there were no Polish jokes there (Davies 2005).
4. The inhabitants of the western part of the country mostly emigrated to Germany.
5. This topic had begun to appear in satirical magazines much earlier. “By the end of the first decade of our [twentieth] century, thanks to adventure stories by Karl May, the western, which would become the passion of moviegoers in the 1940s, was present in popular literary magazines” (Krzyżewski 1995: 177).

6. In Polish the word *lekarz* 'doctor' is both masculine and generic. The feminine equivalent is *lekarka*.
7. The Russian word for *authorities*; also used in Polish in ironic or contemptuous contexts.

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THE “SZKŁO KONTAKTOWE” SHOW – A RETURN TO THE OLD IRRATIONALITY?

Władysław Chłopicki

Abstract

The article discusses a Polish satirical TV show, the “Szkło kontaktowe”. The aim is to account for a new phenomenon in Polish political humour, and attempt to relate it to the notion of post-socialist humour. In the former Eastern bloc, the typical mocking political humour prevailed during the communist regime. The old-style mocking irony and reduction to the absurd are still among the most favourite techniques and can be visible in contemporary Polish political humour. Examples from the show illustrate the claim that the comic technique may in some aspects be similar to that of the jokes from the time of the Polish People’s Republic, but there are many other features, sometimes drawing on pre-communist humour tradition (e.g. intertextuality, ethnic stereotypes). There are also several new themes, approaches and techniques that were not used before 1990s (notably, multimodal references, which add humorous dimensions). Polish political humour may be argued to be partly post-socialist, and its appreciation is limited to middle-aged and older Poles, who retell or refer to their favourite jokes of the past.

Key words: political humour, Polish TV show, post-socialism, humour techniques

The aim of this article is to discuss a new phenomenon in Polish political humour, which has been present since 2005, and attempt to relate it to the notion of post-socialist humour, advanced in the current volume. My claim is that post-socialist humour should be understood as the humour of the countries which have gone through a long period of communist regime and where the typical mocking political humour (cf. Davies 1998) constitutes a reference point, particularly for the older generation (the younger generations, however, have access to numerous publications (cf. Januszkiewicz & Rychlewska 2007), or Internet sites, e.g. prl.dowcipy.pl, where old jokes can be found). This is not to claim that the humour of those countries is necessarily qualitatively different from the humour of others; it is just in the category of political humour that references keep being made to the communist times and the political jokes of the time, particularly by those who remember

them from experience and are still fond of them. This is in contrast to the apparent decline in joke status claimed to be the case in e.g. Dutch humour, see Kuipers 2006 and also my review of the book in the “*Journal of Pragmatics*” (Chłopicki 2009). To use the terms of Raskin (1985), these people have access to certain comic scripts which are not available to others. Also – more controversially perhaps – current political humour seems to be modelled on the old humour, with the mocking irony and reduction to the absurd still being among the most favourite techniques. “In the former Eastern Europe jokes about stupidity were political and ascribed this quality to those holding or exercising political power at the core of society. In this way the political order itself was criticised for its perceived irrationality” (Davies 1998: 82). The perception that the state in its very core remains irrational seems to continue in Poland, hence the presence of post-socialist humour.

I would like to illustrate my claim by discussing examples from the “*Szko kontaktowe*” television show, which started as a short interactive program, aired live twice a week, and then – growing in popularity – was extended and turned into a daily one-hour long program, aired every evening at 10 p.m. Voted the best TV program of 2006, it contributed to the success of the commercial channel TVN24, which now has ca. 4% of the audience, having doubled in the last two years. The name of the program is a double entendre itself: it literally means ‘a contact lens’, through which the presenters are to see the world, but it is also a reference to the glasses the presenters drink transparent liquid from during the program, as well as an allusive reference to alcohol as a facilitator of interpersonal contact.

The “*Szko kontaktowe*” is a daily show of an interesting genre, sometimes referred to as the interactive column (cf. Grzegorzewski 2008). It uses multiple media: it is a TV phone-in show, but it also encourages viewers to send in text messages, some of which are then displayed at the bottom of the screen. The show has its email address where viewers send their comments as well as a website forum which allows them to discuss issues of interest connected with the program. As an additional multimedia feature, the presenters hold periodical competitions for the best text message or film clip produced by viewers. Another type of competition involves the voting for the candidates for the Silver Mouth Award, the candidates being politicians who have made their mark on the political life of Poland by saying rather colourful and unorthodox things. The candidates’ profiles are presented as competition entries by means of a number of video clips with their re-

marks. The show has now turned into an institution of sorts, and meetings of fans of the show with the presenters are occasionally organised. Also a book written by the two principal hosts of the show, entitled “Kontaktowi czyli Szklarze bez kitu” [“The Contact People, or Glassmakers Without Glaze”] was published in 2007, describing the origin and story of the program as well as the personal portraits of all the people appearing on the show, featuring best text messages sent by viewers and excellent drawings by Grzegorz Miecugow made to illustrate the events from the history of the show. The show has also been noticed and accepted by politicians and to such an extent that some of them (across the political spectrum, with the notable exception of the Law and Justice party of the Kaczynski brothers) actually formulate their public statements in such a way as to be quoted in the show.

The type of humour being promoted in the program could be defined as mild political satire, the mildness of it drawing perhaps on the tradition of late-19th century Austro-Hungarian Galicia, where human demeanour, no matter how odd, was not considered outrageous enough to rock the stability of the conservative establishment and the mainstream political life (Miecugow, the show director, has Krakow roots). The Polish tradition of literary humour is also invoked in the show, with intertextual allusions to literary works or songs occasionally made by presenters. The format of the program involves the host, who runs the program, shows video clips and talks to the callers, and a guest who is invited to sit opposite him throughout one show and comment on the events. Both the hosts and guests alternate, and altogether ten people are now involved (nine men and one woman, the latter appearing as a guest on the Saturday program). Most of the four hosts are journalists, while most of the commentators are performers in comedy shows or cabarets (no stand-up comedy in the American sense of the word exists in Poland). The show is based on authentic amusing situations from political life, which are filmed and then presented to the audience either in its original form or distorted in various ways (shortened, cut and pasted, fast forwarded, and/or expanded by adding background music). Some of the clips are rejects of the tapes actually aired, with politicians preparing for their public appearances or relaxing afterwards. All these clips are preceded and followed by semi-serious or openly mocking comments of the show hosts and guests.

Among the favourite humour-evoking strategies of the hosts and guests are pretending ignorance in answering questions as well as asking seemingly naïve questions, which are meant to reveal the stu-

pidity of some of the political attitudes. This is often combined with the reduction to the absurd (exaggeration) technique, which leads to the same effect. A guessing game for the guest is a common strategy used by the hosts to introduce a given video clip. Apart from the ever present irony, mockery, and intertextual allusions, references are made to ethnic and other stereotypes, foreign words (esp. Russian, Czech and French) are used or abused (e.g. pronounced with an exaggerated foreign accent) for comic effect, and comic dialogues are spontaneously enacted by hosts and guests. A separate line of comments is related to the incorrect use of the Polish language by politicians of all sides, slips of the tongue and other lapses. With regard to the phone calls by viewers, hosts sometime interact with them, enjoying their tongue-in-cheek comments, expressing understanding of their concerns, sometimes comment critically, when viewers' emotions run high and they tend to pile abuse against politicians, and sometimes ignore the viewers' remarks entirely, just listening politely. Even though the show has a clear political bias (pro-liberal, pro-market, pro-European Union), the presenters make it their policy to express equal respect for all sides, uneven as the due proportions perhaps are in reality, and always reproach the viewers for not doing so. As a result, they make an impression of maintaining an equal distance from any specific political allegiance and are free to make fun of anyone, keeping the straight face most of the time.

The selected examples from the show, presented below in my translation (all available in the Polish version from the website: www.tvn24.pl), include the situations which involve some form of post-socialist humour, broadly defined above, and those which clearly do not. The assumption is that both forms coexist, the hosts and guests having different preferences in that respect, which tends to coincide with their age differences.

Let us start from the category of post-socialist humour. The most obvious case is when old political jokes are retold or referred to, usually by those who remember the communist times. For instance, one host presents the clip of the Deputy speaker of the Polish Senate (now in his sixties) telling the following joke in a political debate to illustrate his attitude to the Law and Justice (PIS) party:

A train broke down in Soviet Russia, and Stalin says: "Shoot the driver," Krushchev says, "Pardon the driver," and Breznev says: "Pull the curtains and tell everybody the train is moving." And this is PIS today.

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To this a PIS member of the panel says:

You are a duckbill of the Polish political scene. Make sure your beak does not fall off from excessive beaking.

The same politician, who is a former political prisoner and opposition activist, uses another old joke to illustrate difficult communication with PIS members:

This is so irritating. Don't you understand questions? This is like with Chairman Mao and Breznev, who killed the tiger. Breznev went away to get a lorry to transport the carcass. Comes back and there is no tiger. So he asks Mao: "Where is the tiger?" – "What tiger?" He says: "We have killed the tiger, haven't we?" – "What tiger?"

The reaction of the show presenters (*H* stands for the host, *G* stands for the guest) to this clip is also characteristic. They enjoy the jokes and use the opportunity to make some more fun, quoting another old tiger joke in the end:

H: And I want to know where the tiger is.

G: What tiger?

H: But where is it?

G: What tiger?

H: How does the joke end?

G: It has just ended.

H: Didn't they find the tiger in the end?

G: I don't know. And do you know another tiger joke? The question came to Radio Erevan: What to do when a tiger attacks your mother-in-law?

H: What?

G: The radio replies: When it is so stupid, let it defend itself.

The memory of the old times resurfaces when presenters talk about statues of communist heroes. The host tells the story of a new mysterious statue which was apparently raised on the Bankowy square in Warsaw, where the monument of the Cheka leader Feliks Dzierzynski used to stand. The guest immediately comes up with a digression:

G: It was also known as Bozia (she-God) by a cousin of mine.

followed by that of the host:

H: On the bus a child once asked his father who that was out there. The father answered from behind his newspaper: Santa Claus.

The new statue standing on the mobile platform was apparently that of Nicolai Onovalov, a Soviet KGB agent, whose claim to fame is the discovery of a hangover tablet. Using that information, the host plays

an elaborate practical joke on the Mayor of Warsaw. In the interview with him, the Mayor of Warsaw expresses the belief: "That must be a happening of sorts, we will look into whether it has a permit for standing there." She calls her spokesman to find out. The host reveals to the guest, by interviewing the driver, that it was a transport lorry for a theatre, which happened to catch a flat tyre in the square, right next to the statue of the Romantic poet Słowacki currently standing there. Both statues look similar and rather strange next to each other.

Another elaborate joke, this time intertextual, concerns the handsome Polish plumber, whose advert (with the slogan: "*Je reste en Pologne, venez nombreux*"¹) has been so successful in France by countering the fear of the French that Polish plumbers and other workers would all come to France and invade the job market. The host starts from the comment:

H: Our plumber has won! Now they can go to France and work. The plumbers and all others.

This is followed by the classic "Aux Champs Elysees" song, showing plumbers at work and a short statement from the actor how happy he was to serve Poland, and then by an extract from the old plumber sketch from the 1960s cabaret. There the plumber character wearing the communist-style uniform ridicules his potential customer, whom he does not want to serve in emergency unless paid extra for private service: "Don't be a pipe and do not burst (= withdraw). A private service in French is *travail prive*." The presenters offer these mocking comments, turning things around for the purpose:

H: Now, it is no longer travail prive. Now it is travail travail.

G: It is still travail prive, but look how many years ago the Polish plumber was ready to go to France to work and how many years he had to wait.

H: And now this has happened. Wonderful news.

G: 50 years of preparation but that did pay off!

H: It was worth it!

Another type of humour, which perhaps might be claimed to bear some post-socialist features is the use of ethnic stereotypes, strongly present in communist times, although they usually date back further than that. The Russian stereotype is that of a drunkard who is capable of anything. Russians are also strongly associated with the military. On the show an authentic scene is presented, when two Russian soldiers drive to a local shop in their tank, buy two bottles of vodka and then try to return, but failed and half demolished a nearby house. In the jocular introductory comment the host argues that the event

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brings along a quintessence of the Russian soul, and then the presenters indulge in the following dialogue, where the stereotypes are mockingly evoked, complete with the use of a Russian word:

G: I did not know that the Russian population was equipped with tanks.

H: These were soldiers.

G: Soldiers taking a walk, a pragulka.

The explanations in Russian of the shop assistant and the army spokesman are played next:

The shop assistant: They have drunk vodka and sat into their machine...

Army spokesman: It was not their fault. It was slippery. There was glazed frost on the road.

whereupon the guest comments ironically:

G: When you drink vodka the road develops glazed frost.

The clip is accompanied by most appropriate “socialist” background music: the memorable opening and closing song of one of the best loved TV series of the Polish People’s Republic, entitled “Four Men and a Dog – in a Tank” (“Cztery pancerni i pies”, 1966). The film told the story of the four soldiers fighting with the Nazis in their tank alongside the Russians to reconquer Poland and defeat Berlin in 1944–1945. There was a lot of propaganda in the film, but the characters were so memorable and the film so moving that the propaganda was brushed aside and the film has always enjoyed enormous popularity. Nonetheless, it was there – the images of Polish-Russian friendship cemented by blood, the wise Russian military leaders who always knew what to say and what to advise Polish soldiers, who were slightly too romantic for their linking. All this comes back for the Polish viewers when they hear the song, and the contrast between that and the contemporary image of the Russian soldiers escapade could not be greater.

Some of the stereotypes much predate the communist times, dating back to the times of the Polish Commonwealth, e.g. the stereotype of the beautiful Polish woman, and the fierce but romantic Ukrainian man. The former is evoked in an authentic clip showing the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the Ukraine’s Julia Tymoshenko, all smiles at their joint press conference, raising glasses and looking into each other’s eyes. The scene is accompanied by the Romantic ‘Dumka for two hearts’, associated with the recent film based on the classical 19th-century “Fire and Sword” novel, which shows Polish-Ukrainian

fighting in the 17th century as well as mutual love affairs. More specifically the novel tells the story of the pursuit of his beloved by a Polish soldier and nobleman, who tries to rescue her from the hands of a Ukrainian rascal who loves her madly too. The words of the song can be translated as follows: “[female voice] My beloved. [male voice] How can I ask other women, [male and female voice] my heart they will discover in you. And although they know, they will not say, and I will not find you.” The jocular comments offered afterwards by the presenters play the male / female card as well as the big and the small size:

G: Well, meeting the PM Julia Tymoshenko is definitely an aesthetic experience, certainly greater than with...

H: PM Topolanek. For instance, him.

G: I hope we are not offending PM Topolanek.

H: He is just bigger than most of the others.

G: So there is a lot of “the good” there.

Other stereotypes include that of the incomprehensible Czech language, strongly present during the communist times although older too. It is mockingly used when the comments of one of the politicians are fastforwarded to produce gibberish sounding statements, notably in reply to the question: What is the point of your party’s existence?

G: This is a skill! I am impressed. Agagagaa. I cannot talk so fast.

H: But this was in Czech, part of it.

G: Of course!

The Bush stereotype is that of a Texan cowboy who is ignorant of things, including foreign languages – this is hardly “post-socialist”, although was often promoted by communist propagandists. It is evoked in the scene of the Prime Minister Tusk visiting Bush and giving him the book on the history of Gdansk he wrote himself. The joke is partly at the expense of the Polish PM too, as the gift seems inappropriate.

H: This is the book the PM wrote, in Polish. That’s a challenge to the President.

G: Uuuu. So Bush should give Tusk a book of his own.

H: Did he write anything?

G: And how many brilliant thoughts has he given in recent years? That would be one of the funniest books if you ever got hold of it.

The examples of post-socialist humour are a minority in the show, and the totally “non-socialist”, purely comic clips as well as verbal humour predominate. One example is the authentic scene of a blunder commit-

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ted by leftist politicians, who wanted to attack the government in an effective performance, but the band they used to cover their slogans on a whiteboard was covered with a too strong adhesive and did not want to give way. They had to tear it away in a group effort commenting in frustrated anger. The presenters ironically comment in this way, ridiculing their lack of professionalism:

H: I would like to know the producer of the band. Fantastic advert. He should buy this and show from now on.

G: This is an example of how amateurs, to say the least, attempt something like this. Here all the possible mistakes have been made. This was to be a 10 second sketch.

An example of deficiency in the etiquette is ridiculed in the clip showing the President greeting women by kissing their hands. This is the requirement of traditional Polish etiquette, but the man is not supposed to raise the lady's hand, but bow his head instead. The guest comments ironically by trying to explain the reasons for the President's behaviour:

G: The important thing is to pull strongly. So that you wouldn't need to lean or get too close. You need to have quite a lot of power. But that's good – your muscles get stronger.

Another example of the humour which is hardly post-socialist is the clip where a female candidate in parliamentary elections delivers such a jumbled address to the voters that the presenters do not manage to keep a straight face:

Dear friends, inhabitants of cities, towns and villages, inhabitants of Szczecin – the region, and so the place whose it is called Poland.

G: I will vote, count me in!

H: In Szczecin?

G: Yes, I will probably register there! Things you find!

The only element which could link that clip with “socialist humour” is that it was widely known that communist party members were not able to speak proper Polish, having usually been recruited from rural areas or working class families. But the link can be regarded as remote, even though the candidate belongs to the rural Self-defence party, which has leftist or post-communist inclinations.

The presenters do remain serious, however, when reporting on the President's press conference and – pretending ignorance – express ironic respect for the President for being able to understand English (he corrected the interpreter, who said “one fifth” in English, by saying to her in Polish: “20%”):

G: Mr. President gave the proof to all the infidels that he controls things, and that he speaks Polish only because he thinks in Polish.

H: He understands English, although he said he didn't, as he in this way develops an advantage over the interlocutor.

An extract from the authentic video blog by one of the most eccentric rightwing politician of Poland evokes an explosion of humorous comments, including text messages from the viewers, all reducing the idea to the absurd:

Janusz Korwin-Mikke: When I read a book, I do not remember what language I read that in. I know only the content. I do not know whether I read the book or watched the film. I do not care about the performance, I hear the same tune. My mind automatically supplements all the imperfections. I hear the tune, I cannot hear the performance.

G: This is a genius! Can you imagine you can just daub something and he sees the Battle of Grunwald in all its perfection. Or I will play a few tones on a flute and he will...

H: You will whistle the beginning of the fifth symphony and Mr. Korwin Mikke hears the entire orchestral performance.

G: How economical! I wonder if he has this also with his clothes. He puts on thin trousers and in winter they seem to him to be warm and they keep him warm.

One of the text messages that comes in, says: "I have got the same Korwin has. I get an advance and I see the entire pay," whereupon the guest comments: "I would like to employ that person."

Another clip is a visual commentary to the speech of Prime Minister Tusk:

In our dreams there is Poland with its economic miracle. And I deeply believe, I believe that we will succeed.

This is illustrated by a shadow of a man in a skiing outfit flying over the snowy mountains, accompanied by Robert Kelly's song "I believe I can fly". The presenters follow up the details of the visualisation, in their imagination seeing the prime minister as a ski jumper:

H: It's good you asked me how he lands. I wonder myself.

G: He's got his little outfit and this is how he flies. But how he lands? I am sure he will land safely – with a Telemark.

H: We would make a fortune in the world if we had a PM who can jump. But who watches ski jumps? They prefer tennis.

To conclude, Polish political humour may be argued to be partly post-socialist, although its appreciation is limited to middle-aged and older Poles, who retell or refer to their favourite jokes of the past, and even within this group the “non-socialist” type of humour, deprived of such open references, tends to prevail. It is perhaps more difficult to prove the influence of the socialist humour tradition, with its critical attitude to the rationality of the state, as it would require large scale empirical research, but for the moment it is perhaps sufficient to quote random text messages sent to the “Szkło kontaktowe” to see that the critical attitude is dominant, e.g.:

I have got a question: When is this mess going to end?

The shortest joke in the world: “We are restoring normality in Poland.”

It isn't wise to stand in the fool's way. That's why stupidity has conquered the world.

I have now sent 50 jokes to the Szkło. How much time would I have to serve for that?

Note

1. *I am staying in Poland, do come over in numbers*, a Polish tourism board campaign playing on the fear of foreign workforce in France.

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BULGARIA

TOTALITARIAN POLITICAL JOKES IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

The wide dissemination of political jokes was emblematic of the socialist everyday culture. Usually interpreted as a form of discontent and protest against the totalitarian political regime, telling political jokes is described here as a specific form of socialisation, typical for the people living in totalitarian societies. The popularity of the joke genre under socialism was a symptom signalling the alienation from political decisions on everyday level. Being rooted in the very nature of the socialist modernising project, this alienation is based on pre-modern technologies and practices for exercising power, as well as on the strong personification of public institutions and public relations. Socialist political sphere is thus found to be subordinate to partial interests and staying too far away from its initially prescribed role of being completely dedicated to public interest. From this point of view, the present analysis offers an overview of the most popular themes and plots of the Bulgarian political jokes under socialism.

Key words: joke telling, political jokes, totalitarianism, political socialisation, identity

The entire history of joke telling is full of examples that assert firm connections between the political sphere and the jokes that the system inspires. Party leaders and political events are frequently used subjects of all joke telling traditions. The nature of the particular political system has also a very important influence on the intensity of the reflections of political life in the jokes. Political joke telling is not so vital in democratic regimes (Dundes 1993: 94), but it is emblematic for totalitarian societies. During the national-socialist regime, a special term was used to denote political jokes – *Flüsterwitze*, i.e. whispered jokes (Gamm 1990). Bulgarian joke narratives, which experienced the highest popularity in the totalitarian period and went through a considerable decline in post-socialist times, also present a good example for describing how strongly connected jokes and the political sphere are (Stanoev 2005: 38–85). Of course, the Bulgarian case is not an isolated one. Also some other researchers have pointed at the fact that the end of the totalitarian regime coincided with the falling popularity of political jokes in the former Eastern Bloc (Dalos 1993a).

Jokes are often interpreted as harmless entertainment, whose main function is to release hidden pressures and thus to contribute to the psychological and social well-being on the level of both the societies and the individuals. Such a view, being extremely popular both among laypersons and humour scholars interested in jokes as a genre, is easy to comply with. Ideas about the role and function of jokes in a society emerge readily while studying the interdependence between jokes and the political sphere. First of all, exercising power inevitably implies coercion when decisions are being implemented into practice (Duverger 1999: 129; Foucault 1992: 75). Totalitarian regimes are a straightforward example of this. Totalitarian power generates severe political pressure on its people; the way it uses its political influence causes strong reaction from the people as well as everyday life environment. Thus we can assume that political pressure tends to generate more intensive periods of joke telling in the society. Jokes are typically interpreted in this context as a form of protest and as an expression of social indignation, as well as means of survival (including escapism) to help to cope with the harsh reality (Röhrich 1977: 211). Joke telling substitutes overt political protests in situations where manifestations of discontent are banned, punished or suppressed (Röhrich 1977: 211; Banc & Dundes 1986; Cochran 1989: 270; Roth 1991: 192). This attitude is also widely spread as far as the Bulgarian totalitarian jokelore is concerned. It has even entered the very titles of the different compendia of jokes, issued after 1989. For example Kiril Vassilev has entitled his collection of jokes “Forty Five Years of Joke Telling. Laughter against Coercion” (Vassilev 1990), while Ivan Slavov has chosen the title of “The Golden Cage” for his book (Slavov 1991). Both authors have implicitly interpreted jokes as a form of resistance against political repressions.

The issue is further supported by several arguments. Firstly, totalitarian leaders have, in many instances, suppressed the dissemination of political jokes. They have often believed that joke telling might potentially threaten their power. Secondly, political opposition may read out more from a joke than it actually communicates, finding proof of the expression of resistance or hidden discontent in the joke text even where there is no grounds for that (Albrecht 1986: 309–310; Dalos 1993a: 22).

Still, such interpretations of the relationship between the jokes and political sphere are particularly difficult to prove and one can find there are many arguments against the afore-mentioned suppositions. First of all, joke telling is a very popular activity both among common

people and those in power. Researchers have maintained that even the most biting jokes have been disseminated in all levels of social strata (Röhrich 1977: 211; Albrecht 1986: 311). The popularity of joke telling is associated with establishing bonds between people rather than with causing conflict and dividedness. Thus intensive narration of jokes is better explained if one takes into account the system as a whole, and not only the different examples of oppositional protests and attitudes.

Quite rightfully, Richard Albrecht reviews joke telling during the Third Reich as a document of wide-spread mentality under totalitarianism, but also as a testimony for the ways in which people coped with their everyday life and internalised power relations (Albrecht 1986: 316). The author further interprets totalitarian joke telling not so much as a manifestation of oppositional thinking, but rather as a complex issue, implying resistance and obedience, unrest and tolerance, indignation and resignation, outburst and ventilation (Albrecht 1986: 309). Deriving from this, joke telling could reveal the deep fragmentation of public opinion. It is marked by clear differences between public and open declarations of loyalty on one hand and, on the other, the uncensored private and concealed conversations in which attitudes towards those in power may rather lean towards the negative side of the scale (Bausinger 1958: 707; Albrecht 1986: 312). That makes Albrecht's suggestion for creating a thorough political sociology of joke telling in totalitarian societies quite reasonable. His additional comments of the potential problems facing the researcher in such an endeavour are also very important. Problems might arise when we try to determine the origin of the jokes, attribute certain plots to a particular period, or when we discover that the conventional stereotypes expressed in the jokes cannot be taken as indications of public opinion because they are too general, nor might there be a sufficient amount of authentic data on which to conduct the research (Albrecht 1986: 313–314).

Despite the quantitative abundance of political jokes, it is self-evident that political jokes are only a small part of the voluminous joke telling tradition. Political figures and events exist together with many other joke categories such as jokes about animals, or the insane, imbecile and drunken people, as well as foreigners or representatives of other races, not to speak about the numerous jokes about cannibals, children, movie and fairy tale heroes, etc. In addition to that, one has only to mention for example the universal interest in sexual jokes in order to challenge the idea of the prevalence of the political theme in this extremely rich narrative genre with its motley thematic scope. All

these co-exist in a manner which is far from being a simple conglomerate. It is well known that joking, as a mode of communication, also uses the mechanisms of taking turns, changing the topic and interruption. Thus themes and characters which seemingly have nothing in common finish up being entangled with one another in unprecedented and implicit associative communicative sequence in the course of a joke-telling session. Also important in that respect is the replacement of joke characters during the long lasting life of a certain plot (Röhrich 1977: 209; Warneken 1978: 29; Albrecht 1986: 314). Those processes go beyond the confines of a particular joke telling tradition with its thematic and other specific features, and are characteristic to joke telling as a genre. Political jokes, which unquestionably have their substantial role in a society, imply more than simple relief that one gets from being accomplices in taking part in a public act of criticism on the surrounding reality. Thus, the insistence on their functionality falsely leads us to interpret jokes in terms of simple behavioural patterns and models, which is in turn incompatible with the actually diverse and many-sided joke telling practice. When a political joke is told, it is the particular situation of telling which specifies it and best characterises its function. Telling jokes in a totalitarian society usually presupposed a small and intimate audience, whose members were certain of their mutual trust. Consequently, the form of dissemination rather than its function most efficiently distinguishes political jokes from all other joke types.

Detailed investigation of different instances and contexts of joke telling can throw additional light on those matters. According to Bernd-Jürgen Warneken, a careful analysis is capable of revealing the true nature of jokes. Joke telling includes hidden implications, opinions, and a common life experience that can be described through the reception or reaction to the jokes, shared by the joke teller and his audience (Warneken 1978: 30). Sharp differences in the perceptions of the audience members might ruin the very act of joke telling. It will also result in keeping the negative attitudes or interpretations to themselves, as one is reluctant to reveal the backgrounded and often oppositional thoughts to strangers who might not share them. Detlev Peukert has in his observations on the *Flüsterwitz* clearly indicated that political jokes contain quite a strong potential of conveying negative attitudes and criticism. This will often remain only partially realised because of two types of restrictions: the first are brought about by the isolated nature of the indignation and with the understandable confinement of jokes to intimate settings among the closest and most

trustful friends. Also, political critique is additionally weakened because not all the aspects of the regime are being disagreed with at all times (Albrecht 1986: 312).

Any precautions about interpreting the relationship between political context and jokes as a form of resistance or as the safety valve (allowing the release of the pressure) are to a great extent justified by the numerous examples of the Bulgarian post-totalitarian narrative practice as well as the international joke telling tradition. Thus for example during the first years of transition into democracy (with its sharp socio-political polarisation and growing daily problems), joke telling was unexpectedly silenced or confined to topical reflections of political events or actions of the leaders. Even today political jokes could hardly be said to convey prevailing public attitudes, e.g. electoral dispositions. Deeply disappointed by the political leaders, the Bulgarians have already voted non-confidence to political parties in a series of parliamentary elections. Nobody bothers to tell jokes about the present political elites. Of course, one can pose an easy argument against such conclusions by noting that the post-socialist period is rich in other media for expressing social and political indignation. We can parry the claim by pointing at the fact that political regimes with long-standing and more stable democratic traditions also produce political jokes. For example it has been widely known that presidents often make good material for joke characters and there are a number of jokes on them in almost every political system. Waves of joke telling, comparable with the intensive joke telling periods during socialism, could be found in radically different political contexts as well (Dundes 1993). It could hardly be disputed that the extremes of totalitarianism tease out the genre's most functional potential, the one of expressing protest, discontent and even resistance. Nevertheless, there is much more to the function of political jokes than just this, and – as it was already mentioned – it is precisely the life of totalitarian jokes that require the researchers to be more careful in their speculations about the possible functions of jokes.

And last but not least, such interpretations reproduce well known romantic dichotomies to which contemporary folklore studies are reluctant to come back to (see Lipp 1994: 83). These concern reiterating notions of folklore as a comparatively closed system, and searching for the reflection of the “genuine folk soul” and the bearer of authentic values and morals (as opposed to the “spurious and bad” elites that should be subjected to unmasking and renouncement). Tellers of political jokes and their audiences envision themselves not as partici-

pants in political life, but rather as an opposition, resistant and immune to its influences. I do not intend to criticise these views here, but will only note that they substantially differ from the political reality still in early modern times, even more so because of the well known processes of “the politisation of the popular culture” (Burke 1997: 324). The processes of mutual communication between the rulers and their subjects also plays an important role. The construction of a common political sphere started out as “part of our existence” in the years of the Enlightenment (Foucault 1992: 64; Eley 1994) through making use of mutual engagement. It has finally resulted in the creation of a “culture of participation” (cf. also Gabriel Almond & Sidney Verba’s interpretation of these matters within the context of the modern democratic regimes, 1998: 42).

The strong relationship between jokes and the political situation is something that is difficult to overlook. Nevertheless, an interpretation of this relation as a simple confrontation between the official and unofficial undoubtedly trivialises the matter. Relationship does exist, but it is not so direct. Laughter at political matters implies deeper and rather complex processes and relationships between the politicians and the citizens.

There are many reasons why these processes remain hidden even for the researchers. It is precisely in totalitarian regimes when jokes have experienced their zenith in all their functions: as a form of communication, acquiring and conveying knowledge, and providing interpretation of the everyday lives and closest environment of the people. But this also poses the risk that the characteristics of these jokes are presented as universally valid, applicable to all political and cultural contexts. The reasons for the existence of the jokes that are created specifically to adapt to extreme social and cultural conditions cannot be unambiguously translated into other contexts and societies. Thus, when interpreting jokes as directly linked to the political reality through confrontation, it is very likely to overlook the fact that joke telling in totalitarian societies is just another joke telling tradition among others, even if it probably was the most vibrant, richest and long-lasting one. To cite Andreas Schmidt writing about jokes in general (and of political jokes in particular) and describing them as an effective tool of resistance against those in power, he states that the discussion of jokes in such a perspective often confuses functions with results (Schmidt 1988: 47). Respectively, a careful analysis should be deductive, starting with the “normal” conditions for joke telling and penetrate the universal characteristics of the jokes, and only then can

it progress to the study of the more specific cases including the totalitarian jokes as a particular stage in the development of the tradition.

Whatever the interpretation of the relationship between the jokes and their political context or the intensity of this relationship, it is evident at all times and during all regimes that jokes include a lot of mockery of political leaders and events. These targets have always been present in joke telling. Although self-explanatory, the fact is worth mentioning when we are analysing the presence of political implications of joke telling. There are numerous different political plots and characters in Bulgarian jokes and elsewhere. All of these are crucial figures and topoi that mark the cultural identity of the joke teller and/or its audience and reveal that the text is vested in a particular ethnic, regional, local and social context. It also indicates the importance of political issues in the process of identity construction. Political views belong among the substantial elements of the concept of the world and of self-image. Joke telling can be defined as one of the strategies that contribute to the processes of self-identification.

Philosophers, sociologists, political anthropologist and ethnologists who have looked into the matter are unanimous in their attitudes towards political issues being basic structural and organisational components of any social system. Even if their scientific approaches differ in accents and nuances in defining these issues, they all agree on the essential influence of politics. Political decisions have fundamental importance in the existence, stability and functioning of the society as they encompass and regulate public life in many spheres and predetermine its perspectives and dynamics (Duverger 1999: 138; Balandier 2000: 52; Bargatzky 1993: 277, 288). The political realm has become an important aspect of the construction of everyday experience, recognised most readily in the contemporary world with its specific power mechanisms.

Jokes should also be consulted with the regard to their part in the continuous flow of political socialisation which guarantees public integrity (Duverger 1999: 108–112). This integrity further articulates itself in a rich variety of ways, in a number of discourses about politics. These are brought to the everyday level and thus become part of our existence. Everyday experience mediating these discourses includes forms of communication as diverse as the printed media, radio and TV programs, specialised Internet sites, political propaganda leaflets as well as conversations or Internet discussion forums. At the same time, it should be mentioned that this type of communication presupposes a sophisticated and mutual exchange of information, especially as it re-

flects modern political and power concepts and visions (Foucault 1992: 75). Not only political elite, but also common people have a say in the production of political constructs and need to reflect on the political reality. The appearance of the morning newspaper and the communal interest in “state affairs” turned the people into “nation of politics” (Burke 1997: 331). Thus telling and listening to political jokes manifests political awareness and is an important element in the complicated system of political life, rather than being just a substitute for political actions, e.g. resistance. It acts on two levels: taking and implementing decisions on the upper levels of the state machine, but also the internalisations of these actions in the minds of the ordinary citizens (Cornelißen 2000: 137).

In the polyphonic choir of voices talking about politics, jokes are not the first and the only genre which approaches these issues through laughter. Still in the early times when common people started to be interested in politics, at least two modes of talking about politics were used. Parallel to a purely informational level, there existed a second mode engaged in politics through ridiculing (Burke 1997: 324-337). This included genres such as pamphlets, caricatures, political satire, political sketches, etc. It would be an over-simplification to view these as only laughing at the politicians and their actions. A closer look will unveil a continuation of a long lasting tradition that is capable of bringing forth both serious and less serious approaches to the use of political power. I call that second mode carnivalesque, but I would nevertheless include in it a wide array of strategies that started before the appearance of the carnivals and went far beyond them both in essence and time (Dziemidok 1974: 156; Bakhtin 1978: 112). These traditions are connected with criticism as much as confirmation of the status quo and with the symbolic (re)ordering and (re)conceptualisation of the existing power relations in order to maintain them (Burke 1997: 255–261).

Aiming at the detailed review of the role and features of jokes in this context, it will be methodologically important to underline that joke telling as a folkloristic genre is here equated with jokes as a text. Jokes and joke telling bear a similar status in totalitarian practice of humorous genres. Especially as far as political jokes are concerned, the narrative practice is something that defines jokes best. By contrast, the development of jokelore in democratic regimes clearly shows that orality is not the main component of the tradition. Jokes can achieve other, not less vibrant lives in printed press, electronic media and in the Internet. All of them rely on joke narratives created in face

to face communication, but also induce a change of the genre by providing feedback and influencing everyday narration. Thus, if we want to give an adequate explanation for the reasons and describe the context of joke waves, we have to abandon the a priori acceptance of the jokes as a form which characterises mainly interpersonal communication and to study who and why starts telling jokes, and how does it develop in all the forms of existence of the genre.

In order to answer those questions it is necessary to turn our attention back to the totalitarian tradition of joke telling as it presents an example of intensive and rich joke narrative tradition. According to the German researcher Klaus Roth, together with rumours and other narratives, joke telling belonged to the active narrative practices of the socialist everyday culture (Roth 1991). The author examines all these diverse forms and their functioning in the light of the already mentioned assumptions, but also goes further and gives interpretations that are more important in the context of this article. He views these narratives as symptomatic for socialist everyday life and claims that these indicated the existence of firm informal relationships in the *socium*. Roth also examines the place and role of jokes as initiators and regulators of social groups and asserts that they function as one of the mechanisms for maintaining and reproducing various informal networks. The domination of verbal communication and colloquial ways of transmitting information in almost all spheres of life, as well as the importance of private and informal groups bound by strong ties, are interpreted as indicators of deep social and cultural problems within the socialist states. Also, demographic and statistical data showed the Eastern Bloc as an industrial area with a high degree of urbanisation. The privatisation of the social and cultural life during socialism, and also the parallel crisis in the public institutional sphere is informative about the reasons for alienation from the society at large and confinement to small and trustworthy intimate communicative groups (Roth 1991: 193).

The majority of those problems in totalitarian regimes were connected with political issues and attempts to manage them. Bernd-Jürgen Warneken explains the boom of jokes with the fact that the everyday life of the totalitarian citizen was completely immersed with politics. Such a situation was the result of deep engagement of the communist party and its leaders with all aspects of social and cultural life. This made power visible, direct and turned it into a significant reference point of identity. On the other hand in democratic regimes, the relationship of politics and everyday life is abstract or mediated in

a more sophisticated manner (Warneken 1978: 37). Nevertheless, when going deeper into the matter, we will discover that the close proximity of the government and the people is actually illusory and ambivalent – it is actually both close and distant at the same time.

The researchers define the totalitarian type of government as a specific combination of modern means and mechanisms for exercising power combined with traditional patrimonial functional entities (Eisenstadt 1992: 28; Kabakchieva 2001: 75). This was in the very nature of the totalitarian modernising project and was meant to mobilise the members of the society, as well as to guarantee the necessary sustainability and continuity of power and ideology (Kabakchieva 2001: 67–85). At the same time social dynamics are built upon strong personification of institutions and on strong personal bounds. Basic regulators of the social relations were connected to having or not having the membership card of the communist party, with the degree of believing in socialism, and with loyalty to the official programmes and regime. This had a thorough influence on every human practice, ranging from the elementary issues of labour force and working (always referred to as building communism) to the implementation of the latest directives of the communist party. The government institutions with their leaders and actions appeared as a series of non-functional, rigid structures. But there was another, more hidden level of social communication, radically different from the previous one: paying close attention to the details of social ties, one could have revealed various types of important bonds based on kinship, friendship, acquaintance or other forms of personal bondage and obligation (Benovska-Subkova 1993). Active personal bonds were typical both for the upper levels of state government and party leadership, but also for the level of everyday communication as a common strategy for survival.

Thus the power compromised its integrity with the opposition between its formal nature and its alleged dedication to common interest (Bargatzky 1993: 278) and failed in its pretensions to represent the people. This shook its otherwise strong identification potential. As a result the excess of politics actually became deficit of politics. When the subordinates to the system get acquainted with its existence, but remain indifferent to its manifestations, it becomes alien to them. They expect it to offer favours or are afraid of its excessive demands and do not believe that they can substantially alter the processes in the system (Duverger 1999: 96). The maintenance of mighty propaganda and police apparatuses to support the totalitarian regime were notable signs for the constant efforts needed to preserve the system.

The need for a solid ground inside oneself caused the creation and dissemination of political jokes in this context. The aim of the jokes was not so much to reject the political power and its totalising nature, but rather to “gain” power by reframing it as an important factor both for the existence and integrity of the *socium*.

The conclusions concerning the factors responsible for joke telling may also be applied to other, non-totalitarian regimes. Further generalisations can be made after a careful study of the nature of particular political system and its problems, issues of legitimisation and claims of power.

As a “global power”, and as power beyond any other power structure (Duverger 1999: 138–140; Balandier 2000: 36–69) the political realm symbolises the ideas of the social role, order and rationality. The deviation of the political sphere from the rules determining its existence generates serious frictions. Breaking the rules, the political leaders shake the very foundations of social life and pose challenges to its rationality and stability. The final result is strong dependence on principles which are quite different from the initial slogans. This enacts lower-level structures, the informal contacts based on personal relations. They offer possibilities to re-construct the political bonds destroyed by alienation from the political elite and to re-establish their value. The waves of joke telling, which might start and spread, according to Dundes, in a couple of hours (1993: 96), are remarkable for their constant ability to initiate integration or identification strategies necessary for the political being in the everyday life. This constant readiness is actually the well known permanent alertness to the political well-being in the modern epoch (Eisenstadt 1992: 35).

In such situations, the political sphere determines not only what will be discussed, but also particular ways of discussing it. This defines the specific nature of joke telling as a fictional form of knowledge and interpretation of the surrounding reality (Lixfeld 1984). The divergence of the prescribed roles and real actions, of what is visible on the surface and what is actually meant, of propaganda and the internal beliefs, results in an absolute illusion about the social reality, thus also bringing forth the need to find adequate strategies for coping with it. The common forms of everyday discourse are not sufficient there. As I have already mentioned, cultural history has at its disposal a lot of practices whose aim is to revive power. With the very act of trespassing social rules, the political actor opens possibilities for the carnivalesque. The aim of the joke is not so much to unmask (cf. Roth 1991: 186), but to re-inscribe the political, rejecting it and laughing at

its unreasonable qualities, as well as to re-arrange it to be in accordance with the communal values.

Coming again back to socialist joke telling practices, we have to recognise the solid foundation it was based on. It was founded on the basic divergence between the political system of a given society and its actual political culture (Almond & Verba 1998: 44; “political culture” being defined as the internalisation of the knowledge, feelings and evaluations of the political system by the members of the society (Almond & Verba 1998: 36)). I have already mentioned earlier that the socialist state system is characterised by a specific combination of modern and traditional power relations. Thus some researchers define the totalitarian modernity as an erroneous modernity (Eisenstadt 1992: 21–41). The final result was that the human beings lived under socialism as if living in an illusory world of false identities and imaginary social structures and relations, in a world of conflicting declarative slogans and real facts (Kabakchieva 2001: 85–112; Daskalov 1991: 33–39; Ignatow 1991; Bahrtdt 1974: 79–83; Gellner 1996: 34–46).

In such a context not only the researcher but also the joke tellers are aware of the utmost importance of the joke tradition. Totalitarian jokelore has already been characterised as capable of conceptualising itself (Banc & Dundes 1986: 23; Köhler-Zülch 1995: 76–77). The term *political joke* is not a construct invented by the researchers for the purposes of classification, but rather an emic term coming from the joke telling tradition itself. Ines Köhler-Zülch analyses the implicit factors in the practice and finds that it includes a wide range of issues such as the situation of joke telling, the respective communicative groups formed around it, the way of dissemination, and the interaction between the joke teller and his audience (Köhler-Zülch 1995: 76–83). She also mentions one of the joke’s most popular themes – the one about the risks of telling jokes in non-democratic regimes. The Bulgarian jokelore has several jokes supporting such a consideration:

– *What is the joke teller’s prize?*

– *He, who tells political jokes, will dig the metro, and he, who listens to them – will tile it.*

(Slavov 1991: 17)

Radio Erevan was asked:

– *What is the difference between a political and a sexual joke?*

Radio Erevan answered: – At least five years [in jail].

(Anekdoti 1990: 18)

Special attention should not only be given to the intensive telling or consequences of political jokes. The jokes also clearly point at the problematic issues which, being very important for the totalitarian reality, were the reasons for intensive joke creation and dissemination. This can easily be followed if one analyses the main types and subjects of the joke texts in collections of jokes from the totalitarian period (cf. Banc & Dundes 1986; Dalos 1993b; Slavov 1991).

The nature of the totalitarian political model was elitist as it was based on the differentiation between the enlightened elite and the unregenerate crowd (Kabakchieva 2001: 67–73; Arendt 1993: 121–164). This made knowledge something extremely important. It was far from being simply a vision for the future and was rather carrying a strong legitimating potential. The possession of knowledge defines the social positions of its carriers, and defends their leadership pretensions. Following the logics of the traditional power techniques, totalitarian rule marked Marx's doctrine, as well as the elite's political and economic formulations, with an image of sacredness (Ignatow 1991: 73–89). These become the only true, all-encompassing sources of knowledge and truth, determining certainties and identities within every sphere of human practice, in social as well as cultural life:

- *What is communism?*
- *This is the victory of creative Marxism over common sense.*
(Vassilev 1991: 46)

Jimmy Carter visited Leonid Brezhnev in the Kremlin. At a certain point of the visit the American president went to the toilet, relieved himself, but could not understand the flushing system. So he went out of the toilet and asked Brezhnev how it works. Brezhnev answered: "You have simply to shout three times KPSS and that is it."

Shortly after that Brezhnev visited Carter in the States. At a certain point of the visit the Russian leader went to the toilet, relieved himself, but again could not flush the toilet. Then he started to cry "Long live America!" As it didn't work, he also tried with "Long live capitalism!", "Death to socialism!", but alas! So he went out of the toilet and asked Carter how to make the American flushing cistern work. The American president answered: "Just turn the tap on."
(Sega, March 23, 2002: 18)

The English woman. Behind, she has her noble origin, on her left side – good children, on her right side – a devoted husband, on her head – a small hat, in front of her – bright future.

The French woman. Behind herself, she has her wild past, on her left side – her husband, on her right side – her lover, on her head – a big hat, in front of her – endless adventures.

The Bulgarian woman. Behind herself, she has the anti-fascist struggle, on her left side – social duties, on her right side – household chores, on her head – her children and her husband, in front of her – an extended five-year plan.

(Vassilev 1991: 72)

If the knowledge has an image of being sacred, the mythologisation of its creators will be brought about as well. In totalitarian power practices, party and state leaders were usually positioned close to the source of knowledge. They were the ones who controlled, transmitted and interpreted the knowledge. The propaganda machine of the communist party inscribed the party leaders with the aura of knowledgeable persons – thinkers, ideologists, and even philosophers, neglecting the fact that these lavishing “appraisals” were often far away from the real capacities and education these persons had:

Marx and Engels proved that socialism will overcome the whole world.

Lenin proved that it can overcome a single country.

Todor Zhivkov proved that it can overcome a single village.

Nikolae Chaushesku proved that it can overcome a single family.

(AIF I No. 343: 9)

Brezhnev had a speech at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Moscow:

– O! O! O!

– One of his advisors came up and said:

– Comrade Brezhnev, these are the Olympic circles. Your speech is further down.

(AIF I No. 343: 27)

Two men showed up and asked for Toshō¹. His father enquired:

– What is your relationship to him?

They answered:

– We are his former classmates.

– Ok then. Sit down here.

Then his father entered the room with a gun and shot them.

– Classmates, ha! My son has never gone to school!

(AIF I No. 344: 5)

The gerontocratic nature of the totalitarian rule was one of the symptoms for the co-existence of the modern and the traditional (but also the divergence between the propaganda versus the implicit messages). Valorisations of the past and worship of life experience, accenting its

highest accumulation at an old age, were important constructs in modelling social reality and social structure:

Georgi Traykov – a wise comrade and Chair of the Parliament of Bulgaria announced with a feeble voice:

– The members of Politburo and of the Council of Ministers will be carried in here. Everybody who can rise to his feet, stand up!

(Slavov 1991: 116)

An old man caught the golden fish. It asked to be set free and promised to realise three of his wishes. He agreed and said:

– Firstly, I want an apartment for my daughter.

– Done, old man! Your next wish?

– I want my grand-daughter to go to the university.

– This is also done. Your next wish?

– I am an old man and would like to go to a retirement center and to live there together with people of my age. I would like to have chats with them and to discuss our illnesses and the past.

The golden fish just moved its fins and the old man suddenly found himself in... the Kremlin, on a meeting of the Politburo of KPSS.

(Slavov 1991: 123)

The imaginary world of the illusory social identities and structures could only be ruled with violence. Totalitarian regimes had mighty repressive apparatus to maintain their power. This has also found reflection in a number of jokes:

– What is Militia?

– The beating heart of the Party.

(Slavov 1991: 218)

A lawyer got out the session of the court and could not stop laughing. He met a friend in the corridor. The friend, himself a lawyer, asks him:

– Why are you laughing?

– I heard a political joke.

– Tell it to me! I also want to laugh.

– Oh, no! One gets a ten year sentence for telling it!

(Anekdoti 1990: 24)

A group of sociologists conduct interviews and ask Radio Moscow, Radio Warsaw and Radio Washington why there isn't any meat. The three radios answered as follows:

Radio Warsaw: What does 'meat' mean?

Radio Washington: 'What does 'there isn't' mean?

Radio Moscow: Who asked the question?

(Vassilev 1991: 124–125)

Bulgarian jokes are not an isolated exception from the international tradition. The universal character of the policeman was often described in jokes, where they formed a specific sub-group of targets in stupidity jokes. I will cite an example in order to illustrate how political jokes relate such reflective images to the character's power position:

Two militia men telling jokes:

– *Do you know the shortest joke about militia men?*

– *No.*

– *A militia man walks along the road and thinks about something.*

(Vicat 1992: 53)

A drunken man travelled in a tram and repeatedly tried to tell a political joke to the militia man, sitting next to him. The militia man refused several times to listen to him, explaining that he is wearing a uniform. But the drunken man insisted:

– *OK, OK! I'll slowly tell it two times [for you to understand].*

(Slavov 1991: 222)

As I have already mentioned, the logical consequence of the implementation of the totalitarian model is the formation of the “hidden society” (as Richard Albrecht names it; Albrecht 1986: 309) that stays behind the modern institution and the seemingly formal relations. The “hidden society” is based on personal bonds – kinships, friendships and acquaintances. Jokes reflect these social dispositions when asking:

– *Which is the most terrible curse?*

... and give the answer:

– *I wish your closest friends would pass away.*

(AIF I No. 343: 26)

Totalitarian social differentiation set a chiasm between those supporting and those not supporting the ruling communist party. Power positions, rather than the individual economic and social initiative, determined one's standard of living:

Two little shoeblacks wanted to know what perestroika is. So they went to Todor Zhivkov to explain it to them. Zhivkov invited one of the shoeblacks to come closer and said:

– *I'll show you what perestroika is. Do you see the white Mercedes? It belongs to my son. And that black one is mine. When you park your Mercedes between them, this is perestroika. Did you catch it?*

– *Yes, I did.*

The shoeblick went back and his friend asked him:

– Did you understand what perestroika is?

– Yes, I did.

– Go on, explain it to me then.

– This is your box and this is mine. When Todor Zhivkov puts his one between them, this is perestroika.

(AHHS, f. 74, op. 11)

The jokes followed the issues from everyday life and made fun of its absurdities. These daily details were well known to several generations of Bulgarians:

There were four types of shops in Bulgaria. The first ones were sexual ones: there you could find all the shelves ‘naked’. The others were historical: on entering them everybody exclaimed: “Oh, a long time ago, the articles they sell here were so gorgeous!” The third ones were religious – when the customer got in, he made the sign of the cross and said: “God, what a [poor] quality!” The fourth ones were homosexual: there was nothing on the shelves, but people nevertheless queued up.

(AIF I No. 344: 22)

The Bulgarian totalitarian joke telling tradition, much like other examples of jokelore from the former Soviet Bloc, was very eager to mock the presidential figures. Presumably, the political reality is the groundsel of the social system fostering its existence and stability. The political institutions governing this stability are of special importance in that respect and as such they stay at the top of the social hierarchy. The political leaders as the top figures on the upper level of this social hierarchy have a strong potential for becoming a subject of colourful anecdotes. Jokes have depicted the presidents not only in totalitarian societies: for centuries, special attention has been given to presidential figures and this has even specified a distinct narrative category, the so called president jokes. During socialism, the potentials of that category were intensively explored and the institution triggered vivid comments. One of the basic characteristics of the presidential figures in jokes is their stupidity:

Reagan, Gorbachov and Todor Zhivkov were in the Louvre. The accompanying first ladies expressed their admiration for the beautiful pictures hanging on the walls and the museum guide congratulated them for their exquisite tastes. At a certain point of the tour Zhivkov said:

– Oh, what a beautiful picture! A peasant eating sunflower seeds!

– No sir! This is not a picture. It is a sixteenth century Venetian mirror.

(Slavov 1991: 82)

It is a futile attempt to list all the situations in which jokes laugh at stupidity, as stupidity jokes are well known and long lasting cultural universalia. Max Lüthi notes that there is hardly other human fault which is more often in the focus of jeering than stupidity. At the same time, stupidity is not understood as a pathological condition, but rather as a lack of adaptation to a particular cultural environment or as an insufficient adaptation to it (Lüthi 1981: 928). That is why it is not at all surprising that fools are interpreted as inhabiting the periphery between the cultivated and uncultivated, between the native and the alien. Thus, when mocking the figure of their “fool president”, both the joke-teller and his audience re-establish at the same time their own belonging to the corresponding social and cultural context.

The identity of the figure of the president is clearly evident in two types of plots used in political jokes. The first one can be classified as the so-called inter-ethnic joke (Röhrich 1977: 285–291). The common pattern of the joke offers reactions of the representatives of a particular ethnos in a typical situation. All cases in which “our” president shows his stupidity in front of the other presidents illustrate in a perfect way that their actions and words are emblematic of the whole nation and that it is in a direct relationship with ethnic identity (Kubbel 1988: 185):

The VIP plane met with an accident, but there was no parachute for one of the passengers. Then Reagan said:

– What I am expected to do is of an utmost importance for humanity. I am called upon to defend and support world democracy, freedom, progress and justice. So he was given a parachute and jumped down the plane.

Then Gorbachov said:

– I have a historic deed to accomplish. It is me who has to do the perestroika in the socialist countries. If I am not there to do it, it will fail!

So he was given a parachute and jumped down the plane.

Then Todor Zhivkov said:

– I am the father of our nation. We have to accomplish the scientific and technical revolution for the whole world! Without me and my nation this historic achievement will fail!

So he took a parachute and jumped down the plane, but the Pope and a student were still waiting for parachutes:

– Son – said the Pope – I am not far from God and will rely on his help and benevolence. Take the last parachute!

– But there are two ones – calmed him the student.

– One was missing? – exclaimed the Pope.

– Yes, of course, but that guy – the father of the technical nation – jumped down with my rucksack on his back.

(Smyah, No. 1, 1991: 4)

Gorbachov was visiting Margaret Thatcher. While they were drinking tea, a cuckoo got out of the clock and started shouting "Ma-ggy! Ma-ggy!" Gorbachov liked it a lot and asked Thatcher to give him the clock. She said: "Oh, I can't, it is a present!", but finally agreed. Then Gorbachov invited Todor Zhivkov and while they were drinking tea, the cuckoo got out of the clock and started shouting "Mi-sha! Mi-sha!" Uncle Tosho was amazed and asked to be given the clock. The host said: "I can't, it's a valuable present from Maggy Thatcher..." – "Please, please, give it to me!" Toscho said. Finally Gorbachov agreed to give him the clock. Uncle Tosho brought it home, put it on the wall and sat at the table to wait for the cuckoo. When the time came, the cuckoo got out of the clock and started shouting "Cra-zy! Cra-zy!"
(AIF I No. 343: 13)

The second type of president jokes is also extremely popular. These offer a morbid perspective on the leaders, probing the limits of the physical and political existence of the president. A lot of joke texts describe the death of the president. This death is not necessarily a symbolic, political one (Röhrich 1977: 209), but in every case expresses a wish to be done with him. Like no other joke characters, the president figure often goes through imagined incidents of dying. He is often killed, shown fey or encountering extreme situations, i.e. located on the very boundary between life and death or having already passed to the other world:

*– Do you happen to know that joke: Todor Zhivkov died and...
– No, I don't.
– Me either, but the beginning is so promising.*
(AIF I No. 343: 23)

Uncle Tosho retired and came back to his native village of Pravec. He expected that the pioneers would meet him with songs and banners, but there was nothing like that. Then uncle Tosho went to the village field-keeper, who was the only official there, and said:

*– Pesho, what's the matter? There is nobody to meet me here!
– Oh Tosho, everybody is on the fields busy with their work.
– Well, fire your gun to gather them here. Then they will see I have arrived!*

Pesho fired his gun. After a while a woman called Pena came to him and asked:

*– What's the matter, Pesho, did they deliver the bread?
– No, no! Our Tosho came to visit us.
Tosho waited and waited but nobody else bothered to come. Then he said:
– Pesho, fire you gun once more!
Pesho fired again his gun and Pena came again to him and asked:*

- *What's the matter, Pesho, did they now deliver the bread?*
 - *No, no! Our Tosho came to visit us.*
 - *Oh, damn you! Why didn't you shoot him with the first shot?!*
- (AIF I No. 344: 30)

Romanian family was fast asleep. A rat entered the room so the woman got up, made her husband get up and they both started to chase the rat, shouting: "Kill him! Kill him!" Their neighbours also got up and started shouting: "Kill him and his wife, too! Kill him and his wife, too!"

(AIF I No. 343: 11)

Whatever the imaginary spaces that the president figure occupies, he as a character belonging to a particular social or cultural realm never enters these spaces in an abstract way. The joke texts cited above clearly show that he is a personage that helped to conceptualise, understand and interpret the life environment with its particular experiences and then actual problems. It may of course imply also criticism or protest, but that was not the only aim of the jokes. The primary aim for them was to develop the degree of mutual understanding through communicating the jokes and foster the feeling of belonging to a particular social and cultural context.

Having reviewed political joke telling during socialism, I have one more important point to stress. Jokes offer adaptive strategies, help to construct and support identities, and also cope with harsh reality of daily life. The very existence of the political jokes, as well as the themes which they bring to our attention, contain valuable information about the processes characterising the particular reality in which those jokes were told and re-told. The analysis of the totalitarian political jokes offers the possibility to observe some of their important characteristics in "laboratory" conditions. All this is required before one engages himself in an in-depth analysis of joke telling during the post-socialist period.

Note

1. *Tosho* (an intimate name for Todor) or, alternatively, *uncle Tosho* is often used in everyday situations for the name of the well known leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Bulgarian state Todor Zhivkov. These intimate names are regularly mentioned in the Bulgarian jokes, as well as in other forms of everyday communication.

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RUSSIA

THE ORIGIN OF THE ANECDOTE: “MUKHA TSOKOTUKHA” [THE BUZZING FLY] SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION TO SOVIET RULERS

Sergey Neklyudov

Abstract

Among anecdotes about Stalin published by A. Krikmann there are several variations of the story “The State Leaders criticise the poem *Mukha-mukha, tsokotukha*” (Krikmann 2004: No. 136). This anecdote is probably based on actual events that took place in the 1920s. Its direct source can be found in the stories about literary misfortune of this tale (as well as other tales written by Chukovsky) that was considered ideologically wrong by the Soviet censors. Most likely, they were told by Chukovsky himself who described to the circle of friends how he and some other writers had to plead with the officials to prove that there was no ideological implications. These stories were projected into one of anecdote’s models based on cumulative effect (the first version). It is significant that the Soviet leaders’ reaction to the tale as it is presented in the anecdote perfectly corresponds with the official criticism recorded by Chukovsky.

This interrelation between historical reality and the narrative mechanics of anecdote is further demonstrated by another version of this story where Chukovsky is replaced by Mikhalkov (the second version). This replacement has a definite semantic motivation and, at the same time, it follows the logic of folklore where the actions of one character can be easily transferred on another, provided that they both belong to the same category of historical (or mythological) personae. In our case this process is facilitated by the fact that the authors who write for children are less individualised in public consciousness than the ones who work in ‘serious’ genres. Replacing Chukovsky by Mikhalkov, the anecdote draws on such aspects of the latter reputation as a plagiarist and a cynical writer of the Soviet hymn that he kept changing according to political demand. It is a unique occasion when a Soviet writer became the hero of an anecdote cycle even with a limited (mostly professional) circulation. Thanks to Mikhalkov’s reputation the second version of the anecdote has a different message that the first one.

Key words: anecdote; Korney Chukovsky, persecution; Sergey Mikhalkov, plagiarism; children’s literature; Soviet and Russian leaders

Among the anecdotes about Stalin published by A. Krikmann, there are several versions of the plot “The leaders of the country criticise the poem “Mukha Tsokhotukha” [“The Buzzing Fly”, or “Fly-a-Buzz-Buzz”] (Krikmann 2004: No. 136). It should be pointed out that despite their structural compliance with the conventions of the anecdote genre, these texts differ from similar forms of modern folklore in that they are longer, consist of more sections (4 to 7) and exhibit a higher degree of compositional complexity (see the table in the Annex). In all these cases, their structure is a reverse of the pattern known as “The house that Jack built” in which every new episode involves a deletion of the last section rather than an addition of a new one, as, for example, in the following nursery rhyme: “На корабле “ПОВЕДА” / после ОБЕДА / случилась БЕДА – / пропала ЕДА. / Ты украл? – ДА” [“On a ship called POBEDA [victory] / after OBEDA [dinner] / there happened a BEDA [a misfortune]: / EDA [food] was stolen. / Did you do that? DA [yes]”] (here, however, the front section rather than the tail one is cut off). I. Amroyan (2005: 139–140) terms this device “decumulation”. It is quite rare in oral tradition.

The first version recorded in 1983 should most likely be considered the starting point. Its thematic source was apparently the story of persecution of K. Chukovsky’s tales in the 1920s. The censorship crackdown began as early as 1922, soon after the creation of the Glavlit (The Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs). The following line in “Moidodyr” [“Wash ‘Em Clean”, literally “Wash till holes”] was edited out: “Oh, God, what has happened? Why is everything around us...” (Chukovsky 1991: 219, 496). Later, the Glavsotsvos (The Main Committee on Social Upbringing and Political Education of the People’s Commissariat for Education) denounced this tale as “an insult to chimney sweeps”. A group of 29 writers supported this charge and wrote an open letter to Maxim Gorky about that. The tale “Crocodile” was also criticised as an “allegorical representation of Kornilov’s mutiny”, although this work has appeared a year before the actual event. In 1925, the members of the Komsomol (The Communist Union of Youth) came up with the initiative to replace in the children’s performance of the “Moidodyr” line “And the dirty chimney sweeps...”, which was presumably hurting the feelings of chimney sweeps, with the words “And everyone who is dirty...” (Chukovsky 1991: 332). In 1927, the GUS (The State Academic Council of the People’s Commissariat for Education) – and personally N. K. Krupskaya who was the chair of the children’s literature committee – banned two poems, “Doctor Aybolit” [“Doctor Oh, it hurts”] and “The Crocodile”. Krupskaya’s

scathing article in the “Pravda” newspaper about Chukovsky’s “Crocodile” (1928) precipitated a total prohibition on the publication of all of his children’s books. The ban was followed by a full-scale campaign against Chukovsky himself and everything he represented: “We should point our rifles at Chukovsky and the likes of him because they promote the petit-bourgeois ideology [...] Chukovsky never mentions [...] the organisation of childhood by means of collectives of children...” (Sverdlova 1928: 92–93); his books breed superstition and fears (Resolution 1929: 74), etc.

The most severe ideological attacks were directed against “Mukha Tsokotukha” – a tale particularly favoured by the author. Even 20 years later, remembering his early poetic might in a later hour of depression, he placed “Mukha Tsokotukha” before his other works (Chukovsky 1994: 181). “The bloodiest battle was over “Mukha Tsokotukha”: “a bourgeois book, Philistinism with its preserves, the merchant’s way of life, a wedding, a name day, a mosquito dressed as a hussar...” According to the Gublīt (The Provincial Department of Literary and Publishing Affairs), “the fly is the princess in disguise and the mosquito is the prince in disguise”, “the illustrations are indecent: the mosquito is portrayed standing too close to the fly”, “she is smiling way too teasingly”, “they are flirting” (Chukovsky 1991: 344, 450). The tale undermines children’s faith in the triumph of the collective, expresses sympathy for the kulaks’ [affluent peasants] ideology (“The horned beetles are wealthy peasants”), praises “petit-bourgeois virtues and the accumulation of wealth”, and (together with “The Giant Roach” and “The Crocodile”) provides “false image of the animal and insect worlds” (Resolution 1929: 74). The critics adopted the following slogan: let us protect our children from alien influences! We should replace misleading fictional tales with simple and true stories about real life and real nature.

In the anecdote the accusations levelled at “Mukha Tsokotukha” conform to the letter and spirit of the above-mentioned political-ideological charges (themselves quite anecdotal): “Why go to the market and not to the cooperative? This is a political error” (spoken with the characteristic Lenin’s burr); “We do not have money lying around on the streets” (spoken with the Stalin’s characteristic Georgian accent); “If everyone walks across fields, there will be no corn in our country”; “We are counting every single gram of gold, and you have a fly flitting around with a gilded tummy”. To all intents and purposes, the anecdotal tradition views this tale castigated by high-ranking Soviet officials as “unpleasing to the ruling elite” and as “being in need of rehabilitation”.

In his diaries (1991: 344, 406, 411, 426–427), Chukovsky described his attempts to cut through the red tape. He had to turn to publishers and various censorship authorities (Gublīt, GUS, etc.), to A. V. Lunacharsky and, finally, to Krupskaya. Her scathing article appeared in the “Pradva” newspaper soon afterwards.

In fact, there is a strong probability that all these episodes could have been transformed into the plot in question after having been mapped onto the productive matrix of jokes about *Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev... (Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev...; Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev...)*, etc. (see, e.g., Krikmann 2004: No. 2) within the framework of which each leader entering the narrative fabric behaves in a way consistent with his folkloric image.

Of course, half a century separating the anecdote from the prototypical events does set certain limitations on determining the nature of the relationship between them. The record has been dated at 1983, and the appearance of the Secretary General Andropov in the final plot section supports this dating, at least as far as the latest version of the anecdote is concerned. It is not ruled out that in the 1940s the memory of these events could have been reawakened by the resumed persecutions of Chukovsky’s tales following the publication of the 14.08.1946 decree of the Central Committee regarding the magazines “Zvezda” and “Leningrad” (Pravda, 21.08.1946). This time, the criticism was targeted at the tale about Bibigon (1945): “absurd and bizarre incidents [...] naturalism, primitivism” (Krushinsky 1946).

However, the most likely source of the legend that gave rise to the anecdote was Chukovsky himself who at different times used to tell his acquaintances about the circumstances surrounding the official persecution of “Mukha Tsokotukha”, the attacks on which were particularly painful for him (“my most cheerful, most melodious, most felicitous work” (Chukovsky 1991: 344)). The anecdote could have emerged in the way indicated above in the process of further folklorisation of the initial legend.

Let us consider the next version (No. 2) recorded twenty years later – in the year of Mikhalkov’s 90th anniversary (i.e. in 2003).

This version does not mention Lenin, but the succession of Kremlin rulers is extended to include Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin. It is obvious that Mikhalkov could not go to Lenin, but the point here was hardly to try and avoid that kind of anachronisms. They are excusable in an anecdote, for example: “Chukovsky comes to Andropov” (No. 1; Chukovsky’s life and Andropov’s tenure as Secretary General did not coincide in temporal terms), or: “Stalin died, so did Chukovsky. Mik-

halkov comes to Khrushchev alone” (No. 2; in fact, Chukovsky died 16 years later than Stalin did and, thus, was a contemporary of not only Khrushchev, but Brezhnev as well).

The replacement of one character with another is a natural process in folklore: the actions of one person are attributed to another who belongs to the same “class” of historical (or mythological) figures. In the given case, this process is facilitated by the fact that the authors of children’s poems are generally perceived as being less individualised and are, consequently, less stick to one’s memory than the authors of “high” literature. This is substantiated by the existence of version No. 3 in which the poet is unnamed, but the text of “Mukha Tsokotukha” is retained (without it, the anecdote would not have been possible). “It is impossible to recognise whether it is Marshak, or Mikhalkov, or Barto, or a dozen of second-rate men of letters and a hundred of third-rate ones,” observes a critic likening such works to “authorless” poetry; Chukovsky, though, according to him, did not belong to the above-mentioned plethora of writers (Yakovlev 2001: 6).

Supposedly, the deletion of Chukovsky and the introduction of Mikhalkov instead resulted from the subsequent development of the topic of the anecdote ending with the phrase: “Chukovsky was completely forgotten.” This deletion has a much deeper semantic motivation behind it than the mere variation mechanism at work and has to do with the persona of anecdotal Mikhalkov who now becomes the main character in the plot in question. In other words, the replacement of Chukovsky with Mikhalkov and not with, say, Marshak or Barto is not accidental. It is here that the story about the rulers reading “Mukha Tsokotukha” acquires certain additional, although not immediately obvious, meanings.

First of all, it should be pointed out that anecdotes about Sergey Mikhalkov constitute a relatively rare case in which the protagonist of the anecdote sequence is not a statesman (for instance, the leader of the country like Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev) or a popular film character (Chapaev, Stirlitz), but a man of letters, albeit a very famous one. Mikhalkov is unique in this respect: apparently, he is the only Soviet writer who had the honour of becoming the subject of a whole series of anecdotes. Two reservations should be noted, however. Firstly, these texts were known almost exclusively in literary circles, outside of which they were simply incomprehensible. Secondly, in terms of both content and structure, they are very much akin to a “historical anecdote”, i.e. to a short informal account of an incident in the life of a particular character, often suffused with humorous overtones.

In this sense, they constitute a certain intermediate form between the historical anecdote and the modern folkloric joke.

Anecdotes about Mikhalkov cannot be understood outside literary circles because they are based on the long-established reputation of this writer (see, e.g.: Goryaeva 1998: 279, 281; Kaverin 1989: 416–417; Koval 1998: 256, 259) and are classifiable as inside knowledge not only in oral tradition (“hearsay”), but also in literary criticism and even in certain works devoted to the theory and history of literature. The characteristics that make up his folklorised image have not lost their relevance in the course of many decades and constitute the motivational backbone of the anecdotes.

Mikhalkov as an epigone and a plagiarist. “In the beginning, the children’s writer M[ikhalkov] was an epigone of S. Marshak and K. Chukovsky” (Kazak 1996: 265). He began his career as a playwright by dramatising “The Prince and the Pauper” by Mark Twain (Mikhalkov 1938), the first edition of which featured the following acknowledgement on the title page: *Sergey Mikhalkov. Tom Canty. A Comedy in 3 Acts and 6 Scenes (inspired by Mark Twain)*. It is fully reflective of the Soviet tradition of belittling the authors of re-written literary proto-texts (A. Tolstoy, L. Lagin and others). The issue of plagiarism is particularly relevant in respect of the USSR anthem. “A hearing of the new version of the anthem soon took place. This time, the anthem contained a direct plagiarism from the welcome address of “the Belarusian people” to the ruler at the XVIII party congress: “We procured our armour in battles...” etc.” (Antonov-Ovseenko (quoted in Shchuplov 2000); here and hereafter my expanded spacing – S. N.). In the 1950s it was rumoured that Mikhalkov exploited “literary slaves” who helped him create his dramatic works. Nowadays, this reputation is still alive. For example, Mikhail Antonov, a journalist on the Kultura radio station, starts his presentation of the DVD called “New Adventures of Puss in Boots” (27.07.2006, 20.15) with the following words: “Is it correct to call Mikhalkov a plagiarist?”.

Mikhalkov edges Chukovsky out of the list of leading children’s authors and becomes his antithesis. Chukovsky’s diary of 1947 contains the following entry: “They used to say: “Chukovsky, Marshak and others”, then: “Marshak, Chukovsky and others”, then: “Marshak, Mikhalkov, Chukovsky and others”, then: “Marshak, Mikhalkov, Barto, Kassil and others” (Chukovsky 1994: 181). The existence of such rolls was a fact of literary life at that time “Кто входил в обойму,

кто? / Лев Кассиль, Маршак, Барто. / Шел в издательствах косяк: / Лев Кассиль, Барто, Маршак...” [“Who used to be a real hit? / Lev Kassil, Marshak, Barto. / Who shoaled in the editing houses? / Lev Kassil, Barto, Marshak”]. Unfortunately, I do not remember the author of these humorous and, probably, anti-Semitic verses, so I will just recite them from memory. Another “fact” was the marginalisation of Chukovsky after the persecution campaign of 1946. The writing trade was well aware of that, sharing this knowledge by word of mouth. Mikhalkov was, of course, by far not the only one who edged Chukovsky out. However, as can be concluded from the above-mentioned diary entry (made – and this is quite important – before the crackdown on cosmopolitanism), Mikhalkov came higher on that list, and then, as the next step, Chukovsky’s surname was excluded. One can be almost certain that the entry features extracts from various critiques, speeches, etc. rather than random combinations of names. In this sense, it should be quite representative.

Mikhalkov’s play “Laughter and Tears” (1945; in later editions known as “A Funny Dream” as well as the screenplay to the 1958 film “New Adventures of Puss in Boots” based on the same plot) contains a parody of Chukovsky. In the play, Krivello/Brigella, a secret villain “of the suit of spades,” is tormenting an unhappy prince with his horrible stories: “Чудовища вида ужасного / Схватили ребенка несчастного / И стали безжалостно бить его, / И стали душить и топить его...” [“Terrible-looking monsters / caught a poor child / and started beating him up mercilessly / and started smothering and drowning him”] – cf. Chukovsky: “Принесите-ка мне, звери, ваших детушек, / Я сегодня их за ужином скушаю! / ...Да какая же мать согласится отдать / Своего дорогого ребенка... / Чтобы несытое чучело / Бедную крошку замучило!” [“Bring me, you animals, your children / I am going to eat them tonight for dinner / [...] No mother will ever agree to give / her beloved child / to a voracious monster / so that he could torment the poor baby!”] (“The Giant Roach”); “Гадкое чучело-чудище / Скалит клыкастую пасть... Чудище прыгнуло к ней / Сцапало бедную Лялечку...” [“The ugly stuffed monster / bared its teeth / [...] The monster jumped up to her / and grabbed poor Lyalechka...”] (“The Crocodile”). Let us recap the old charges leveled against Chukovsky’s tales: “breeding superstition and fear” (Resolution 1929: 74). It should be noted that Mikhalkov’s play about the secret villain Brigella and his horrible stories appears shortly before another eruption of persecution against Chukovsky, and this can hardly be viewed as pure coincidence (for more detail, see Stroganov 2003).

The text written by Mikhalkov with a co-author and sent for approval to Stalin can be nothing else but the anthem of the USSR. The history of the creation of the USSR anthem (1943) is one of the central themes in Mikhalkov's "anecdotal epos". Interestingly, Mikhalkov himself authored some of those versions (Zhovtis 1995: 18–21; Shchuplov 2000; Soboleva 2005: 13). The submission of "Mukha Tsokotukha" for consideration in turn to Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, reveals not only the motif of the hero's immortality ("akin to a character in the Russian folk-tale [...] Mikhalkov" (Poryadina 2002: 287)), but also the farcical version of the plot about repeated opportunistic alterations of the anthem ("He owes his career success to the fact that he adjusted children's poems in accordance with the shifts of the party line, be it Stalin's, Khrushchev's, Brezhnev's or Gorbachev's rule..." (Kazak 1996: 265)). This is indirectly substantiated by the ending of the anecdote (awards granted by Putin), as well as by the anecdotal Yeltsin's remark (in response to another attempt to publish "Mukha Tsokotukha"): "We are in no need of poets" (No. 2) – cf. "At the end of 1993, the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin issued a decree that M. I. Glinka's piano piece without lyrics called "The Patriotic Song" musically edited by B. Diev should be adopted as the anthem of the Russian Federation [...] As a result, the Russian anthem existed without lyrics for more than 10 years" (Soboleva 2005: 19).

The elimination of the co-author ("Mikhalkov alone [...] Chukovsky has been forgotten"). The legend has it: "In half a year they [the authors of the lyrics of the anthem] were summoned to Stalin. Then, there were six more meetings without Registan, because Stalin said that he would take care of the political aspect himself ..." (Shchuplov 2000). In reality, Mikhalkov is the sole author of only the last version of the anthem (the so-called "Putin's" version of 2000). In Brezhnev's version of 1977 the name of (the by that time late) Registan was still retained (Soboleva 2005: 19). It is possible to detect a certain correspondence between the motifs of getting rid of a co-author (Registan in the story with the anthem, Chukovsky in the anecdote about "Mukha Tsokotukha") in the apotheosis of Mikhalkov's oeuvre during Putin's rule.

To sum up, the literary anecdote about "Mukha Tsokotukha" which the author submits for consideration to the Soviet rulers (from Lenin to Putin) is apparently based on the actual literary situation of the 1920s. Its direct sources seem to be the accounts of the rejection of this

work (as well as of other Chukovsky’s tales) by the Soviet ideological authorities as well as the accounts of the attempts of the author himself and some other men of letters (Marshak in particular) to cut through the red tape in order to solve the matter. The reshaping of such accounts occurs within the framework of the productive anecdote pattern: the Kremlin rulers are successively introduced into the narration and figure there in accordance with their established anecdotal images. The cumulative plot that thus arises (version 1) does not run counter to the mechanism of creation of the modern folkloric anecdote, but is somewhat more complex and cumbersome than the usual oral forms.

The semantic motivation behind the replacement of Chukovsky with Mikhalkov in the given plot is just as strong (version 2). Again, it happens in total compliance with the folkloric variation mechanism, although cannot be accounted for exclusively by it. The replacement occurs as an action within the plot and is quite important in itself: the theme brought up in the second episode (“Mikhalkov alone...”) is resolved only in the very end (“and Chukovsky was forgotten”). Apparently, the traits invariably attributed to Mikhalkov in literary circles and making up his folklorised image are actualised here providing the motivational backbone: Mikhalkov as a plagiarist, a court poetaster re-writing his verses to suit the fickle political climate (interestingly, it was precisely due to this fact that Mikhalkov’s works underwent at least two censorship attacks: in 1947 for mentioning Tito “in a positive context” and in 1960 for mentioning him in a negative one (Blum 2003: No. 227, 326)); Mikhalkov as a cynical careerist addressing his texts to the powerful and through that pursuing his own goals. It is this reputation that makes Mikhalkov the hero of a whole anecdote series and gives Version 2 of the plot in question an entirely new resonance as compared to Version 1.

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<p>1. The 1983 Anecdote</p>	<p>2. Dedicated to Mikhailkov's 90th anniversary.</p>	<p>3.</p>
<p>Mikhailkov and Chukovsky wrote a poem together.</p>	<p>Mikhailkov and Chukovsky wrote a poem together.</p>	<p>Appendix</p>
<p>Korney Ivanovich Chukovsky comes to Lenin. "Vladimir Ilyich, I wrote a poem and would like to publish it now." – "Read it out." – "The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field / and found some money. / The Fly went to the market / and bought a samovar there..." – "Wait, wait, wait, Comrade Chukovsky. Why did she go to the market and not to the cooperative? This is political error. I want you to rewrite this poem!"</p> <p>Chukovsky comes to Stalin. "Joseph Vissarionovich, I wrote a poem and would like to publish it now." – "Well, read it out." – "The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field / and found some money..." – "Wait, wait, wait, Comrade Chukovsky. There is no money lying around along the roads in our country. I want you to rewrite this poem."</p>	<p>They come to Stalin for approval and start reading the poem out loud: "The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field / and found some money..." – "In what sense did she find some money?" – "There is no money lying around along the roads in our country. Your poem won't do!"</p>	<p>The poet comes to Stalin and brings a poem along: "The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field / and found some money..." Stalin: "Are you implying that we have bank-notes with the portrait of the leader lying around on the fields?!"</p>

The Origin of the Anecdote: “Mukha Tsokotukha” [The Buzzing Fly]

<p>Chukovsky comes to Khrushchev with the same request and starts reading: “The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field...” – “Wait, wait, wait, Comrade Chukovsky. If everyone starts walking across fields, there will be no corn there. Rewrite the poem.”</p>	<p>Stalin died. As did Chukovsky. Mikhailov comes to Khrushchev alone and says: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin was alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field...” – “In what sense was she walking across the field? One should not walk across fields. We grow corn there! No, this poem won’t do!”</p>	<p>The poet comes to Khrushchev: “The Buzzing Fly...” Khrushchev: “No, no, no. Why is your fly hanging around on kolkhoz fields? It will trample the corn down!”</p>
<p>Chukovsky comes to Brezhnev with a new version of his poem: “The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy...” – “Wait, wait, wait, Comrade Chukovsky. We are counting every single gram of gold, and you have a fly flitting around with a gilded tummy. Rewrite the poem.”</p>	<p>Khrushchev is removed from his office. Mikhailov comes to Brezhnev and says: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin and Khrushchev were alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy...” – “Who are you hinting at with this ‘gilded tummy’? No, this won’t do!”</p>	<p>The poet comes to Brezhnev. Brezhnev: “What do you mean by ‘gilded tummy’?! Why do our heroes of socialist labour remind you of flies?!”</p>
<p>Chukovsky comes to Andropov. “Yuri Vladimirovich! I cannot publish my poem. Please help me!” – “Well, read it out.” – “The Buzzing Fly...” [In Russian, Tsokotukha sounds similar to “TseKa” – abbreviation for ‘Central Committee’] – “What did you say about Tseka?!”</p>	<p>Brezhnev died. Mikhailov comes to Andropov: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev were alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly...” – “What do you mean by Tseka? Why are you writing about Tseka? No, that won’t do!”</p>	<p>The poet comes to Andropov: “The Buzzing Fly...” Andropov: “Wait, wait, wait. What did you say about Tseka?!”</p>

	<p>Andropov died. Mikhailov comes to Gorbachev and says: "I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov were alive." – "Read it out!" – "The Buzzing Fly.." [In Russian slang the expression "under the fly" refers to being drunk] – "What do you mean by being drunk! We are fighting against alcoholism here! No, that won't do!"</p>	
	<p>The Soviet Union collapses. Mikhailov comes to Yeltsin and says: "I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and Gorbachev were alive." – "We do not need poets altogether!"</p>	
	<p>Finally Putin becomes president. Mikhailov comes to him and says: "I wrote a poem but cannot publish it." – "Read it out!" – "The Buzzing Fly / with a gilded tummy / was walking across the field / and found some money. / The Fly went to the market / and bought a samovar there." – "What a wonderful poem!" Putin gave Mikhailov a medal for promoting the market economy, investors, Russian industry and mineral resources of gold, oil and gas. Chukovsky was forgotten, however."</p>	

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN JOKES: NEW CAST OF CHARACTERS

Elena Shmeleva and Alexey Shmelev

Abstract

The article describes the recent trends in Russian jokes. The focus is on the new joke targets, which include New Russians, Estonians, but also drug addicts, computer programmers and several politicians and other public figures. The latter targets are presented usually in the context of topical jokes which comment on the topical events widely discussed in the mass media, and they render meaningless without the access to the background knowledge about these events. The popularity of the contemporary jokes is often determined by the availability of certain agreed stereotypes and speech characteristics of the depicted characters.

Key words: speech genre, jokes, stereotypes

In a number of previous publications, Shmeleva & Shmelev (e.g. 2005) have noted a transformation of the joke as a speech genre. This is best seen in the fact that the retelling and citing of the old jokes is much more common than creating new ones. At the same time, this is not an evidence of the degradation or disappearance of the genre, nor does it mean that there are no new jokes. In many new / post-socialist jokes, the characters are already known from old Soviet jokes with their specific traits and linguistic masks (*речевые маски*). However, there are also changes in the choice of characters in contemporary jokelore as a whole. Some of the old targets have been forgotten – there are no contemporary jokes about Major Pronin¹, Veronika Mavrikiyevna and Avdotya Nikitichna² (though we can find some records of old jokes being cited quite often), and new Radio Yerevan jokes come about very rarely. At the same time, a number of new characters have appeared only recently, and some of them even feature in a joke cycle. In the current short overview of contemporary joke characters in Russia, we focus on these new targets.

TOPICAL JOKES (АНЕКДОТЫ-ОТКЛИКИ)

A substantial part of the new jokes are those that comment on the topical events widely discussed in the mass media (“humanitarian” bombing Serbia, war in Iraq, presidential elections in Russia, Putin’s on-line press conferences, the census, scandalous press conference held by Russian rock star Filipp Kirkorov in Rostov-upon-Don, purchasing the Chelsea football team by a Russian millionaire Abramovich, the Yukos Oil Company affair with the conviction and imprisonment of Russian billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, etc.). The characters of these jokes are real-life individuals with a more or less leading role in the event. Many of them have not yet acquired a specific comic characteristics or linguistic masks, though Russian anecdotes and jokes usually display personages with a conventional build. Instead, the information about the characters is acquired from the mass media.

The jokes of that type are short-lived as a rule. If the event that they reflect upon in a comical distorting mirror has lost its actuality, the jokes render themselves incomprehensible and people not only stop telling them, but also remembering and citing them. Some examples:

- (1) *Остап Бендер знал 400 относительно честных способа отъема денег, Владимир Путин придумал еще один, пафосно назвав его “спором хозяйствующих субъектов”.*
★ *Ostap Bender knew 400 new ways of relieving people of their worldly belongings³. Vladimir Putin has added yet another, pathetically calling it the “budget quarrel of managing subjects”.*
- (2) *Предложение генерала Трошева о выплате крупной суммы за голову Басаева нашло живой отклик у чеченского населения. На сегодняшний день ими сдано 16 голов Басаева. К сожалению, только девять из них признаны подлинными.*
★ *The proposition of General Troshev to pay a considerable bounty for the head of Bassaev stirred up lively discussions among Chechen people. They already brought in 16 Bassaev’s heads the next day. Regretfully, only 10 of them have been found to be authentic.⁴*
- (3) *Армянское радио спрашивают: “Какая идея может появиться в голове у необразованного еврея, которому на эту голову свалилось несколько миллиардов халявных баксов?” Армянское радио отвечает: “Купить “Челси”.*
★ *Radio Yerevan is asked: “Which idea can a poorly educated Jew have if he has accidentally earned a couple of fast billion bucks?” Radio Yerevan answers: “Buy “Chelsea”.*

A few topical jokes that are, as a rule, tied to a certain event and salient only during a limited time, have a chance to live longer (even if in a slightly modified form), sometimes even until the event that gave rise to the jokes has itself been forgotten. This has happened to some topical old Soviet jokes that were inspired by actual situations. For example, the following joke was told years after the Soviet invasion into Czechoslovakia in 1968:

(4) *Встречаются американец, француз и русский. Американец говорит: “У меня три автомобиля: на одном я езжу по городу, на другом – по стране, а на третьем – за границу.” Француз говорит: “Нет, я такого не могу себе позволить – у меня только два автомобиля. На одном я езжу по стране, а на другом – за границу.” А русский говорит: “А у меня нет автомобиля.” Его спрашивают: “Как же так? А на чем же ты ездил, например, за границу?” – “А на танке!”*

★ *The American, French and Russian meet. The American says: “I have three cars: with one I drive in the city, the other is for the countryside, and the third I use when I go abroad.” The French says: “Well, I cannot allow myself three, I have only two cars: one for driving in France and the other for driving abroad.” The Russian says: “But I don’t have a car at all.” The others ask: “Really? How do you travel abroad then for example?” The Russian says: “With a tank!”*

Remembering this certain text for a long period of time may be due to the fact that the invasion was still in the memory of the Russians and in this way it remained salient. It was easy to recognise the allusions of the joke. But if the joke referred to a more marginal and easily forgotten event, it could already render meaningless some months after the topic lost its actuality, for example:

(5) *Знаете, как звучало официальное объяснение грузинского правительства по поводу отмены матча Грузия – Россия: “Во всем виноват Чубайс”.*

★ *Do you know how a Georgian government official explained why they cancelled the Georgian-Russian football match? – “Chubais is always the one to blame”.*

The previous joke is probably incomprehensible for most readers. To understand its implications, one should be aware of the fact that until July 2008, Anatoly Chubais was the head of the Russian electricity monopoly UES (Unified Energy System) which was in the habit of extensively switching off electricity if payments were overdue, and that the Georgian – Russian football match in October 2002 was cancelled in Tbilisi because after futile efforts to repair it, electricity on the football field failed twice and for good. It also refers to Boris Yeltsin’s

phrase that has become proverbial: “Chubais (a minister in his government) is always to blame.”

The next joke appeared as a reaction to the bombings of Belgrade in 2000, when the USA troops accidentally bombed the Chinese embassy there. The official explanation was that the maps the pilots used were out-dated.

(6) *Разговор двух пилотов: “Джон, а ты в курсе, что твоя жена изменяет тебе с китайцем?” – “Как?!? Ах она... Кстати, мы подлетаем к Белграду.”*

★ *Two pilots: “John, do you know that your wife has a Chinese lover?” – “What? Oh, her... by the way we are approaching Belgrade.”*

After the Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg had acquired a collection of Easter eggs that cost a fortune, the following joke became very popular:

(7) *Звонит Вексельберг жене и спрашивает: “Дорогая, я еду домой. Может, нужно что-нибудь купить?” – “Да, купи, пожалуйста, яйца.”*

★ *Vekselberg calls his wife and asks: „Darling, I am on my way home. Do you need anything from the store?” – “Yes, please, buy some eggs.”*

If the topical joke is still told after a while and if the characters and targets of the joke have become or are already conventional figures in Russian jokes, the chances are high that they will also spring up in the next versions of the joke. For example, this has happened to the joke about three nations (Example 4), or the anecdote about Khrushchev visiting the exhibition of the abstractionists⁵. But if we are dealing with only an occasional character, he will probably not be mentioned in later jokes – as was the case with the story about the Russian ambassador in China. The joke was a reaction to the appointment of a former communist party secretary in Leningrad, Vassili Tolstikov, infamous for his dislike of the Jews. Later the same joke⁶ was told about an anonymous Russian delegate abroad.

NEW JOKE CYCLES

There are characters in newer joke cycles who were completely unfamiliar to the Soviet jokelore. But there are also those who appeared in the old jokes, even if their popularity was not remarkably high. The most obvious member of the first category is the character of New Russians (*новые русские*), but also Yeltsin and Putin. The second category is inhabited by Estonians, programmers and drug-addicts⁷.

New Russians is a term denoting a stereotypical caricature of the newly rich business class in post-soviet Russia, and it forms the most popular joke target in 1990s. The specific behaviour and speech has been described in greater detail in several earlier articles and a book (Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002). New Russians are a separate nation inside Russia with their own habits and language. They live among the Russians, but act in a different way. They speak Russian, but misunderstand several words as the words may have a different meaning in the “New Russian” language. These traits are also valid for their children:

- (8) *Приходит сын нового русского из школы первого сентября, говорит: “Зачем вы меня обманули? Ничего хорошего в этой школе нет, а говорили: первый класс! Первый класс!”*
 ★ *The son of a New Russian comes home after his first day in school on the 1st of September and says: “Why did you lie to me? There is nothing good about going to school, but you kept saying “First class, first class...”.”*

The wife of the New Russian has several similarities with the New Russian himself, but there are also connections to joke cycles on blondes, and in general to wives in Western European and American jokes:

- (9) *Жена нового русского принимает квартиру после евроремонта. Представитель фирмы говорит: “У нас вопрос по поводу прокладки антенны. У вас какое телевидение будет, обычное или спутниковое?” – “Не знаю, муж мне ничего не говорил о запуске спутника.”*
 ★ *The representative of a building company is handing over the fully renovated apartment to the wife of the New Russian. He says: “We have a question about the TV-antenna. Do you have satellite or cable TV?” – “I don’t know... My husband has not said anything yet about sending satellites to space.”*
- (10) *Новый русский говорит своей жене: “Дорогая, я, конечно, не имею ничего против, но, ради Бога, объясни мне, зачем ты сегодня купила точно такой же новый “Мерседес”, как и вчера?” – “Понимаешь, милый, я опаздывала к Славе Зайцеву на примерку, мне надо было срочно ему позвонить, а ближайший телефон был в салоне фирмы “Мерседес”, я позвонила, а потом, посуди сам, я же не могла уйти оттуда с пустыми руками!”*
 ★ *The New Russian is telling his wife: “Darling, I have nothing against it, but tell me, why did you have to buy the exact same new Mercedes that you did yesterday?” – “You know, my love, I was running late on the dress-fitting appointment at Slava Zaitsev’s atelier, and I needed to call him. The nearest telephone was in the agency of “Mercedes”, and after making the phone call, I could not have left the place empty-handed!”*

- (11) *В милицию вбегает заплаканная жена нового русского. “Найдите мне моего мужа, я без него жить не могу!” – “А когда он исчез?” – “Два месяца тому назад.” – “Но почему вы заявляете об этом только сейчас?” – “У меня кончились деньги!”*

★ *The crying wife of the New Russian runs into the police department.*

“My husband is missing, please find him!” – “And when did he go missing?” – “Two months ago!” – “So why did you turn to us only now?” – “I just ran out of money!”

There is also a separate type of joke targets, the “female New Russian” who has an inclination to do business:

- (12) *Деловая женщина сидит в баре, к ней подходит новый русский: “Привет, дорогуша. Разрешите предложить вам свою компанию!” – “А почему вы решили ее продать?”*

★ *The businesswoman is sitting in a pub. A New Russian comes around and says: “Hi, sweetie! Could I offer you my company?” – “But why have you decided to sell it?”*

- (13) *“Девушка можно попросить у вас телефончик?” – Протягивает мобильный телефон: “Ну, достали уже – ладно, звоните.”*

★ *“Miss, could I get your phone?”⁸ – “Yes, here it is,” answers the businesswoman, handing it over. “Well... okay, you may as well use it too.”*

During recent years the popularity of the joke cycle has faded and new jokes do not come around very often. The prominent figure of the New Russian has become blurred. We can see this in a joke that circulated soon after Mikhail Khodorkovsky was arrested:

- (14) *Поймал новый русский золотую рыбку. “Хочешь денег?” – говорит рыбка. “Да у меня много.” – “Хочешь здоровья?” – “Да я здоров.” – “Так, чего хочешь-то?” – “Хочу сидеть и ничего не делать.” – “Хорошо, Миша.”*

★ *The New Russian caught a gold fish. “You want money?” asks the fish. – “No, I’ve got plenty.” – “You want health?” – “No, I’m fine.” – “So, what do you need?” – “I just want to sit and do nothing.” – “Your wish is granted, Mikhail.”*

Joke figures of Yeltsin and Putin have certain easily recognisable speech characteristics. Yeltsin’s speech in jokes is filled with his favourite expressions like “you know” (*понимаешь*), he has a specific pronunciation of some words (“tek” vs. “tak”, meaning ‘so’; “schta” vs. “schto”, meaning ‘that’ or ‘what’). Putin’s characteristic is mixing different styles and the fondness of vulgarisms (for example, *замочить*, ‘wet oneself’).⁹ In jokes about both Putin and Yeltsin, a similar mechanism is at work – this is the way that ambiguous words get used in pun-based jokes. Consider the following joke, where the jargon word

“vegetables” (*овоци*) is used to denote vegetables in a literal sense, but also failures, persons with doubtful intellectual abilities and noticeable helplessness:

- (15) Путин с Грызловым и Фрадковым идет в ресторан. Официант его спрашивает: “Вы будете мясо или рыбу?” – “Мясо.” – “А овощи?” – “Овощи тоже будут мясо.”

★ *Putin, Gryzlov and Fradkov¹⁰ go to a restaurant. The waiter asks: “Do you eat meat or fish?” – “Meat,” answers Putin. – “What about vegetables?” – “The vegetables will also have meat.”*

Interestingly, the same mechanism is used in the case of jokes about programmers, where polysemous words are used for creating a pun. These characters live in their own worlds and tend to understand the real world through their specific lense, translating them into computer terms:

- (16) Сидит парнишка за компом, мерзнет, сквозняк... Звонит мама: “Как дела?” – “Да знобит чего-то, сквозняк сильный...” – “А ты бы окошки закрыл!” Через какое-то время звонок маме: “Мама, я все окошки закрыл, два раза перезагрузился, а все равно сквозняк!”

★ *A young man is sitting at a computer. It's cold and drafty¹¹. Mother calls: “How is it going?” – “I've got chills, it's drafty in here.” – “Close the windows, then,” the mother advises. After some time, the young man calls her back: “Mom, I closed all the windows, and even rebooted twice, but it's still so drafty!”*

Analogical misunderstandings can take place when the programmer needs to interpret some sayings or idioms, which they take too formally or algorithmically:

- (17) Программист второй час не выходит из ванной. Жена кричит ему: “Что ты так долго моешься?” – “Да тут на шампуне написано: нанести шампунь на влажные волосы, смыть, повторить...”

★ *The programmer is already locked in the bathroom for two hours. His wife asks: “What are you doing there for so long?” – “Well, you see, it's written on the shampoo bottle: rub on wet hair, rinse. Repeat the procedure.”*

The programmers cherish the opportunity to sit the whole day by the computer, and prefer it to real life:

- (18) Разговаривают два программиста. “Представляешь, прихожу я вчера домой, а у жены любовник! Я, конечно. сразу к компьютеру!” – “Ну и что?” в ужасе спрашивает второй программист. – “Да все в порядке, пароль мой они не вскрыли!”

★ *Two programmers: “Can you imagine, I came home last night, and find my wife with a lover! So, I rush to the computer...” – “And then what?” asks the other, terrified. – “Oh, nothing, everything was ok, they had not yet been able to guess my password!”*

Drug addicts are characterised in a joke by their inability to identify themselves or orientate in time and space:

(19) *Вышел наркоман на балкон. Вдруг раз – в глазах темно, потом раз – в глазах светло. Вдруг раз – и снова темно. Ну, он испугался, кричит: “Мама-мама, мне что-то нехорошо!” – “Конечно, сынок, нехорошо, ты третий день на балконе стоишь!”*

★ *The drug addict goes on the balcony. Suddenly, it gets pitch-black outside, and the next moment it's light again, and then it's bang! dark. He gets scared and shouts to his mother: “Mom, mom, I am not feeling well!” – “Sure, you are standing outside for the third day already!”*

In jokes about drug addicts, polysemous words are often used as well. They tend to understand even the most usual words as idioms connected with the use of drugs:

(20) *Правда, что ежики колются? – Да нет, только бухают иногда.*

★ *Is it true that hedgehogs spike / shoot up? – No, but they just drink hard.¹²*

(21) *Новообращенный наркоман делится своими первыми откровениями с преподавателем воскресной школы: “В Новом Завете написано, что Иисус однажды велел ученикам посадить народ на траву... В другом месте Иисус сказал Самарянке сесть уколоться... [= у колодца]”*

★ *Being a novice at a church, the drug addict shares his first illuminations with the minister at Sunday School: “The New Testament says that Jesus asked the people to sit on the grass / weed... In another place, Jesus asks the Samaritan to sit by the well / shoot up.¹³*

There are also plenty of sources of mutual misunderstanding, connected with the loss of orientation skills:

(22) *Встречаются два друга-наркомана. Первый говорит: “Вчера был в козырном баре, с такой девушкой познакомился, даже взял телефон.” Второй отвечает: “Кайф.” На следующий день опять то же самое, и так всю неделю. Наконец в очередной раз второй не выдерживает и говорит: “Ну, на что тебе столько телефонов, ты бы лучше телевизор взял, что ли?”*

★ *Two friends, both of them drug addicts, meet in a cafeteria. One of them says: “I was in the best pub yesterday, you know, I met the most gorgeous chick, she even gave me her phone [number].” The other answers: “Awesome!” The next day, the first person repeats the story, and continues*

that for the whole week. In the end, the other cannot stand it and exclaims: "Why do you need such a heap of phones, you should have asked for the TV-set!"

Specific to drug addicts is also the inability to communicate in the way it was planned and intended:

(23) *Едет чувак на мотоцикле, обкуренный, думает: сейчас менты остановят и спросят: "Че глаза красные, обкурился?" – а я отвечаю: "Нет, ветром надуло". Его останавливают: "Че глаза красные, ветром надуло?!" – "Нет, обкурился."*

★ *A guy drives a motorcycle, stoned. He thinks: Soon the cops will stop me, and ask: "Why are your eyes red, have you smoked pot?" And I'll answer: "No, it's the wind, it blew in my eyes." After a short while, he gets stopped by the police, and the officer asks: "Why are you eyes so red, wind blew in your eyes?" – "No, I smoked pot, that's why."*

The rumours about the Estonians extraordinary slowness are most probably a derivative of the long pauses usual in the communication between Estonians. The Estonian language displays many long vowels and consonants that makes the speech sound slow. This in turn is taken as evidence of the communicators' intellectual slowness.

Slow pace of speech, long pauses, long vowels and consonants and intonational monotonousness are the main features of the "Estonian-ness" of speech in jokes. The joke-teller tries to imitate the Estonian way of speaking, and even if it is often not remarkably similar to an Estonian speaking Russian, it is sufficient for the listener to recognise and understand the allusions to Estonians' specific speech. The character of this target is compliant with their manner of speech. Estonians are particularly slow in actions, introverted, calculating, and incapable of expressing strong emotions. In addition to examples from our previous accounts on jokes about Estonians (Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002; 2003), we bring here another typical joke:

(24) *Эстонец с женой приезжает в одну из арабских стран. Там они идут на местный рынок. На рынке к ним подходит один араб и обращается к эстонцу: "Европеец?" – "Та, я ис Европы." – "Это твоя жена?" – "Та, моя сена." – "Я предлагаю тебе за нее 50 верблюдов." Эстонец округляет глаза, начинает что-то думать 10 минут, 15... 20... затем говорит: "Нет, она не протается." Араб уходит, и жена говорит эстонцу недовольным голосом: "Почему ты сразу ему не скасал, что я не протаясь? Ты что, хотел меня унисить?" – "Нет, просто я думал, как ше я смоку уместить в квартире 50 верплютов."*

★ *The Estonian is in an Arabian country together with his wife. They go to a market. An Arab comes and asks the Estonian: “European?” – “Yaaah, I’m from Europe.” – “Your wife?” – “Yaaah, this is my wife.” – “50 camels for your wife!” The Estonian is surprised, he starts thinking. 10 minutes, 15 ... 20 ... and then says: “Noo, she’s not for sale.” The Arab leaves and the wife says in an angry voice: “Why didn’t you tell him before, did you have to humiliate me like that?” – “Noo, I was just trying to imagine how to house the 50 camels in our apartment.”*

Side by side with targets who have become the heroes of entire joke cycles, there are characters about whom there are certain agreed stereotypes and speech characteristics, but these jokes do not evolve in the format of independent joke cycles. Such targets are Anatoly Chubais, Vladimir Zhirinovski, Boris Moisseev¹⁴. They are all the main targets but also often the side characters in the joke setup (for example, Chubais is often the side character in jokes about Yeltsin and Putin). In addition to that, some side characters appear often, but still have not acquired a ready conventional character or portait (e.g. Gryzlov and Fradkov in Example 15).

Notes

1. Cold War years the fictional KGB Major Pronin, spying on the foreigners visiting Russia, was a popular character. The Pronin stories were written by Lev Shapovalov, using the pen name Ovalov. The first of these appeared in 1957.
2. Veronika Mavrikiyevna and Avdotya Nikitichna were the stage-names for the Russian variety show (comic *estrada*) duo, actors Vadim Tonkov and Boris Vladimirov, in 1971–1982. The intelligent but naive and giggling Veronika Mavrikiyevna is the constant laughing stock for the clever but rude Avdotya Nikitichna.
3. Contains a reference to the main character in the novel by Russian authors If and Petrov (pseudonymes for Ilya Arnoldovich Faynzilberg and Evgeniy Petrovich Kataev), titled „The Golden Calf” (1931).
4. Shamil Bassaev, the Chechen field commander and a leader of the Chechen separatist movement, was actually killed in a car explosion in 2006.
5. The joke about Khrushchev and the abstractionists is the following:

Khrushchev, surrounded by his aides and bodyguards, surveys an art exhibition. – “What the hell is this green circle with yellow spots all over?” – “This painting, comrade Khrushchev, depicts our heroic peasants fighting for the fulfillment of the plan to produce two hundred million ton of grain.” – “Ah-h... And what is this black triangle with red strips?” – “This

painting shows our heroic industrial workers in a factory.” – “*And what is this fat ass with ears?*” – “*Comrade Khrushchev, this is not a painting, this is a mirror.*”

6. The story goes that Tolstikov was appointed as the ambassador in China. He steps off the plane and says: “Hey, kikes, why do you squint?”
7. During Soviet times, the jokes about hot-blooded Estonian guys were known. At the same time, there were no other jokes about Estonians in general. The jokes about drug-addicts and programmers were told only in very small circles among people involved with these matters as a folklore of subcultures.
8. The phrase used here (lit. “Could I get your phone” or “Could you give me you telephone”) stands for a request to get a phone number of an attractive woman, a fact missed by the female New Russian.
9. By the way, these speech characteristics are not the only possible ways of referring to the targets in the jokes about Yeltsin or Putin. Unlike the jokes about Stalin and Lenin, the specific speech styles are not always used, for example, in jokes that depict the actions of state leaders in stereotypical situations (not specific to a particular leader).
10. Boris Gryzlov – the Speaker of State Duma (Russian Parliament); Mikhail Fradkov – the Russian Prime-minister in Putin’s Russia.
11. The word “draft” (*сквозняк*) has a double meaning in Russian, besides being used for a room where wind blows because windows / doors left open, it means a word used as reference to a website to raise the number of hits to the page, resulting in a higher number of visitors.
12. The pun here is in the word *колются* that means “to prick” but is also a slang word for “shoot up”, use intravenous drugs.
13. *посадить на траву* [literally: ask somebody to sit on the grass] is a slang idiom for teaching somebody to smoke marihuana; *у колодца* (‘sit by the well’) has an acoustic resemblance to the verb *уколоться*, meaning ‘to shoot up’.
14. Anatoly Chubais – see the comment to the joke example (5); Vladimir Zhirinovski – the vice speaker of the Russian State Duma (Russian Parliament), the leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party, known for his right-wing extremist opinions and scandalous behaviour; Boris Moiseev – a popular singer who demonstratively stresses his untraditional sexual orientation.

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ON THE FORMATION OF THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL ANECDOTE: FROM PETER THE GREAT TO PUTIN

Alexandra Arkhipova

Abstract

In this case study, I examine metamorphosis of Russian political humour from the 18th century literature to the present-day folklore. I analyse a joke that circulated already in the 18th century as a ‘true story’ about Russian Emperor Peter the Great. I trace its evolution into a political joke about Stalin and, later, into a joke about Leonid Brezhnev, to arrive at the most recent incarnation as a contemporary joke about Putin, Bush and Chirac. The plot of this anecdote remains intact throughout the centuries, yet the joke has been staying in circulation by continuously absorbing political and social details of each new epoch in Russian history.

Key words: jokes, anecdotes, transforming traditions

THE VARIANTS OF THE ANECDOTE FROM 18TH TO 21ST CENTURY

This plot has a long life. Its latest incarnation is the joke about Putin, Bush and Chirac, while the earliest (at least in the Russian context) dates back to the anecdotes about Peter the Great in the 18th century from Ivan Golikov’s famous collection of anecdotes about Peter the Great (Golikov 1837–1841). This text from “Deeds of Peter the Great” appeared to be a ‘true story’ for the people of that time:

Variant 1

It is known that the great ruler had numerous meetings with the kings of Poland and Denmark. One day [...], when the three were enjoying various amusements and conversations after dinner, the subject of bravery and unquestioning obedience of soldiers was incidentally brought up. The Danish king claimed that his Danish soldiers had an indisputable advantage because they were battle-seasoned and long used to discipline. The Polish king, on the contrary, believed his Saxon army to be superior and provided a number of historical examples illustrating its superb gallantry. Having listened to these assertions, Peter the Great turned to the latter ruler and said: “You’d better keep silent about your Saxons. I know them way too well: they are not far better than the craven Poles. And [addressing the Danish king] no matter how experienced your soldiers are,

they are still no match for mine.” The kings started challenging the monarch’s opinion about their troops. “Very well,” said the ruler. “Let us verify this. Summon one soldier whom you think to be the bravest and most loyal and command him to jump out of the window. We will see if your soldiers are ready to fulfil the order without demur. I have full confidence in my fellows. If, out of vanity alone, I wished to sacrifice one of them, very single one would unquestioningly obey.” At Peter’s insistence, the experiment did take place.

The Danish king was the first to summon whom he believed to be his most fearless and faithful grenadier and commanded him to cast himself out of the window (it should be pointed out that the incident was taking place on the third floor). The grenadier went down on his knees in front of the king begging for mercy. The king, however, turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and repeated his order. The grenadier started crying and asked to be at least told what his guilt was and to be allowed some time for praying. [...] Finally, the monarch summoned his own officer and ordered him to fetch a grenadier. When the latter came, the ruler cold-bloodedly commanded him to jump out of the window. The grenadier struck his hat with his hand, came to the window and, having crossed himself, raised his leg over the sill. “Stop!” cried the monarch. “I take pity on you. Go away.” The grenadier turned around, gave a salute by striking his hat with his hand and left the room. The monarch asked the surprised kings how they found his soldiers. They confessed that this fellow was truly fearless and ready to blindly fulfill the will of his ruler and asked Peter to grant him the rank of officer. The monarch replied that all his soldiers were like that and, following this logic, he would then have to promote to officers all of them.
(Nikanorova 2001: 394–395)

The collection of I. I. Golikov (1788–1789) had been reprinted an infinite number of times in the course of the 19th century and had reached the end of the century in a slightly modified (and shorter) form. The same text has the following ending in the collection of historical anecdotes of 1904:

Variant 2

“Listen, fellow,” said Peter to the soldier. “I want you to cast yourself out of the window immediately. Do you hear me?” – “Which window do you have in mind, Your Highness?” asked the soldier and not waiting for further directions headed for the window in the middle.

(Shevlyakov 1998: 61)

The same plot was unexpectedly recovered in Soviet times (with a different ending: “To hell with such a life!”), the epoch of *Velikij Perelom* (‘Great Turning Point’) by the American historian and journalist William Chamberlin, who was in Moscow at that moment:

Variant 3

Then there is the story of how Stalin and Voroshilov, during a First of May demonstration, discussed whether the workers on parade were genuinely loyal to the régime. It was decided to test out the question by taking one worker out of the procession, leading him to one of the Kremlin towers, and telling him, as a proof of loyalty, to jump off. The worker complies with unexpected alacrity, is caught in a net which has been prepared in advance, and congratulated for his daring and loyalty, whereupon he disgustedly remarks: "Oh, to the devil with such a life as we are leading!" (Chamberlin 1934: 330)

Another author remembered that he heard the same joke – with the other ending ("Better a horrible end than an endless horror!"), which by the way happened in 1927. See the text below:

Variant 4

The Politburo decided to prove Trotsky that workers and peasants were not only loyal to the Party and its Leninist Central Committee, but that every one of them was ready to die for the Party's cause. For the sake of experiment, three representatives of the working class were summoned to the CC from the regions: a worker from Donbass, a peasant from Tver and a Jewish artisan from Minsk. The summoned were taken to the last floor of the CC building and invited to the balcony where the entire Politburo was waiting for them. [...] Then Kaganovich turned to the Jewish artisan who darted to the railing before the former could finish his farewell words.

"Stop," said Stalin. "Your readiness to die for the cause of the Party is quite enough for us. There is no need to jump. But do explain to comrade Trotsky the reasons behind your heroic intention."

"Very simple," said the Jew. "Better a horrible end than an endless horror!"

(Avtorkhanov 1991: 153)

Subsequently, this plot had a prominent presence in the emigrant collections of anti-Soviet anecdotes of 1970–1980s (Dolgopolova 1983: 109–110; Ruksenas 1986: 97; Telesin 1986: No. 632; Borev 1990: 37; Viikberg 2003: 18–19, cf. the references in Krikmann 2004: No. 11). In more recent notes the plot is framed with an account of the argument between the allies:

Variant 5

Stalin and Roosevelt had an argument about whose bodyguards are more loyal and ordered them to jump out of the window on the fifteenth floor. Roosevelt's bodyguard flatly refused to jump saying "I think about the future of my family." Stalin's bodyguard, however, jumped out of the window and fell to his death. Roosevelt was taken aback and asked Joseph

Vissarionovich: "Tell me why your person has done that?" Stalin lit the pipe and replied: "He simply thought about the future of his family."

(Krikmann 2004: No. 11)

or of the argument between Brezhnev and the American president:

Variant 6

Brezhnev and Nixon were once standing near the Niagara Falls with their bodyguards and decided to test them. Each ordered his bodyguard to jump down the waterfalls. The American refused: "I have a family and children!" The Russian rushed headlong towards the precipice but was intersected in the very last moment. "Where did you get the guts to do that?" asked Nixon in astonishment. – "I have a family and children!"

(Telesin 1986: No. 632; Krikmann 2004: No. 11)

Presumably, the following anecdote is also related to this plot (from my own collection):

Lenin came up to Dzerzhinsky and said: "Felix Edmundovich, would you be able to jump out of the window for the cause of the Party?" – "I would," replied Felix Edmundovich and jumped out of the window. Lenin went down the stairs, stepped out to the pavement and said, looking at Dzerzhinsky: "Iron Felix, Iron Felix.¹ You pushover!"

And now let us turn to the anecdote about Putin – latest variant of the plot so far, dated 2001.

Variant 7

Bush, Chirac and Putin started arguing whose soldiers are hardier and decided that every party should send one soldier for a trial of strength. The following day they assembled together and came up to an American marine.

Bush turned around and punched him directly in the jaw – wham! The soldier merely winced. Bush asked: "Does that hurt?" – "Yes, Mister President." – "But you endure it." – "The American Marine Corps can endure anything!" – "Att-a-boy!"

Then Chirac took the sword from the commander of the guard of honour, came up to a French paratrooper and stuck the sword into his shoulder – zap! The soldier gritted his teeth but stood still. Chirac asked: "Does that hurt?" – "Oui, Monsieur le President." – "But you endure it." – "French paratroopers despise pain!" – "Well done, my boy!"

Then Putin took the gun from the head of security, came up to our soldier and made a shot into his foot – bang! The guy got a hole in his boot but did not even flinch. Putin asked: "Does that hurt?" – "No, sir!" Bush and Chirac exclaimed: "Holy shit!"

Putin was radiant with joy. In a while, he came up to the soldier and whispered into his ear: "Common, aren't you really hurt a bit?" – "Nope." –

“Way to go! I will issue a commendation order for you.”² – “And could I also have a normal pair of boots? I wear size 40, you see, and there has been only size 45 at the warehouse for the second year in a row.”

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PUNCH-LINE OF THE JOKE

Below is the table showing variants of the ending of the given plot.

Explication for the ‘suicide’ by the main character	Type of the character	References
Without any explication	a soldier	variant 1, 2
“Better a horrible end!”	a Jew	variant 4
“I have a family and children”	a soldier	variant 5, 6
“To hell with such a life!”	a worker	variant 3
A fortuitous trick	a soldier	variant 7

Table 1. Variants of the endings for the given story

The rationale behind the conduct of the Russian worker (“I have a family and children” – see Telesin 1986: No. 632; Krikmann 2004: No. 11), in its turn, dates back to another anecdote of the late 1920s:

The following anecdote was passed by word of mouth: “Rumor has it, Ivanov, that you are a supporter of the opposition.” – “Me? Never! For pity’s sake. I have a wife and children!”

(Serzh 2001: 296)

– containing a thinly veiled hint that the system of opposition suppression developing at that time involved pressure on the relatives.

The cliché “Better a horrible end than an endless horror” is apparently a historical quote: the words by the Prussian hussar Ferdinand von Schill who tried to raise a revolt against Napoleon in 1809. The phrase “ein Ende mit Schrecken” dates back to the German translation of the New Testament (Psalt. 72:19) – see Dushenko 2006: 262, 477.

One of the first of the numerous incarnations with regard to the realities of the Soviet era dates back to the year 1919 (a note in a diary by Zinaida Gippius):

[He] ... living in the vicinity of the Peter and Paul Fortress, hears endless shootings by night: Sometimes it seems to me that I am going crazy and I think “No, better a horrible end than an endless horror...”

(Gippius 1921: 21)

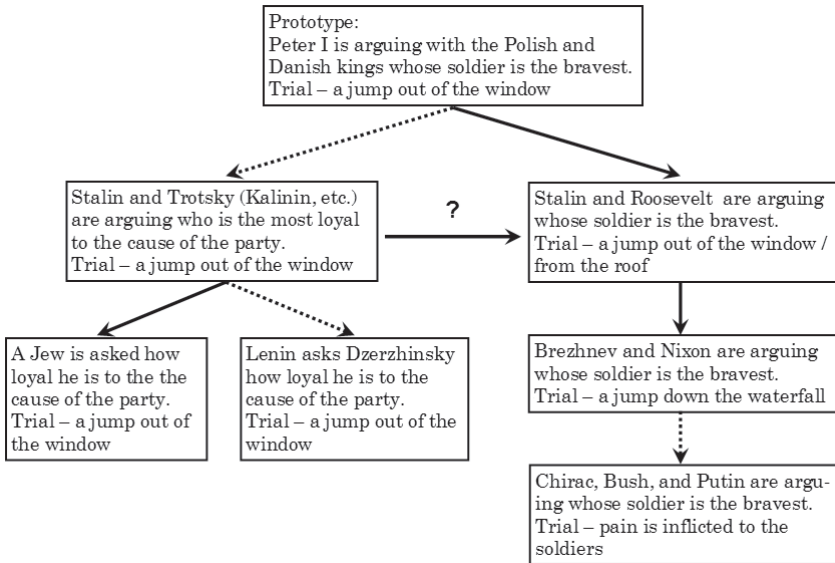
One may notice that the ending of the most recent version – about Putin – is quite different from the others: no verbal clichés are used, but a typical trickster character instead. The trick is as follows: Putin shoots his soldier in the foot, but the soldier feels no pain: his boot turns out to be empty – which is typical not of a political joke, but rather of a traditional folk narrative – for instance, of a folktale about the Tsar and his smart soldier, who usually either helps the Tsar (and then asks for a very modest reward – see e.g. Barag et al. 1979: No. 952) or cheats him (the Tsar wants the soldier to be executed, but instead rewards him – see Barag et al. 1979: No. 1736).

In this joke, Putin shoots his soldier in the foot in order to test him. One finds the same motif in the legend about Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible.³ The Tsar's political rival, Prince Kurbsky, sends his valet Vasilij Shibanov to the Tsar as a messenger. Ivan the Terrible tests Shibanov's loyalty by piercing the messenger's foot with his iron crossier (*царский жезл*), and orders him to read the message loudly. Shibanov obeys the order, and shows no sign of pain (Karamzin 1821: 59–60). Vasilij Shibanov's behavior becomes a stereotype of the 19th century 'slave loyalty'; poet Aleksey Tolstoy uses it as the plot of his poem "Vasilij Shibanov".

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXTS AND HISTORICAL METAMORPHOSIS OF THE STORY

It can be seen that from the end of the 18th century until the beginning of 21st century the plot itself has remained the same; it is the rationale behind it that has been constantly changing (see Table 1).

At first, in the "anecdote" about Peter I in Golikov's record (Variant 1), the rationale of the soldier's conduct is not clearly expressed. The entire narration of the narrator, however, implies that the worst thing the grenadier can do is to disobey the order of the emperor. The anecdote cannot exist in this form at the beginning of the 20th century. It simply ought to "draw" a witty ending which would explain the suicidal act of the character. This is how the answer of the wily Jew comes into being – "better a horrible end than an endless horror" – in which "an endless horror" refers to the Soviet reality (Variant 4).



*Figure 1. The historical development of the story
(the dotted line indicates the tentative connection)*

The same also holds true for the answer of the worker who agrees to jump from the Kremlin tower: “To hell with the life that we are living!” (Variant 3). In later post-war variants the anecdotal wit becomes even more complex (Variant 5, 6). As a rationale for the jump, these anecdotes use the text which figured as a separate anecdote in the 1920s.

How is that possible? In an everyday situation, the refusal of an interlocutor *X* to comply with *Y*'s request motivated by the phrase “I have a wife and children” means that *X* cannot fulfill the request because the fulfillment would preclude *X* from taking care of his wife and children, which the society undoubtedly expects *X* to do. Thus, it follows that such requests on the part of *Y* violate the conventional covenant between *X* and the society. These are the grounds for the American bodyguard's refusal to his superior (Dolgoplova 1983: 109–110; Telesin 1986: No. 632; Borev 1990: 37; cf. the references in Krikmann 2004: No. 11). It turns out, however, that the Soviet worldview contains a different system of values. According to this worldview, the fact that *X* has a family is regarded, first and foremost, as a potential instrument of pressure on *X*. *X*'s care about his family consists not in his ability to support it, for example, but in his potential “non-performance” of something that may provoke repressions against it.

This long string of explanations was necessary in order to demonstrate that one and the same plot may incorporate different outlooks depending on the historical era. If Golikov in his anecdote about Peter I viewed the unquestioning loyalty to the ruler as a positive quality, then at the beginning of the 20th century the things were quite different.

Given the invariance of the plot, the logic of this anecdote is considerably transformed – from the ideals of the era of enlightened absolutism to the sudden incarnation in today's time in the figures of Putin and the resourceful soldier, quite stable and popular stereotypes. The people of the Soviet mentality communicated with the power or against it using the single language, which they even had – the folklore language of traditional plots and tale types and this became the possible reason why some opposition jokes are originated from literary stories about Peter the Great.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. *Zhelezny Felix* ‘Iron Felix’ was a nickname for Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky, the first chief of VChK (‘secret police’).
2. This story is cited from the Internet: <http://anekdot-miheeff.ru/anekdoty/3200-.html>; <http://www.anekdot.ru/an/an0102/j010213.html#1> (retrieved February, 13, 2001).
3. I am grateful to Prof. Sergey Neklyudov, who drew my attention to this fact.

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TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN PUTIN JOKES¹

Alexandra Arkhipova

*In the end I asked him:
“Do you know any jokes about Putin?”
“No,” answered Eduard Moiseevich.
“Why?”– “Well, just in case ...”
(Ilin 2001)*

Abstract

In this paper, I present a collection of Putin jokes (195 jokes and 136 joke-types), gathered between 2000 and 2008 from different sources: Internet, media, and oral communications. This analysis shows to what degree contemporary folklore is truly contemporary: about 75%, as judging by the proportion of new joke-types.

Key words: Putin jokes, speech stereotypes of Putin, contemporary Russian jokelore, origin of jokes

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT COLLECTION OF PUTIN JOKES¹

The sources of Putin jokes

The present collection of Putin jokes (hereafter PJ) has been gathered between 2000 and 2008² (see the Appendix³). The total of 195 jokes were found and divided into 136 joke-types.

The jokes were obtained from three types of sources: the newspapers (both provincial and central), the Internet, and oral communications (see Table 1, p. 248). In the latter case, the jokes were gathered “passively”: no request to hear a joke was ever made.

What does the PJ corpus actually consist of? How many joke-types are “old,” i.e. emerged “before Putin” and were modified later? What do we encounter in the corpus of jokes about Putin?

The following Figure 1 (p. 248) demonstrates the distribution of the old and new PJ joke-types.

Text types	Number
In newspapers, not registered in Moscow or St.-Petersburg ⁴	47
In newspapers, registered in Moscow or St.-Petersburg	9
On Internet news sites	18
On various Internet sites	107
Oral transmission of jokes, made in the presence of the author ⁵	12
“Live Journal” blog sites	2
Sumtotal of texts	195

Table 1. Joke distribution by the source type

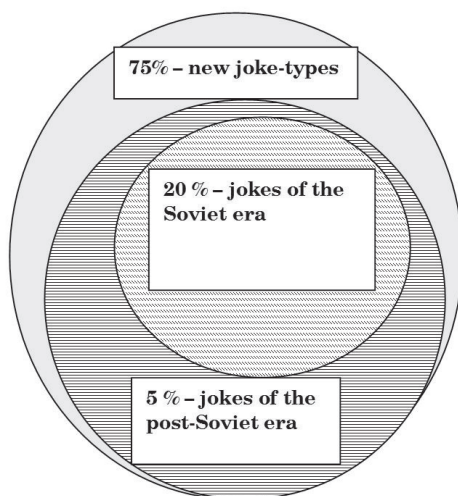


Figure 1. Distribution of the old and new PJ joke-types

Table 2 below presents the same data in terms of the amount of joke-types as opposed to its relative share as well as the data illustrating the synchronic distribution of this corpus across various communication niches.

It is important to note that I could not determine with a 100% certainty which joke-types in the corpus are “new”. The competence of a single folklorist is not enough for this. The only thing I could do, relying on written sources, was to demonstrate, which joke-types are definitely “old”.

The joke-types and versions are based on the stock listed in the Appendix.

The “core” of the corpus

The total number of PJ joke-types	136
“Old” joke-types in the PJ corpus	32
of which:	
migrating joke-types included in the ATU	1
literary joke-types of the 18 th century	2
earlier known joke-types as jokes about	
Gorbachev	2
Yeltsin	6
Andropov	2
Brezhnev	8
Khrushchev	2
Stalin	9

Table 2. The old and new joke-types of PJ

What information can be drawn from Table 2?

The core of the corpus comprises 32 “old” joke-types, of which only one joke-type can be traced back to the traditional folklore and is registered in the Catalogue of the Types of International Folktales as ATU No. 924, “Discussion in Sign Language” (joke-type No. VIII.7 in the Appendix: “Putin and Bush are using body language”, see also the detailed commentary there). Apparently, as far as the modern anecdotal folklore is concerned, this is quite expected. For example, the corpus of early (1925–1965) jokes about Stalin (236 joke-types) also contains only two joke-types included in the ATU.

Of more interest is the fact that two joke-types can be indirectly traced to the literary jokes about Peter the Great. These are the joke-types numbered VIII.20 “Bush, Chirac and Putin are arguing, whose soldier is the bravest” (see also my article “On the formation of the Russian political anecdote: From Peter the Great to Putin” in this volume) and VIII.6 “Russian and American achievements” (see comments in the Appendix). The mediating role in this case was played by the jokes about Stalin and Khrushchev.

The remaining 29 “old” joke-types date back to the jokes about Soviet and post-Soviet leaders. This is not much. Moreover, the percentage of jokes about Putin modified from old Andropov jokes (which, in view of his Chekist background, was expected to be rather high) has turned out to be quite low in actual joke tradition.

“Old” / “new” joke-types and their areas of circulation

Total number of joke-types	136
Joke-types, found on the Internet	101
Joke-types, found in newspapers	34
Of these:	
joke-types, cited in the press	4
joke-types, adapted from Yeltsin jokes	3
«new» joke-type, cited in the press	27

Table 3. Distribution of PJ types in newspapers and on the Internet

The following fact, however, is particularly interesting: as can be seen from Table 3, the distribution of the “old” and the “new” joke-types⁶ clearly correlates with their areas of circulation. “New” joke-types can be found both in the printed media and on the Internet. On the contrary, “old” joke-types almost never appear in printed media. How can this be accounted for? Apparently, this effect is directly related to the process of formation of contemporary folklore.

Folklorists, who nowadays are both observers of and participants in this process, are intuitively trying to separate “natural” and “artificial” formation mechanisms. An “artificial” mechanism is a process whereby the tradition-bearer mechanically adjusts an “old” text to the new realities of life. It is then possible to say that this is an old, modified joke. Much more seldom, the initial source is entirely forgotten and the derivative assumes the status of a new, topical text of contemporary political relevance. The following examples can serve as an illustration: certain modern jokes about American presidents derive from traditional folk stories (Ozarks stories) recorded at the end of the 19th century (Oring 2003); jokes of the classical antiquity (for instance, about Cicero) reincarnate in texts about Lincoln (Nye 1914). The famous joke about the KGB (“Well, go and try to prove that you are not a camel!”) can be traced back to an Iranian source of the 12th century (Omidshar 1987; Marzolph 1988).

Hypothetically, it can be assumed that the re-adjustment of older joke-types to reflect contemporary realities is a continual process. If a joke is a felicitous one it is easily spread by word of mouth, if not, it dies out halfway. The Internet, being a special communicative medium between the oral and written modes of communication, makes it possible to display, store and observe the uninterrupted process of joke formation, whereas in oral and written speech we can only see the

peaks of development of a joke, i.e. moments when it achieves “communicative success”.

Let us take a look at the joke-type numbered III.16: “Putin reassures a meat jelly”. This joke is based on the juxtaposition of the common knowledge that due to its consistency the meat jelly starts shaking at the slightest touch and of the political stereotype that Putin enjoys scaring everyone (terrorists, journalists, oligarchs, etc.). These stereotypes are conveniently united by the Russian idiom “to shake with fear” (*дрожать от страха*). All three printed versions mentioned herein aptly retell the joke, for example:

Putin wakes up in the middle of the night and heads for the fridge. Inside there is a plate with a meat jelly. When he opens the door, the meat jelly starts shaking. “Don’t be afraid: I’ve come to fetch some beer.”

(Berry 2006)

The Internet version – *Putin opens the fridge and sees a meat jelly shaking with fear. “Don’t worry. I just need some ketchup”* – however, is less compelling, because it foregrounds the above-mentioned idiom and thus spoils the surprise for the reader.

Topic	Joke-types in total	“New” joke-types	“Old” joke-types
I. Putin and elections	17	13	4
II. Putin as a Cheka officer / Stirlitz	4	4	0
III. Putin as a totalitarian leader	18	16	2
IV. Putin and disasters in Russia	3	3	0
V. Putin and 9/11	2	1	1
VI. Putin and his activities as president	41	33	8
VII. Putin and Khodorkovsky	3	3	0
VIII. Putin and other rulers	22	13	9
IX. Putin and Vovochka	3	3	0
X. Wordplay on Putin’s name / surname	4	4	0
XI. Putin and GDP	3	3	0
Total of joke-types in the PJ corpus	120	96	24

Table 4. The grouping of “old” and “new” joke-types into thematic categories

Also of interest is the question of whether there is a link between the topics giving rise to jokes about Putin and the degree of “oldness”/ “newness” of the joke-types (see Table 4). I did not think about that when compiling the PJ corpus and grouped the joke-types into thematic categories empirically. The highest ratio (9:13) is found in the

thematic group “Putin and other rulers” where all jokes are comparative, i.e. they compare Putin with other political leaders. This is a longstanding folkloric and literary tradition and this is why it seems to provide such fertile ground for “old” joke-types. This observation, however, raises another intriguing question: which particular “old” joke-types tend to be associated with Putin’s character more often?

Putin’s image in the press as a Cheka officer or a Neo-Stalinist and the folklore about Putin

Not surprisingly, Putin began to be associated with Stirlitz in the public mind, at least during his first term of presidency. More interestingly, Putin deliberately casts himself as a Chekist, a Stirlitz planted to work in the government: “The penetration of the criminal gang has been successful. I’m joking.”⁷

When speaking in public, Putin likes using the professional Chekist jargon: “Whose rights are you taking about? Names? Secret addresses? Surnames?”⁸

Of course, the parallel “Putin is Stirlitz today” was often used in mass media in the first two years of his rule, both in headlines and articles themselves. Here are some examples of such headlines: “Putin, Stirlitz and Intelligence Agencies”⁹; “Putin is Stirlitz Who Managed to Fulfill His Dream”¹⁰; “President Stirlitz” (Lipovetsky 2000); “Putin is a kind of Stirlitz”¹¹. Scholars have also started to talk about the mythologisation of Putin through the figure of Stirlitz (Shmeleva 2004). The names of Putin and Stirlitz are sometimes linked in a purely associative way, through a quote: “I would like you, Stirlitz, to stay: What were Putin and Primakov talking about?”¹² or: “I mean the immortal characters of Stirlitz from “Seventeen Moments of Spring” and of comrade Sukhov from “White Sun of the Desert”. A country in love with Stirlitz and Sukhov could not help developing a crush on Putin as well.”¹³

Stirlitz is often mentioned alongside Putin for no particular reason at all, simply as a matter of association. Here is a remark made by Novodvorskaya in an interview: “It’s the same trick that he has just played in Edinburg. He pretended to be a European and a holder of democratic values. In his meetings with the leaders of the civilised world, he, just as Stirlitz, was stretching the truth. And he was not even able to hide it.”¹⁴

The Putin-Stirlitz odyssey in mass media has taken another twist after the famous incident with a Saratov newspaper (Zakon 2007). On August 31st, 2007, a Saratov newspaper “Saratovsky Reporter” published an article that made fun of the idea of changing the constitution in order to allow Putin to stay in office for another term. This idea circulated in the media at the time, and the articles mocked it by alluding to an episode of the “Seventeen Moments of Spring” (“А вас, Штирлиц, я прошу остаться”).

What is this process of the anecdotal pairing of Putin and Stirlitz like? At first (in 2000) it was reflected in the following saying: “Yet another reason why Putin is our beloved president: as a person, he represents two of our favourite joke characters – Stirlitz and Vovochka.” The joke writers would actively keep developing the associative link between Putin and Stirlitz in mass media.

This did not happen though. The tradition fizzled out. Only two new joke-types were born. The first one uses a motif from the “Seventeen Moments of Spring”. The voice-over (spoken by Kopelyan) describes the situation in which Stirlitz wearing a disguise and heading for a meeting with Borman and says: “Stirlitz was circling around the city for a long time trying to lose a possible tail.” Cf. with the following joke:

One day Putin comes to Germany to meet his former colleagues, so to say. They invite him for an informal dinner, of course. 19.00 – Putin has not showed up. 20.00 – he is still not there. The punctual Germans are worried: at 21.00 they call Voloshin. He answers that everything is ok and that they will arrive shortly. V. V. P. was simply circling around the city trying to lose the tail...

A completely unique joke is based on the device called de-metaphorisation of the paroemia. If one does not know the Chekist motto (*A Cheka officer should have a cool head, a hot heart and clean hands*), one would not be able to make sense of the following text:

Putin is paying a visit to Germany. In the morning, Schroeder comes to his residence to pick him up and sees a strange picture: VVP [Putin] is standing with his head stuck into the fridge and a hot iron pressed against his chest. Putin then comes to the washstand and carefully washes his hands.

Schröder: “??????” Putin: “Please don’t mind my behavior, Herr Kanzler. It’s just an old habit of mine that I’ve had since my days at a previous job.”

Somewhat livelier has been the folkloric tradition about Putin as a totalitarian leader in the vein of jokes about Stalin and Andropov.

It should be pointed out beforehand that, in his speeches, Putin himself likes using rather intimidating phrases suggestive of Stalin's addresses:

*I know way too well that it is all my fault, even if it is not. This is fully applicable to all those who are present in this hall today. It is your fault as well, even if you have no idea of what I am talking about.*¹⁵

Wordplay and hints at Putin's repressive grip can be seen in jokes where the Russian verb "sit" is used in its other sense – 'to be incarcerated'. There have been plenty of such jokes in the last two years. The anecdotal tradition seems to have actualised all possible figurative contexts of the verb "sit". In Russian, the word *сажать* may mean either 'to imprison' or 'to plant', see also comments on it in III.4, "Putin at the subbotnik":

Putin gave Abramovich a certain computer accessory as a present and through that expressed his opinion of him. Question: What did Putin give Abramovich as a present? Answer: CD-ROM / sit, Rom. [In Russian, they both sound as "si-di-rom", and Rom is short for Roman, Abramovich's given name]

*An extract from an interview with V. V. Putin about the anthem:
"Will it be obligatory to stand during the playing of the anthem?"
"Everyone will have freedom of choice. Those who do not want to stand up will sit [in prison]."*

*"Have you heard that Putin ordered the government to stop the inflation!"
"Not quite so. He gave orders to decelerate / arrest [задержать] it. And put it into prison."*

*Khodorkovsky comes to Putin and says:
"I have paid all the taxes, returned the stolen money and left opposition. Can I finally go abroad now?"
"Of course! But please take a seat [посидим] before a long journey as is the custom in Russia." [A reference to sitting in prison]*

The following two jokes are interesting because the latter makes a reference to the YUKOS case while the former appeared soon after Putin had been appointed acting president but long before he began his real crackdown on the independent mass-media, for instance, NTV:

The traditional spring subbotnik¹⁶ has taken place in Moscow today. V. V. Putin has personally planted / incarcerated [посадил] several independent publishers of newspapers and magazines.

“A subbotnik took place in Russia today. Putin planted a pine-tree / incarcerated a person called Sosna [‘pinetree’, but also a common family name].”

“Did this Sosna also work in the Yukos oil company?”

These examples are heirs of the old Soviet jokes, for instance about Khrushchev and Stalin:

Khrushchev meets with Little Octoberists. A boy asks him:

“My dad says that you have launched / neglected¹⁷ [запустили] not only sputnik, but corn as well.

“You can tell your dad that it’s not only corn that I can plant / incarcerate [сажать].”

Stalin has demonstrated that the most important skills in governance are the agricultural ones: to plant, to plant, to plant / to incarcerate, incarcerate, incarcerate [сажать].

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PUTIN JOKES

Interplay of the formal and colloquial speech registers in Putin’s idiolect

Russian culture abounds in jokes, and Russian language easily lends itself to playful use. However, each group of jokes tends to utilise only certain specific devices that may be taken used to characterise it. Thus, the syntagmatic decomposition, for example, is typical for Russian jokes about Brezhnev and is quite rare in other groups (Arkhipova & Krotov 2006).¹⁸

One of the main propositions of this research is that some jokes about Putin are based on linguistic devices that are not remarkably productive outside this particular joke group. The peculiarities of Putin’s idiolect might have played an important role in this.

I have chosen only those remarks and responses by Putin that he made in actual conversations (in interviews and answers to the questions) because the texts of his official speeches are prepared beforehand and cannot be viewed as authored by him in full measure.

Let us take a look at two peculiarities of Putin’s “linguistic strategy”:¹⁹

- 1) interplay of the formal and colloquial speech registers;
- 2) decomposition (*переразложение*) of clichés and paroemias.

The characteristic of Putin's spontaneous speech mentioned in the title would be absolutely normal for a Soviet or Russian politician (none of whom could speak the correct and proper language), were it not for one thing. Putin is idiosyncratic not merely in that he combines different language registers, as in the following example:

У нас в руках скорее большая дубина, которая называется палицей, одним ударом которой можно все решить. Но мы ее еще ни разу не использовали, мы просто взяли ее в руки, и это уже вызвало определенный резонанс. Но если будут злить, то придется использовать

★ *We are holding a large club called a cudgel,²⁰ one strike with which can decide everything. We haven't used it yet, we simply took it in our hand, and that already had a certain effect. If they make us angry, though, we will have to use it.²¹*

He also renders one and the same meaning first formally and then colloquially, or vice versa, i.e. engages in self-translation:

И, больше того, у меня родители в свое время активно работали на одном из подобных участков, сами там “горбатились” с утра до ночи и меня заставляли.

★ *Moreover, my parents used to work actively [активно] on one such plot; they slaved [горбатились] there themselves and forced me to, too.²²*

At first, Putin uses the phrase “to work actively” (formal register) and then immediately switches to the conversational style deliberately choosing the colloquial verb “to slave”. The occurrence of this self-translation in spontaneous speech might be linked to the various types of listeners to whom Putin's remarks are addressed. He emphasises that by using the parenthetical phrase “as people often say”:

И тогда он будет стремиться к их реализации и “слезет”, как в народе говорят, со стакана.

★ *He will then aspire to turn them into reality and “get off the glass” [слезть со стакана, go on the wagon], as people often say.²³*

Тем не менее наверняка есть какие-то вопросы. Чтобы ляжку не тянуть, как у нас в народе говорят, и времени не тратить зря, давайте перейдем прямо к этим вопросам.

★ *There are bound to be some questions. So, not to drudge with a strap [ляжку не тянуть], as people often say, and not to lose time, lets get down to those questions.²⁴*

Evgeny Bunimovich (2004) said the following on that score: “In the era of postmodernism and multiplicity of choice, the plurality of languages is a perfect tool for politicians, officials and artists... Putin is peculiar in that he can freely speak all kinds of languages. He is a typical post-modernist.” Here is another notorious example (see also comments in the Appendix, X.4., “The marshalling yard”):

Российские самолёты наносят и будут наносить удары в Чечне исключительно по базам террористов, и это будет продолжаться, где бы террористы ни находились... Мы будем преследовать террористов везде. В аэропорту – в аэропорту. Значит, Вы уж меня извините, в туалете поймаем, мы и в сортире их замочим, в конце концов. Всё, вопрос закрыт окончательно.

★ Aviation attacks in Chechnya are directed solely against militants' bases and will take place wherever the terrorists are... We'll chase the terrorists everywhere. If that's an airport – it'll be at an airport. Yes, and if we should catch them – if you'll pardon the expression – in a toilet, we'll waste them on the bog! That's it, end of story.

Мочить (‘to urinate’), in Russian slang can mean also: ‘to kill’ or ‘to eliminate of somebody’ (cf. Baldaev et al. 1992: 144). The first part of Putin’s utterance contains the promise to hunt terrorists down wherever they are, the second part expresses the same idea but with additional emphasis: not merely to hunt them down, but to kill them as well. Over the past years, this verb has become quite popular in political speech:

L. Gushchin [former editor in chief of the *Ogonek* magazine]: “*He* [V. S. Chernomyrdin] *gave a mouthful to Berezovsky. Berezovsky tells me: “Lev, let’s not whack [мочить] Chernomyrdin.” In his own language I reply: “All right”.*²⁵

This propensity for self-translation also manifests itself in those cases when Putin deliberately demonstrates that he could resort to strong language but, as a moral and educated person, he is not going to do so – a kind of self-imposed ban on profanity:

*I think he expresses himself way too intelligently. I have other wordings for it, but I am not to use them in the mass media.*²⁶

*You know, it’s a very unexpected posing of the question. I am really tempted to thrust my thumb between the curled fingers of my hand and to show this fig gesture into the camera to all those who are looking forward to such developments. My upbringing, however, would never allow me to do that.*²⁷

*If you want to become a proper Islamic radical and decide to undergo circumcision, then I invite you to come to Moscow. Ours is a multi-confessional country and we have specialists in this 'field' as well. I highly recommend you to have this operation done in such a way that nothing could ever grow there afterwards.*²⁸

We observe a similar situation in the well-known quote *we'll waste them on the bog* (*мочить в болоте*), cited on the previous page. Putin proceeds with an excuse: *We should catch them – if you'll pardon the expression – in a toilet*, and then says something much more rude: *We'll waste them on the bog!*²⁹ So, his previous excuses only mark his knowledge about the impossibility of any public speech in such rude way.

The usage and decomposition of idioms in Putin's spontaneous speech

The second peculiarity of Putin's idiolect is less obvious. His spontaneous speech is distinguished by the use of a large number of paroemias, both neutral ones:

This doesn't mean that I am against liberal economy. This means that many other countries often act according to the Russian proverb: "Your own shirt is closer to your body" [Своя рубашка ближе к телу, with the sense 'take care of yourself first'].
(Verkhovsky et al. 2003: 47)

A huge danger to a country such as ours is the incitement of ethnic and religious hatred. This is absolutely unacceptable. What we get is the road to hell paved with good intentions [самыми лучшими благими пожеланиями выложена дорога в ад].
(Verkhovsky et. al. 2003: 55)

and ostentatiously colloquial, informal ones:

Если будем сопли жевать годами, тогда ничего не изменим. Надо принять все меры для стимулирования переработки леса на территории России, а не гнать кругляк за границу.

★ *If we keep chewing the snot* [жевать сопля, i.e. to dawdle, to dilly-dally; here: procrastinating] *for years on end, we will never change anything. We should take all the necessary measures to stimulate wood-working on Russian territory, and not to export round timber abroad.*³⁰

Putin often tries to retell an idiom:

Вы знаете, у нас есть такая поговорка, может быть, она не очень хорошо звучит, но, наверное, будет к месту: мы считаем, что котлеты и мухи должны находиться друг от друга в разных местах.

★ *You know, we have one saying which may not sound very well but which would be quite appropriate here: we believe that patties and flies should be located separately from one another.*³¹

But Putin's spontaneous speech is characterised by the decomposition of paroemias. For example, the idiom *to sit on a needle* (*сесть на иглу*, i.e. to become a drug addict) gave rise to the neologism *to get off the needle* (*соскочить с иглы*, i.e. to stop doing drugs): *He used to do drugs for about half a year and now he seems to have got off the needle* (Guseinov 2003: 326). Using this pattern, Putin coins the phrase *to get off the glass* (*слезть со стакана*, i.e. to get on the wagon, to stop drinking alcohol):

*He will then aspire to turn them into reality and “get off the glass”, as people often say.*³²

Such artificial constructions coined on the basis of colloquial idioms can be found side by side with elements of formal vocabulary (*aspire to turn something into reality*).

In another case, Putin invents the construction *not to haul with a strap* (*лямку не тянуть*) as a synonym for *not to lose time* – a derivative from two paroemias *to haul with a strap* (*тянуть лямку*, i.e. to work hard)³³ and *don't stretch rubber* (*не тяни резину*, i.e. don't procrastinate). The former idiom supplies the form, the latter the semantics:

*There are bound to be some questions. So, not to haul with a strap [лямку не тянуть], as people often say, and not to lose time, lets get down to those questions.*³⁴

The next example features Putin's coinage *to puff up your gills* (*раздувать жабры*, i.e. to put on airs), which is apparently based on the paroemia *to puff up your cheeks* (*надувать щеки*, meaning the same as the previous idiom) or is analogous to the idiom *to spread your tail* (*распускать хвост*, i.e. to put on airs, to try to impress):³⁵

*I would even say that they are trying to puff up their political gills [раздувать какие-то политические жабры] in order to make some kind of capital out of it.*³⁶

Demetaphorisation in Putin jokes

What about jokes? Does the folklore parody Putin's speaking style?

Sometimes the joke directly expresses the negative perception of the style and content of Putin's speeches (see also comments on X.4, "The marshalling yard"):

Here's the new Stimorol commercial:

Putin is shown on the screen: "If we find terrorists in the toilet, we'll whack them in the toilet."

Slogan: "SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO CHEW RATHER THAN TALK"

In another example, we can see the demetaphorisation of the formal vocabulary. For instance, Putin and his associates often use the phrase *vertical of power* (*вертикаль власти*) meaning 'the hierarchy of power'. Moreover, it is now used not in the standard phrase *the vertical of power* (*вертикаль власти*), but alone (*вертикаль*). For example, in the New Year address of the president in 2002, Putin promised "to consolidate the executive vertical" (*выстроить исполнительную вертикаль*). Due to the popularity of this phrase (the concrete meaning of which is not always clear to the addressee) jokes appear in which "the vertical line [of power]" is understood as an object having physical properties:

Bush summons the CIA analysts and asks them:

"Russia's behaviour has changed dramatically. How would you explain that?" The analysts answered: "Putin has been consolidating the horizontal line of power."

Bush: "Where does this horizontal line come from?" – "Well, the vertical line has fallen..."

Having created the horizontal lines of power, V. V. Putin has set out to consolidate the vertical ones. Thus, the entire cage of power [клетка власти] will have been completed by 2002...

The following joke, which is also about the "vertical line," has additional nuances. The Vladimir Central Prison (*Владимирский централ*, 'Vladimir's central') is a famous penal institution, and Vladimir Putin's regime is often referred to as being totalitarian. The ending of the word *централ* (the short version for the 'central prison') is similar to the words 'vertical and horizontal lines' *вертикаль и горизонталь*, that is the reason why the word *централ* received the new meaning: something placed in the centre (see also VI.11, VI.12 and VI.13 in the Appendix).

The Vladimir Central Prison is the vertical line of power created by Vladimir Putin.

The next example is a joke in which the question phrased in the formal register is understood as a question in the colloquial style. *Следить* means ‘to follow’, ‘to observe’. However, one can *follow a process* (*наблюдать за процессам* – formal register in Russian) and *follow an object* (*наблюдать за объектом* – professional Chekist jargon). A former Chekist, Putin interprets the journalist’s question in the latter sense:

A Western journalist asks Putin: “Are you following the development of the civil society?”

Putin: “I haven’t followed anyone for more than ten years!!!”

The following joke relies on the similar wordplay with the verb *задержать* which can mean either ‘to stop ~ retard ~ decelerate a process’ or ‘to take into police custody’:

“Have you heard that Putin ordered the government to stop [остановить] the inflation!”

“Not quite so. He gave orders to decelerate / arrest [задержать] it. And put it into prison.”

Clichés and idioms in jokes about Putin

In certain folkloric texts, the anecdotal Putin, just as his real-life prototype, actively uses paroemias. And it is by virtue of paroemias that Putin gets a communicative advantage in these exchanges:

Khodorkovsky comes to Putin and says:

“I have paid all the taxes, returned the stolen money and left opposition. Can I finally go abroad now?”

“Of course! But please take a seat before a long journey as is the custom in Russia.” [A reference to sitting in prison]

The next joke ascribes Putin the same propensity for paremiological innovation: the idiom *a cut-off slice* (usually, of bread) (*отрезанный ломоть*, i.e. a self-supporting person) + [*a chunk of*] *saló* ([*кусок*] *сала*, i.e. pig fat, traditional Ukrainian dish) = *a cut-off chunk of saló* (*отрезанный ломоть сала*) as in his real-life speech. Cf. the example analysed above in which *not to haul with a strap* (*лямку не тянуть*) as a synonym for *not to waste time* was a derivative of two paroemias: *to haul with a strap* (*тянуть лямку*, i.e. ‘to work hard’) and *don’t stretch rubber* (*не тяни резину*, i.e. don’t procrastinate):

Putin: "Say what you will, but Ukraine is lost for us: it's a cut-off chunk of salo."

Kuchma: "If that case.... For us, you are a cut-off... a cut-off..."

Putin: "A cut-off gas pipeline, for instance. This could be easily arranged if you like."

Not only Putin's but also his associates' predilection for switching from the formal register ("press release") to ordinary people's language is vividly demonstrated in the following joke:

"Vladimir Vladimirovich, what would be the Chinese equivalent for "scaring the hedgehog with one's bare ass"?"³⁷

"No idea... What on earth do you need this phrase for?"

"Well, I am writing a press release about the joint Chinese-Russian military exercise..."

In the following set of jokes, the wordplay is based on the fact that a fixed expression or metaphor is literalised, demetaphorised, i.e. we are observing the same semantic process which characterises Putin's spontaneous speech:

A news bulletin on TV: "And now briefly about the principal [events].
Putin is still the principal."³⁸

This joke, just as the ones that follow, is based on the syntactic and semantic wordplay: the ellipsis is split, and the object becomes the subject in the next phrase. Thus, the cliché "briefly about the principal [events]" with which news bulletins usually start in Russia can be understood as "briefly about the principal [person in the country]". *Principal* (Главный), a colloquial abbreviation for "the chief person in charge," is a classic example of substantivisation.

The following joke is based on the same model as the example cited above ("Briefly about the principal [events]"), where the ellipsis ("And vegetables?") can be reconstructed into the sentence "Would you like to order vegetables as well?", Putin understands the phrase "And vegetables?" as containing the subject, not the object. The next phrase (*And the vegetables will also go for the meat*) is a clear indication that, in addition to have misunderstood the syntactic role of the word *vegetables*, Putin also gets its semantics wrong: as a slang reference to passive people [*a vegetable* (овощ (vulg.)) is used to denote a person in a helpless condition, for example, in a coma]:

Putin comes to a restaurant together with the ministers and the speaker of the Duma. A waiter asks him:

"What would you prefer: meat of fish?"

"I think I'll go for the meat."

“And vegetables?”

“The vegetables will go for the meat as well.”

In the following example, the cliché *to burn your bridges* (*сжигать за собой мосты*, i.e. to do something that makes it impossible to come back to the previous situation later) is understood literally as *to burn the Bridge* (“Мост”), i.e. to destroy V. Gusinsky’s Media-Most holding company:

The newly elected president Putin has resolutely set out to rebuild Russia. He is breaking with the legacy of the past and burning the bridges behind him. The first bridge to have been burnt was the Media-Most holding company.

The following joke exploits the same topic but incorporates even more paroemias:

“Why has Putin run over [наехал на] Media-Most [literally: Media-Bridge] holding company?”

“Because he comes from Saint-Petersburg and it is customary to raise bridges there.”

In addition to the idiom *наехать на кого-то* (literally: ‘to run over someone’ / *to take a swipe at somebody*, i.e. to criticise somebody, to crack down on somebody), we are also confronted with the following interesting case: the phrase *to raise bridges* (*разводить мосты*) which is usually used in its direct non-figurative meaning (cf. *the Palace Bridge has already been raised*) is perceived here as a derivative of the slang cliché using the same verb, *разводить кого-то* (‘to swindle somebody out of something’, i.e. to deceive somebody by persuading them to give you something, or to let you do something by crooked means).

Putin’s speech in jokes and his violation of the Grice’s Maxim of Quantity

On August 12, 2000, the Kursk submarine sank in the Barents Sea. On September 7, 2000, while answering the question asked by the famous American journalist Larry King “What happened to your submarine?”, Putin said with a smile: “It sank.”

In terms of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, Putin’s answer, although being formally correct, lacks meaning, because the journalist’s question sought not to check the president’s awareness about the Kursk tragedy in general, but to elicit his personal commentary on it. Putin, thus, violated one of the Grice’s maxims (Grice 1991 [1989]: 22–

40), according to which the speaker should supply all information necessary to understand what he means: “The category of quantity relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims: 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.” (Grice 1991 [1989]: 26)

Putin’s deliberate mistake here is of exactly the same kind as in the answer “Yes, I could” given to the question “Could you pass me the salt?” The genre of interviewing a political leader, as is well known to Putin, often involves not the announcement of new information, but a commentary on it. For reasons the explanation of which falls outside the scope of this paper Putin chose to violate the conventions of the genre. As a result, already on September 12, 2000, www.anekdot.ru, one of the main joke websites which is known for its quick reaction to social events and for not letting its materials be censored, put out a quote from the interview as if it were a joke in itself:

We publish a translation of Larry King’s interview with Vladimir Putin in the form it appeared on the CNN website.

King: “Tell us what happened to your submarine.”

Putin: “It sank.”

This model spawned a string of jokes in which the comic effect relies on the accumulation of pragmatically meaningless, but formally correct information:

“What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.”

“And to your TV tower?” – “It burnt.”

“And to your Mir space station?” – “It burnt and sank.”

Putin is being interviewed by a foreign journalist. The latter asks:

“What happened to your TV tower?” – “It burnt down.”

“What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.”

“What happened to your space station?” – “It burnt and sank.”

“Well, do you have anything that did not burn and sink?” – “My car. It turned over.”

A year has passed. Putin is giving an interview to Larry King.

L. K.: “Mr. Putin, please tell us what actually happened to the NTV channel?” – Putin (with a wide grin): “It was closed.”³⁹

“What happened to the submarine, Mr. Putin?” – “It sank.”

“And to the TV tower?” – “It burnt.”

“And to the NTV channel?” – “Done over by Gazprom.”

“And to the TV-6 channel?” – “Done over by NTV.”⁴⁰

The expression *накрылось Газпромом* (i.e. kiboshed by Gazprom) relates to the fixed expression *X накрылся медным тазом* (literally: *X was covered with a copper basin*)⁴¹ or *X накрылся п...* (literally: *X was covered with p...*, the kibosh was put on X, i.e. X went belly up, X flopped).

The pattern in question may become more complex, as in the example below:

“What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.”

“What happened to your aircraft?” – “They fell down.”

“What happened to your underground?” – “It was blown up.”

“What happened to your school?” – “The process of normalisation is under way.”

Finally, there appeared a joke which became a kind of metatext in relation to all other jokes of this type:

“What happened with the jokes about Putin’s brevity?”

“They began to pall [достали].”

In my view, the conclusion that the contemporary political joke is formed under the partial influence of the language of those against whom this joke is directed may seem unacceptable only at first sight. The language of the powers that be is remembered not only by virtue of some vivid expressions: we borrow, often without being fully aware of it, not only words, but syntax as well.⁴² Putin’s habit to talk using two or more registers at the same time naturally provides new rich opportunities for linguistic parody.

One shall keep in mind, that the joke-type links the jokes to the folklore tradition, while the language of the jokes connects it to the life around it.

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Notes

1. The Russian word *анекдот* is more or less equivalent to the English *joke*. The term *joke-type* corresponds to the Russian/French *sujet* and is loosely equivalent to the term *tale type* used in traditional folklore studies.
2. The present collection is not meant to be definitive; it is only an attempt to represent the current stock of Putin jokes.
3. For more Putin jokes, see the full Russian version of this article in the *Антропологический Форум* No. 10, 2009. The statistical data presented here (excl. Table 4) was obtained using the cited version.
4. Such a large number of jokes, published in provincial versus the central press, merits special attention.
5. As already noted, none of the jokes in this collection was heard in response to any kind of a prompt on the researcher's part.
6. Here, we use the term *joke-type* in the same sense as *tale type* is used with regards to folk tales.
7. Putin about his appointment as Premier at the banquet dedicated to the Chekist Day. *Московский комсомолец* [newspaper]. 01.02.2000.
8. The answer to the question about human rights in Chechnya at the press conference following the Russia – EU summit. 3.10.2001.
9. <http://www.inosmi.ru/stories/01/05/29/2996/140495.html>
10. *Новости Владивостока* [newspaper]. 07.12.2005.
11. www.open-forum.ru/meeting/251.html
12. *Сегодня* [newspaper], No. 44. 28.02.2000.
13. <http://www.specnaz.ru/archive/01.2000/8.htm>
14. <http://expressnews.by/modules.php?name=news&file=article&sid=1122>
15. An address to the governors at the session of the State Council on 29.05.2001.
16. See a comment on the word *субботник* in the joke-type III.4. “Putin at the subbotnik”.
17. Russian word *запустить* has two different meanings: ‘to launch (e.g. a rocket)’ and ‘to neglect, let fall behind’.
18. Many readers are familiar with the similar syntagmatic decomposition from the knock-knock jokes such as this one: [*Кnock Knock!*]. *Who is there? – Doris. – Doris, who? – Doris [Door is] locked, that's why I had to knock!* See also on such type of jokes in Ritchie 2004: 126.
19. Similar to “linguistic masks“ described by Shmeleva & Shmelev, this volume (editor's comment).
20. Here we also have the case of deliberate archaism: the word *налица* ‘cudgel’ in Russian is more archaic than the word *дубина* ‘club’.
21. The interview given by V. V. P. to the French newspaper “Le Figaro” on October 26, 2000. See <http://www.gazeta.ru/2001/02/27/unasvrukahbo.shtml>

22. Moscow, the Kremlin. The press conference of the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin. See <http://www.vesti.ru/files.html?id=4105>
23. The answer to the question during a live broadcast on the ORT and RTR channels on December 24, 2001, quoted in <http://www.ortrtr.ru/answers.htm>
24. The press conference in the Kremlin on June 24, 2002 See <http://www.strana.ru/stories/02/06/21/3083/150468.html>
25. This example is quoted from Guseinov 2003: 306–307.
26. The interview to the National Public Radio in the US ON November 15, 2001. Quoted in <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2001/11/28703.shtml>
27. The answer to the question during a live broadcast on the ORT and RTR channels on December 24, 2001. Quoted in <http://www.ortrtr.ru/answers.htm>
28. The announcement for the press and answers to journalists' questions after the Russia – EU summit made in Brussels on November 11, 2002; quoted on the official Kremlin website
http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2002/11/11/0856_type63380_29553.shtml
29. I am grateful to Dr. Jacob Fruchtmann for drawing my attention to this point.
30. President's speech delivered to the Government on 27.03.2006. See <http://vokruginfo.ru/news/news18034.html>
31. An interview of the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin to the ARD (German TV company). See <http://2002.kremlin.ru/events/308.html>
32. <http://www.ortrtr.ru/answers.htm>
33. *To put a strap / harness on somebody* (*Запрячь кого в лямку. Надеть на кого хомут* – see Dal 2000); *Haul with a strap until they dig a hole for you* (*Тяни лямку, пока не выкопают лямку!* – see Dal 2000: 182); *If you have put a strap on, do haul!* (*Надел лямку, так тяни!* – see Dal 2000: 407). Paremiological comments in this research have been prepared in cooperation with Elena Zhigarina.
34. The press conference in the Kremlin on June 24, 2002.
35. I would like to thank Artem Kozmin for this observation.
36. In an interview to the RTR on 23.08.2000. See
<http://www.gazeta.ru/2001/02/27/zdesjnikakih.shtml>
37. This paroemia is based on the same principle (there is no sense to scare X with Y, if Y poses no threat to X or X is quite used to Y) as the following examples: *Do not scare the country woman with a dick, she has seen worse things* (Moshkin 2005: 1322); *Do not scare the pike with the sea* (Moshkin 2005: 1323); *Do not scare the falcon with the crow* (Dal 2000: 139).
38. In addition to wordplay, this joke also relies on the fact Putin is irremovable from his post.
39. The closure of the NTV channel refers to the forced replacement of the management which prompted the backbone of the staff to leave the channel.

40. Boris Berezovsky, who owned 75% of the shares of the Moscow Independent Broadcasting Corporation which transmitted its programmes on the TV6 channel, invited the staff that had left the NTV due to conflicts with the new management to work for TV6. However, another interpretation is also possible: in January 2002, TV6 enlivened by the NTV team “flopped”, i.e. was forbidden to broadcast.
41. I am thankful to G.A. Levinton for this observation.
42. In his article “On the Kremlin Ellipsis...” (2002), E. V. Rabinovich shows how the borrowing of Yeltsin’s syntactic constructions occurs.

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Appendix

PUTIN JOKES 2000–2007

This collection of jokes about Putin (henceforth – PJ) is not final: it is merely an attempt to present a cross-section of the existing corpus. The division of the stock into thematic groups on the basis of content is very tentative, of course, but it does reflect the main range of topics encountered in the anecdotal folklore about Putin. These provisional thematic categories (designated by Roman numerals) are comprised of joke-types (denoted by Arabic numerals) that, in their turn, contain different textual versions (denoted by Latin letters). The author has corrected the egregious spelling errors in the sources but left the spelling principles (e.g. the marking of part of a name with capitals) unchanged.

The main emphasis of collecting the jokes was on ensuring the presence of the text in sources with diverse communicational orientation: first and foremost in the printed media, but also Internet publications and oral communications.

Abbreviations

CJ – a collection of jokes

IP – an Internet publication

MM – memoirs

OC – an oral communication

PP – a publication in the press (online publications are not included)

LJ – a blog from www.livejournal.ru

I. PUTIN AND ELECTIONS

I.1. A crow is voting for Putin

I.1.A. Сидит на дереве ворона – во рту кусок сыра. Мимо бежит лиса: «Ворона, ворона, ты политически грамотная?» Ворона молчит. «Ворона, ворона, ты на выборы президента пойдешь?» Ворона молчит. «Ворона, ворона, ты за Путина голосовать будешь?» Ворона со всей дури как гаркнет: «Да-а-а!» Сыр естественно выпал, и лиса с наглой рыжей мордой и куском сыра во рту была такова. Сидит ворона на дереве и думает: «А если бы я сказала “нет”, то что бы это изменило?!»

★ A crow is perching on a branch with a piece of cheese in her beak. The fox is running by: “Hey, Crow, are you politically aware?” The crow remains silent. “Hey, Crow, are you going to vote in the presidential elections?” The crow remains silent. “Hey, Crow, are you going to vote for Putin?” Suddenly, the crow cries out loud: “Yeah!” The cheese, of course, falls down on the ground. The fox snatches it and runs away, satisfied. The crow thinks: “Had I said “No,” would it have really changed anything?!”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.1.B. В Москве гуляет такой анекдот. В его основе – известная басня Крылова «Ворона и лисица». В современном варианте лисица спрашивает у вороны, станет ли она голосовать за Путина. Та отвечает «да». Сыр падает на землю. Ворона с грустью взирает на ломоть и говорит: «Ничего не изменилось бы, если б она сказала «нет»...» Избрание президента РФ predetermined. Ясно, что нынешняя предвыборная кампания проводится не для того, чтобы передать власть, а для того, чтобы удержать ее.

★ The following joke is circulating in Moscow. It is based on the famous fable by Krylov called “The Crow and the Fox”. In the modern version of this story, the fox asks the crow if the latter is going to vote for Putin. The crow answers: “Yes!” and the cheese falls on the ground. The crow looks sadly at the chunk and says: “Nothing would have changed if I had said “no”...” The outcome of the president elections in the Russian Federation is predetermined. It is clear that the current election campaign is being carried out in order to retain power, not to hand it over.

(PP: Groznensky 2000)

I.1.C. Ворона сидит на суку и, понятно, держит в клюве сыр. Лиса пробегает внизу и спрашивает: «Ворона! Будешь голосовать за Путина?» Та молчит. «Будешь?» Молчит. «Сволочь, в последний раз спрашиваю: будешь?!» – «Да!!!» Сыр выпал, с ним была плутовка такова. Ворона в задумчивости пожимает крыльями: «Ну а скажи я «нет», что бы изменилось?» Этот важный этап в понимании судеб сыра пока, кажется, не учтен нашими оппозиционерами.

★ The crow is sitting on a bough and, naturally, is holding a piece of cheese in her beak. The fox is running by beneath and asks. “Listen, Crow, are you going to vote for Putin?” The crow is silent. “Well, will you, or will you not?” The crow is still silent. “I am asking you for the last time: will you or will you not, you bitch?!” – “Yes!” The cheese falls down and the sly fox runs away with it. The crow shrugs her wings thoughtfully: “If I had said ‘No’, what would have changed?” It seems that this crucial stage in understanding the fate of cheese has not been taken into account by our opposition yet.

(PP: Вуков 2005)

I.1.D. Вторая серия к анекдоту... Ворона со всей дури как гаркнет: «Да-а-а!». Сыр естественно выпал, и лиса с наглой рыжей мордой и куском сыра во рту была такова. Сидит ворона на дереве и думает: «А если бы я сказала “нет”, то что бы это изменило?!». Тоже самое, только на следующий день после выборов. Ворона сует сыр под мышку и говорит: «Халява кончилась!».

★ A sequel to the joke... The crow cries out loud: “Yeah!” and the cheese falls down, of course. The fox snatches it and runs away with a sly and brash expression on her face. The crow is sitting and thinking: “If I had said “no”, what would have changed?” The same situation the following day after the

elections. The crow sticks the cheese under her arm and says: “That’s it! No more freebies.”

(OC: from A. K., Moscow)

I.1.E. Глубокий смысл басни Крылова «Ворона и лисица» состоит в том, что, лишь потеряв сыр, ворона обрела свободу слова...

★ The deeper meaning of Krylov’s fable “The Crow and the Fox” consists in the fact that only having lost her cheese was the crow able to gain the freedom of speech ...

(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004a)

I.1.F. Сидит ворона на дереве, держит в клюве сыр. Подошла лиса, села под деревом, развернула газету и читает: «С каждым днем увеличивается благосостояние жителей нашего леса.» – «?» – «Растет доход на душу лесного населения.» – «???» – «Скоро в нашем лесу на каждой ветке будет висеть кусок сыра.» – «Ха!» сказала ворона, сыр выпал и с ним была плутовка такова. Мораль – нечего смеяться над решениями правительства.

★ The crow perched in a tree was holding a piece of cheese in her beak. The fox came up, sat down under the tree, opened up a newspaper and started reading: “The prosperity of the inhabitants of this forest is growing every day.” – “?” – “Per capita income is increasing.” – “???” – “Very soon a chunk of cheese will be hanging from every branch in our forest.” – “Hah!” laughed the crow. The cheese fell down and the sly fox ran away with it. The moral is that no one should make fun of the government’s decisions.

(IP: <http://0ka.ru/133.html>)

I.2. Putin’s mother congratulates him

I.2.A. Сидит будущий президент в кабинете. Телефонный звонок. Он берёт трубку, слушает, кладёт трубку, потом набирает номер и кричит: «Алло, мама! Можешь меня поздравить! Я победил на президентских выборах!» Мама радостно: «Ой! Честно!?» – «Мама, ну хоть бы ты не подкалывала!»

★ The future president is sitting in his office. The phone starts ringing. He picks up, listens, hangs up, then dials a number and says: “Hello, Mother!? You can congratulate me! I’ve won the president elections!” Mother, merrily: “Wow! Really!?” – “C’mon, Mother, I hoped that at least you wouldn’t josh!”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdote/anekdote20-040.html>)

I.3. Yeltsin is choosing a successor

This joke existed in Soviet times at first as a story about a clever Jewish boy, and later as a joke about Stirlitz:

Гиммлер вызывает своего сотрудника. «Назовите двузначное число.» – «45.» – «А почему не 54?» – «Потому что 45!» Гиммлер пишет характеристику “характер нордический” и вызывает следующего. «Назовите двузначное число.» – «28.» – «А почему не 82?» – «Можно, конечно, и 82, но лучше 28.» Гиммлер пишет характеристику “характер близок к нордическому” и вызывает следующего. «Назовите двузначное число.» – «33.» – «А почему не... А, это Вы, Штирлиц.»

★ Himmler summons one of his subordinates. “Name me a two-digit number.” – “45.” – “And why not 54?” – “Well, because it’s 45!” Himmler makes a mark “Nordic character” in the file and summons the next person. “Name me a two-digit number.” – “28.” – “And why not 82?” – “82 would also be an option, but 28 is better.” Himmler makes a mark “character close to Nordic” and summons the next person. “Name me a two-digit number.” – “33.” – “And why not... Oh, its you, Stirlitz.”
(<http://shtanek.narod.ru/>)

Viktor Stepanovich Chernomyrdin, Anatolij Borisovich Chubais, Evgeny Maximovich Primakov, Yury Mikhailovich Luzhkov, and Mikhail Mikhailovich Kasyanov were competing for the Russian presidency after Boris Yeltsin’s resignation on December 31 of 1999.

1.3.A. 1999 год. Вызывает Ельцин кандидатов в свои преемники. Заходит Черномырдин. Ельцин спрашивает: «Как, по-вашему, должны звучать имена и отчества новых президента и премьер-министра России?» – «Виктор Степанович и Анатолий Борисович.» – «А почему не Степан Викторovich и Борис Анатольевич?» Тот замолкает, не зная. Заходит Примаков. Ельцин задаёт тот же самый вопрос. Примаков отвечает: «Евгений Максимович и Юрий Михайлович.» – «А почему не Максим Евгеньевич и Михаил Юрьевич?» Примаков тоже не знает ответа. Входит следующий кандидат. Тот же вопрос. Ответ: «Владимир Владимирович и Михаил Михайлович.» – «А почему не... А, это вы, товарищ Путин...»

★ 1999. Yeltsin summons prospective successors. Chernomyrdin comes in. Yeltsin asks: “How do you think should sound first names and patronymics of the new president and the new prime minister?” – “Viktor Stepanovich and Anatoli Borisovich.” – “And why not Stepan Viktorovich and Boris Anatolievich?” Chernomyrdin becomes silent, not knowing what to answer. Primakov comes in. Yeltsin asks him the same question. Primakov answers: “Evgeny Maksimovich and Juri Mikhailovich.” – “And why not Maksim Evgenievich and Mikhail Jurievich?” Primakov also does not know what to answer. The next candidate comes in and hearing the same question answers: “Vladimir Vladimirovich and Mikhail Mikhailovich.” – “And why not... Oh, it’s you, comrade Putin...”
(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anedoty/anedoty20-050.html>)

1.4. Putin is buying a watermelon

This joke used to be very popular in Gorbachev’s and, later, Yeltsin’s time.

Идет мужичок с арбузом. Навстречу ему Горбачев. «Хороший какой арбуз. Дай мне!» – «Выбирайте, Михаил Сергеевич!» – «Выбирать? Но у вас же только один арбуз!» – «Ну и что! Вы у нас тоже один, а мы Вас выбираем!»

★ A man with a watermelon is walking down the street and comes across Gorbachev. “What a nice watermelon! Give it to me!” – “Of course, Mikhail Sergeevich, you pick!” – “Pick? But you have only one watermelon!” – “So what? There is only one you, but we are electing you nevertheless!”

(Vot takoi 1990: 23)

I.4.A. По Красной площади идет южанин с огромным арбузом. Ему навстречу Путин. «Продай арбуз,» просит Путин. «Нэ продаю!» – «Ну продай.» – «Ладно, выбирай!» – «Как же я выберу? Он же у тебя один!» – «А тебя как президентом выбрали?!»

★ A person from the Caucasus is walking across the Red Square with a huge watermelon and meets Putin on the way. “Sell me the watermelon,” begs Putin. “It’s not for sale.” – “C’mon, sell me.” – “All right. You pick.” – “How am I supposed to pick? You have only one watermelon!” – “And how have you been elected president?!”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.5. Election campaign speeches of the presidential candidates

I.5.A. Выдвиженец от демократов: «Я обещаю, что все, кто выдвинут меня, будут жить как в США!» Представитель от коммунистов: «Я клянусь, что избиратели, избравшие меня, будут жить как в СССР!» В. В. Путин: «Я гарантирую, что все те, кто проголосуют за меня, будут жить.»

★ The candidate for the Democrats: “I promise that all who vote for me will live as Americans do.” The nominee for the Communists: “I swear that all those who vote for me will live as Soviet people did.” V. V. Putin: “I guarantee that all who vote for me will live.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.6. Putin’s tough choice

I.6.A. 26 марта народу России вновь предстоит трудный выбор: Путин, Путин или Путин?

★ On March 26, the people of Russia shall face a tough choice again: Putin, Putin or Putin?

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.6.B. Анекдот слышали? «На президентских выборах в марте 2004 года будет два основных претендента: президент Путин и царь Владимир». Какого-то другого политика, которого я реально хотел бы видеть на посту президента, пока не знаю.

★ Have you heard this joke? “There will be two main candidates standing in the presidential elections in March 2004: President Putin and Tsar Vladimir”. At the moment, I do not know any other politician whom I would like to see on this post.

(PP: Gorobinskaya 2003)

I.7. Voting in the army

At the moment of writing this article, Alexander Lukashenko, the President of the Republic of Belarusia, holds office for the fourth consecutive term; the Constitution of Belarusia was modified to make this legal.

I.7.A. В армии перед выборами: «Товарищи солдаты, если вы за Путина, то поставьте напротив галочку, если против, то крестик.»

★ An announcement in the army right before the elections: “Dear soldiers, if you are in favour of Putin, put a tick beside his name; if you are against him, put a cross instead.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.7.B. А вот анекдоты про выборы появились в России и Белоруссии почти одновременно, и разница между ними чисто косметическая. Белорусский – про вопрос на референдуме: «Не хотите ли вы, чтобы Александр Лукашенко покинул свой пост?» Варианты ответов: «Да, не хочу» и «Нет, не хочу». Русский – про президентские выборы-2004: «Если вы хотите, чтобы президентом остался Владимир Путин, поставьте против его фамилии крестик. Если не хотите – поставьте нолик».

★ Jokes about presidential elections appeared in Russia and Belarusia almost simultaneously, with merely a cosmetic difference between them. Here is a Belarusian joke about a proposed referendum question: “Would you like Alexander Lukashenko to resign?” Answers to choose from: (i) “No, I do not want him to resign”, or (ii) “Yes, I would like him to stay in office”. Here is a Russian joke about the presidential elections of 2004: “If you wish Vladimir Putin to remain our President, put a cross next to his name. If you do not want it, put a nought there.”

(PP: Вывков 2005)

I.8. The distribution of votes in Putin’s elections

Alexander Albertovich Veshnyakov was the Chairman of the Central Electoral Committee of Russian Federation (1999–2007). Gennadij Andreevich Zyuganov was the presidential nominee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the main opponent of Putin’s during the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000.

I.8.A. Вызывает Путин 26-го Вешнякова к себе, смотрит исподлобья и спрашивает: П: «Как?» В: «Подсчитали пол-России, у Зюганова 55%.» П: «Что?!» В: «Ничего страшного, Чечню еще не подсчитали.» Через некоторое время – опять: П: «Как?» В: «Подсчитали всю Россию, у Зюганова 54%.» П: «Что?!?!» В: «Ничего страшного, за границу еще не подсчитали.» Еще через некоторое время, смотря в экран на улыбающегося Зюганова: П: «Как?» В: «Подсчитали за границу, у Зюганова 53%.» П: «Что?!?!?!» В: «Ничего страшного, непроголосовавших еще не подсчитали.»

★ On March 26, Putin summons Veshnyakov and says with a frown on his face: P: “What’s the update?” V: “We’ve counted half of the votes. Zyuganov has 55%.” P: “What?!” V: “Nothing to worry about. We haven’t counted the votes in Chechnya yet.” In a while: P: “What’s the update?” V: “We’ve counted all the votes. Zyuganov has 54%.” P: “What?!” V: “Nothing to worry about, we haven’t counted the votes abroad yet.” In a while, watching the smiling Zyuganov on TV: P: “What’s the update?” V: “We’ve counted the votes abroad. Zyuganov has 53%” P: “What?!” V: “Nothing to worry about. We haven’t counted those who did not vote yet.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.8.B. Приходит Вешняков к Путину: «Ну что у тебя есть?» – «У меня есть две новости, одна хорошая, другая плохая.» – «Ну давай с плохой.» – «Плохая новость та, что «против всех» набрал 64%.» – «А хорошая какая новость?» – «Вы, господин президент, набрали 77%.»

★ Veshnyakov comes to Putin: “Well?” – “I have the good new and the bad news.” – “Give me the bad one first.” – “The ‘against-all’ option has received 64%.” – “And the good one?” – “You, Mister President, have received 77%.”
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.9. Putin’s elections: all vote unanimously

In the present context, *стенка* implies a wall, where people are executed by a firing squad. The original joke concerns Andropov:

На пленуме ЦК. После единогласною избрания Андропова генсеком, он объявил: «Проголосовавшие, опустите руки и отойдите от стенки!»

★ After Andropov had been unanimously elected Secretary General at the plenum of the Central Committee, he announced: “Those who have voted please put your hands down and step away from the wall!”

(1983)

(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 247)

I.9.A. Выборы в России 2008. «Так, а теперь товарищи депутаты, кто за избрание Владимира Владимировича царем, могут опустить руки и отойти от стенки.»

★ 2008 elections in Russia. “And now, dear deputies, those of you who have voted for Vladimir Vladimirovich to become our Tsar may put their hands down and step away from the [execution] wall.

(IP: <http://nepom.ru/anekdots/?raz=4&ord=new> 21.11. 2007)

I.9.B. В Думе выборы. Объявляют кандидатуру Путина. Входит Путин с автоматом: «Руки вверх... Одну опустить... Единогласно.»

★ Elections in the Duma. Putin’s candidacy is announced. He comes in holding a sub-machine gun: “Hands up... One hand down... Elected unanimously.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.10. Americans are asking for help in the elections

I.10.A. В связи с возникшей неопределенностью на выборах президента американцы обратились за технической помощью в российский Центризбирком. В Америку вылетел Вешняков, и к настоящему времени получены новые данные относительно выборов в США: лидирует Владимир Путин.

★ In view of the indeterminacy that arose during the presidential elections, Americans turned for assistance to the Central Election Committee of the Russian Federation. Veshnyakov flew to the US, and here is the latest election update: Vladimir Putin has taken the lead.

(PP: Yakutia 2000)

I.11. A new calling plan for a cell phone

I.11.A. «Слышала, какой появился новый тариф сотового? – «Президентский пожизненный!»»

★ “Have you heard about the new calling plan? It is called ‘Lifelong Presidential’.”

(OC: 2006)

I.12. The advertising campaign organised by the Central Election Committee

I.12.A. Рекламная акция от Центризбиркома: «Проголосуй за Путина дважды и получи его на третий срок без выборов!»

★ The advertising campaign by the Central Election Committee: “Vote for Putin twice and get him for the third term without elections!”

(IP: <http://www.peoples.ru/state/king/russia/putin/anekdot.html>)

I.13. New terms for Putin and Khodorkovsky

See comment on Khodorkovky in VII.2.

I.13.A. «Что будет, если Путин сядет на 3 срок?» – «Ходорковский сядет на 2-ой.»

★ “What will happen if Putin gets the third term in office?” – “Khodorkovsky will get the second term in prison.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

I.13.B. Если Путин пойдет на третий срок ... Хадарковский пойдет на второй!

★ If Putin gets the third term in office... Khodorkovsky will get the second term in prison.

(IP: http://anekdoti.ru/jokes.php?joke_category=31)

I.13.C. Референдум 2007. Добавить еще один срок: 1) В. В. Путину 2) М. Б. Ходорковскому. В. Путин сообщил, что его устраивает любой вариант.

★ Referendum in 2007: One more term should be given 1) to Putin 2) to Khodorkovsky. Putin has announced that either variant will satisfy him.

(IP: http://anekdoti.ru/jokes.php?joke_category=31)

I.14. A poll about Putin and Khodorkovsky

See comment on Khodorkovky in VII.2.

I.14.A. Вчера Генпрокуратура провела телефонный опрос населения на тему «Кого бы вы хотели видеть российским президентом: Путина или Ходорковского?». Результаты опроса обрабатываются специальной группой ОМОНа.

★ Yesterday, the Prosecutor General's Office conducted a telephone poll on the following topic: "Whom would you like to see as your president: Putin or Khodorkovsky?" The results of the poll are being processed by a unit of the Special Police Force.

(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004b)

I.15. A poll by the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre

I.15.A. Сообщение в прессе: «ВЦИОМ провел анонимный опрос населения по вопросу: "Будете ли вы голосовать за Путина В. В., если выборы президента состоятся завтра? Из ответов выяснилось, что за Путина В. В. проголосовали бы 75% респондентов, 2% респондентов еще не сделали выбора и 23% – проголосовали бы против. В настоящее время в администрации Президента РФ Путина В. В. активно идет работа по изучению списка 23-х процентов анонимных респондентов.»

★ "The All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre conducted an anonymous poll regarding the following question: "Would you vote for V. V. Putin, if the elections were to take place tomorrow?" The following results were received: 75% of the respondents would vote for V. V. Putin, 2% of the respondents have not made a decision yet and 23% of the respondents would vote against him. At the moment, Putin's administration is actively studying the list of the anonymous respondents."

(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004b)

I.16. Putin is asking a fortune-teller about the third term of office

I.16.A. Приходит Путин к гадалке и спрашивает: «Скажите, баллотироваться ли мне на третий срок?» Гадалка раскидывает карты и говорит: «Мда... Карты, увы, к Вам неблагоприятны. Зима у Вас будет тяжелая...» Путин: «Значит, зимы не будет!»

★ Putin comes to a fortune-teller and asks: "Should I run for a second term?" The fortune teller lays out the cards and says: "Well-well-well... The cards, unfortunately, are not very favourable to you. You are going to have a difficult winter." Putin: "There will be no winter then!"

(OC: 11.2006–12.2007)

I.16.B. Вот последний анекдот в тему. Владимир Путин приходит к гадалке с вопросом: «Получится у него остаться еще на один срок президентом?» – «Нет,» отвечает гадалка. «Эта зима у тебя последняя.» – «Ну, значит, зимы не будет...»

★ Here's the latest joke on this topic. Vladimir Putin comes to a fortune-teller wondering whether he will be able to remain President for one more term. "No," answers the fortune-teller. "This will be your last winter." – "Well, there will be no winter then..."

(PP: Golovina 2006)

I.17. Journalists and channels / canals

The White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal (*Беломорско-Балтийский канал имени Сталина*, Belomorsko-Baltiyskiy Kanal), often abbreviated as Belomorkanal is a canal in Russia opened in August 1933. It connects the White Sea with the Baltic Sea near St. Petersburg and was built by prisoners from camps. During its construction thousands died. 'To send sb. to the Belomorkanal' (*послать на Беломорканал*) means 'to send sb. to prison', 'to work at the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal' (*работать на строительстве Беломорканала*) means 'to be in a prison camp'.

I.17.A. Если Путин пойдет на третий президентский срок, то все тележурналисты будут работать на двух каналах: одни на Первом, другие – на Беломоро-Балтийском.

★ If Putin runs for a third term, all journalists will be working on two channels / canals (*на двух каналах*): some on Channel One, others on the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal. [In Russian these two words have identical spelling *канал*]

(IP: <http://anekdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-050.html>)

II. PUTIN AS A CHEKA OFFICER / STIRLITZ

II.1. Putin is trying to lose the tail

II.1.A. Приехал как-то Путин в Германию, встретиться со старыми, так сказать, коллегами. Ну, те, естественно, пригласили его на неофициальный ужин. Немецкая пунктуальность – в 19 часов Путина нет, в 20 нет. В 21 час обеспокоенные немцы звонят Волошину. Тот отвечает, все типа нормально, сейчас будем, просто ВВП долго по городу кружил, от наружки избавлялся...

★ One day Putin comes to Germany to meet his former colleagues, so to say. They invite him for an informal dinner, of course. 19.00 – Putin has not showed up. 20.00 – he is still not there. The punctual Germans are worried: at 21.00 they call Voloshin. He answers that everything is ok and that they will arrive shortly. VVP was simply circling around the city trying to lose the tail...

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

II.2. Putin is remembering his old habits

The joke refers to Felix Dzerzhinsky's famous saying: "A Chekist has to have a cool head, a hot heart and clean hands".

II.2.A. Визит Путина в Германию. С утра за ним в резиденцию заезжает Шредер. Заходит в апартаменты и видит странную картину: ВВП стоит, засунув голову в холодильник, и прижимает к груди горячий утюг. Затем подходит к умывальнику и тщательно моет руки. Шредер: «?????» Путин: «А-а-а, не обращайтесь внимания, герр канцлер. Это старая привычка – осталась от прежней службы.»

★ Putin is paying a visit to Germany. In the morning, Schroeder comes to his residence to pick him up and sees a strange picture: VVP is standing with his head stuck into the fridge and a hot iron pressed against his chest. Putin then comes to the washstand and carefully washes his hands. Schroeder: “?????” Putin: “Please don’t mind my behaviour, Herr Kanzler. It’s just an old habit of mine that I’ve had since my days at a previous job.” (IP: www.anekdot.ru)

II.2.B. Регулярные ссылки на то, что все приличные люди начинали в разведке, спровоцировали анекдот о том, как во время визита президента в Германию потрясенный Шредер застаёт его с утра держащим голову в холодильнике, раскаленный утюг на груди и при этом моющим руки! «Не обращайтесь внимания, господин канцлер, чекистская гимнастика.»

★ Regular references to the fact that all decent people started their careers in the intelligence service have given rise to the joke about the president’s visit to Germany during which Schroeder is taken aback when one morning he sees how Putin is washing his hands with his head in the fridge and a hot iron on his chest. “Do not mind my Chekist workout, Herr Kanzler.” (PP: Вуков 2005)

II.3. Putin is recruiting the government

Вербовка: recruiting a new secret agent (for instance, by KGB). The joke hints at the KGB past of V. V. Putin.

II.3.A. Президент Путин приступил к вербовке нового правительства.

★ President Putin has set out to recruit a new government. (IP: www.anekdot.ru)

II.4. Civil society under surveillance

II.4.A. Западный журналист спрашивает у Путина: «Вы следите за созданием гражданского общества?» Путин: «Я уже больше десяти лет ни за кем не слежу!!!»

★ A Western journalist asks Putin: “Are you following the development of the civil society?” Putin: “I haven’t followed anyone for more than ten years!!!”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

II.4.B. Авторство как минимум одного анекдота, который вошел во многие сборники, знатоки смело приписывают самому президенту: якобы подобные слова не раз звучали во время путинских «подходов к прессе». Журналисты спрашивают у президента: «Вы следите за созданием в России гражданского общества?» – «Я уже больше 10 лет ни за кем не слежу.»

★ The experts attribute the authorship of at least one joke included in many collections to the president himself. He supposedly pronounced the following words on several occasions during his meetings with the press. Journalists

ask the president: “Are you following the development of the civil society in Russia?” – “I haven’t followed anyone for more than 10 years.”
(PP: Komsomolskaya 2005)

III. PUTIN AS A TOTALITARIAN LEADER

III.1. Putin promises to catch everybody

In this joke, the last two words of the first sentence, *свободы слова*, mean ‘the freedom of speech’. However, the last word may be interpreted either as *слово* (‘word, speech’ in ‘the freedom of speech’), or as *слов*: an impromptu word, implying ‘arrest/capture’. While the first sentence barely admits the latter interpretation (albeit only formally), the following sentence definitely promises arrests instead of the freedom of speech.

III.1.A. Владимир Путин подтвердил, что является твердым сторонником свободы слова. «Мы свободно словим их всех!» пообещал президент.

★ Vladimir Putin has confirmed that he is a staunch proponent of the freedom of speech. “We will freely catch them all!” promised the president.
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.2. Putin renames the NTV website

III.2.A. Президент России Владимир Владимирович Путин издал указ о переименовании сайта НТВ.ru в НТВ.net.

★ The Russian President Vladimir Putin has issued a decree saying that the NTV website should be renamed from NTV.ru to NTV.net [in Russian “*нет*” means ‘no’].
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.3. Putin’s minister is writing a press-release

III.3.A. «Владимир Владимирович, как будет по-китайски «напугать ежа голый жопой?»» – «Не знаю... Глебка, подожди, а зачем тебе это нужно?» – «Да вот пишу пресс-релиз о российско-китайских учениях...»

★ “Vladimir Vladimirovich, what would be the Chinese equivalent for “scaring the hedgehog with one’s bare ass?”” – “No idea... What on earth do you need this phrase for?” – “Well, I am writing a press release about the joint Chinese-Russian military exercise...”
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.4. Putin at the subbotnik

The word ‘subbotnik’ originates from the word *суббота* (‘Saturday’) and denotes a Soviet tradition, whereby the government would “encourage” people to do a full Saturday of unpaid work for some governmental needs. For instance, people would clean the streets and plant trees. Vladimir Lenin personally participated in the very first subbotnik. In Russian, the word *сажать* may mean either ‘to imprison’ or ‘to plant’.

III.4.A. Сегодня в Москве прошел традиционный весенний субботник. В. В. Путин собственноручно посадил несколько независимых издателей газет и журналов.

★ The traditional spring subbotnik has taken place in Moscow today. V. V. Putin has personally planted / incarcerated several independent publishers of newspapers and magazines.
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.5. Putin burns his bridges

III.5.A. Новоизбранный президент Путин решительно занялся переустройством России. Он порывает с наследием прошлого и сжигает за собой мосты. Первым сожженным мостом оказался «Медиа-Мост».

★ The newly elected president Putin has resolutely set out to rebuild Russia. He is breaking with the legacy of the past and burning the bridges behind him. The first bridge to have been burnt was Media-Most holding company [in Russian “most” (*мост*) means ‘bridge’].
(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-050.html>)

III.6. Putin is raising bridges

The Russian verb *развести* [‘to raise’ (a bridge)] coincides with an argot verb, meaning ‘to swindle’. The name of the company («Мост») means ‘bridge’. St. Petersburg is famous for its bridges, which are raised at night.

III.6.A. «Почему Путин наехал на группу «Мост?»» – «Потому что Путин – уроженец Питера, а в Питере принято разводить мосты.»

★ “Why has Putin taken a swipe at the Media-Most company?” – “Because he comes from Saint-Petersburg and it is customary to raise bridges there.”
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.7. The winner of the joke contest has already been invited by a summons

This joke is based on a popular story of the 1960s/1970s, but I failed to find its originating appearance:

Конкурс на лучший политический анекдот в честь ленинского юбилея. 3-я премия – 3 года общего режима. 2-я премия – 7 лет строгого режима плюс пять лет по ленинским местам. 1-я премия – встреча с юбиляром.

★ A contest for the best political joke dedicated to Lenin’s anniversary. The third prize – 3 years of ordinary confinement; the second prize – 7 years of strict confinement plus a 5-year trip around the places associated with Lenin [i.e.: Siberia]; the first prize winner gets to meet the birthday boy.

The bibliography and variants of the joke in emigrant collections can be viewed in Krikmann 2004: No. 47. Also in Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 171.

III.7.A. ТАСС. МОСКВА. Победитель всероссийского конкурса анекдотов о Путине уже приглашен повесткой для награждения.

★ Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union, Moscow. The winner of the All-Russian competition in jokes about Putin has already been invited to the awarding ceremony by a summons.
(IP: <http://www.user.cityline.ru/~kozak/news21.htm>)

III.8. What is a marked-down joke?

This joke-type was known earlier as a joke about Stalin:

«Уцененный анекдот: анекдот, за который при Сталине давали десять лет, а при Брежнев только три.»

★ “A marked-down joke is a joke for which you would get ten years in Stalin’s time and only three years in Brezhnev’s”

Recorded in Krikmann’s index (Krikmann 2004: No. 240), and in the collections (Telesin 1986: No. 987; Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 323–324).

III.8.A. Уцененный анекдот – анекдот, за который при Сталине давали 10 лет, а при Путине – только три.

★ A marked-down joke is an joke for which you would get ten years in Stalin’s time and only three years in Putin’s.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.9. Will it be obligatory to stand during the playing of the anthem?

III.9.A. Из интервью с В. В. Путиным по поводу гимна. «Обязательно ли будет вставать при исполнении гимна?» – «У каждого будет свобода выбора. Кто не захочет вставать, будет сидеть.»

★ An extract from an interview with V. V. Putin about the anthem: “Will it be obligatory to stand during the playing of the anthem?” – “Everyone will have freedom of choice. Those who do not want to stand up will sit [in prison].”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.10. Putin orders to stop the inflation

Russian word *задержать* carries double meaning: ‘to hinder / delay’ or ‘to arrest’.

III.10.A. «Вы слышали, Путин приказал правительству остановить инфляцию!» – «Не совсем так. Он распорядился ее задержать. И посадить.»

★ “Have you heard that Putin ordered the government to stop the inflation!” – “Not quite. He ordered to arrest it. And to put it in prison.”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-030.html>)

III.11. Putin asks to check MTS, because his cell phone is not working

S. V. Stepashin headed the Russian Federal Security Service (formerly known as KGB) from 1994 through 1995.

The abbreviation MTS for one of the leading Russian mobile phone companies (Mobile TeleSystems = MTS) sounds similarly to MPS for the Ministry of Transportation (MPS) [МПТ, *Министерство путей сообщения*], and to the MChS for the Ministry

of Emergency Situations (MChS) [МЧС, *Министерство по чрезвычайным ситуациям*].

III.11.A. Испортился у Путина мобильник. Он звонит Степашину: «Слушай, проверь-ка ты МЧС. То есть МЧС. То есть МТС. В общем, ты их всех проверь!»

★ Putin's cell phone is not working. He calls Stepashin. "Listen, check the MPS, will you? I mean, the MChS... no, I mean the MTS! Well, check them all, just in case!"

(OC: from B. L. K., born in 1969, Moscow)

III.12. Members of the Special Police Force will receive their wages

III.12.A. Путину докладывают: «Забастовали шахтеры!» – «Выдать шахтерам зарплату!» – «Забастовали учителя!» – «Выдать зарплату учителям!» – «Забастовали колхозники!» – «Выдать зарплату колхозникам!» – «Забастовали одновременно шахтеры, учителя и колхозники!» – «Выдать зарплату ОМОНу!»

★ Putin receives the following reports: "Miners have gone on strike!" – "Give the miners their wages!" – "Teachers have gone on strike!" – "Give the teachers their wages!" – "Collective farmers have gone on strike!" – "Give the collective farmers their wages!" – "Miners, teachers and collective farmers have gone on strike simultaneously!" – "Give the Special Police Force their wages!"

(IP: <http://www.humorist.ru/?root=anek&jcid=9>)

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-050.html>)

III.13. Putin gives a present to Abramovich

The Russian word *сидеть* has two meanings: 'to sit' or 'to serve a prison term'.

III.13.A. Путин подарил Роману Абрамовичу некую деталь компьютера и тем самым выразил к нему свое отношение. Вопрос: что подарил Путин? – CD-rom! [*Сиди, Ром!*]

★ Putin gave Abramovich a certain computer accessory as a present and through that expressed his opinion of him. Question: What did Putin give Abramovich as a present? Answer: CD-ROM [in Russian, 'CD-ROM' sounds the same as 'sit, Rom'].

(OC: B. L. K., born in 1969, Moscow)

III.14. Putin awards Abramovich

III.14.A. Вызывает Путин к себе Абрамовича: «Знаю, Роман Аркадьевич, что вы большой вклад внесли в развитие нашего государства. Поднимали металлургию, нефтяную промышленность, футбольное хозяйство, чукотскому народу сильно помогли... Хочу вас денежной премией наградить. Вот чековая книжка – сейчас впишу любую сумму, какую назовете. Ну,

так как?» Абрамович молчит. «Сколько? Пятьдесят? Сто миллионов?» Абрамович неловко мнетя и сопит. «ДВЕСТИ ПЯТЬДЕСЯТ МИЛЛИОНОВ ДОЛЛАРОВ ДОСТАТОЧНО?!» Абрамович вздыхает и с запинкой говорит: «Достаточно, Владимир Владимирович... Большое спасибо, Владимир Владимирович...» Путин мягко улыбается, вписывает в чек названную сумму, расписывается, складывает бумажку пополам и всовывает ее в карман пиджака Абрамовича. Потом бережно берет его за локоть и спокойно, но со значением говорит: «А вот ОСТАЛЬНОЕ надо вернуть, Роман Аркадьевич...»

★ Putin summons Abramovich: “I know, Roman Arkadievich, that you have made a considerable contribution to the development of our country. You have lifted our metalworking, oil industry and football management to new heights and have helped the Chukchi people a lot... I would like to grant a monetary award to you. Here is my chequebook – I will now put there any sum you name. Well then?” Abramovich is silent. “Well, how much? Fifty? One hundred million?” Abramovich is humming and hawing. “WILL TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS BE ENOUGH?” Abramovich sighs and stammers: “Quite enough, Vladimir Vladimirovich... Thank you so much, Vladimir Vladimirovich...” Putin smiles softly, writes the sum on the cheque, signs it, folds it and sticks it into the pocket of Abramovich’s jacket. Then he gently takes him by the elbow and says with a meaningful look: “But THE REST you will have to return, Roman Arkadievich...” (IP: Mysli 2007)

III.15. Putin answers anonymous questions

This joke mocks an online press-conference of Vladimir Putin.

III.15.A. «Вот такой вопрос поступил,» говорит президент: ««Володя, не запахло ли тебе отвечать на анонимные вопросы?» Николаеву Петру Владимировичу, проживающему в городе Гусь-Хрустальный, улица Розы Люксембург, дом 5, квартира 12, женат, бухгалтер, сообщаю: «Нет, Петя, не запахло!»»

★ “I have received the following question,” says the president. “Volodja, why bother answering anonymous questions? Well, I would like to inform the accountant Petr Vladimirovich Nikolaev, who is married and resides at Rosa Luxemburg Street 5-12 in Gus-Khrustalny, that I DO bother answering them.” (PP: Vykov 2005)

III.15.B. Путин он-лайн: «Только-что через Интернет пришел хороший вопрос: «А не запахло тебе, Вова, отвечать на анонимные вопросы по Интернету?». Отвечаю задавшему этот вопрос обладателю IP (такой-то), хост (такой-то), провайдер (такой-то) Иванову Сергею Васильевичу, проживающему на Ивановской, дом 13/2: НЕ ЗАПАДЛЮ!»

★ Putin is answering questions during an anonymous online press-conference: “I have just received an interesting question over the Internet:

“Vova, why bother answering anonymous questions online?” I would like to inform Sergei Vasilyevich Ivanov, who has just asked me this question from the IP number such and such, host number such and such and Internet provider such and such, and who resides at Ivanovskaya Street 13/2, that I DO BOTHER!”

(OC: 30.09.2006)

III.15.C. [Анонимная интернет-конференция он-лайн] Путина спрашивают: «А не в падлу ли Вам, наш дорогой президент, отвечать на тупые вопросы в интернете?» Путин: «Дорогой Иванов Виталий Сергеевич с IP 198.12.1.546, проживающий по адресу: Москва, Сиреневый бульвар, д. 5, кв. 117, отвечаю – нет, не в падлу!»

★ [Anonymous Internet-conference with Putin]. Putin was asked: “Our dear president, do you really bother answering stupid questions online?” Putin: “Dear Vitaliy Sergeevich Ivanov, IP 198.12.1.546, residing at Sirenevij Boulevard 5-117 in Moscow, my answer to you is “Yes, I do bother!”

(PP: Komsomolskaya 2005)

III.16. Putin reassures a meat jelly

III.16.A. Путин встает среди ночи и направляется к холодильнику. Внутри стоит судок с холодцом. Когда он открывает дверь, холодец начинает дрожать. «Да не бойся ты, я за пивом.»

★ Putin wakes up in the middle of the night and heads for the fridge. Inside there is a plate with a meat jelly. When he opens the door, the meat jelly starts shaking. “Don’t be afraid. I’ve come to fetch some beer.”

(PP: Berry 2006)

III.16.B. Путин открывает холодильник, а там студень трясется от страха. Путин: «Не бойся, я за кetchupом.»

Putin opens the fridge and sees a meat jelly shaking with fear. “Don’t worry. I just need some ketchup.”

(OC: 5.03.2005)

III.16.C. Просыпается Путин ночью, идет на кухню, открывает холодильник, а там холодец дрожит. Путин ему говорит: «Не бойся. Я за сметаной.»

★ Putin wakes up in the middle of the night, goes to the kitchen, opens the fridge and sees a shaking meat jelly in there. “Don’t worry. I’ve come for the sour cream,” says Putin to it.

(PP: Molodoy 2005)

III.16.D. Титул «ходячего анекдота» в коридорах власти по-прежнему принадлежит Павлу Бородину, госсекретарю Союза России и Белоруссии. Мы не могли пройти мимо него... «Пал Пальч, а про Путина вам анекдот рассказать слабо?» – «Но если только хороший. Значит, Путин резко так открывает холодильник, а там холодец весь затрясся. Путин и говорит: «Ты чего трясешься-то? Я за сыром!»»

★ Pavel Borodin, State Secretary of the Union of Russia and Belarus, still carries the title of “the walking joke” in the Kremlin corridors. We could not help asking him: “Pal Palych [a diminutive of ‘Pavel Pavlovich’], will you dare to tell us a joke about Putin?” – “I will only tell you a really good one. Putin flings the fridge door open and sees a shaking meat jelly inside. “Why are you shaking? I just need some cheese!” says Putin.”
(PP: Komsomolskaya 2005)

III.17. The correct answer to the question asked by the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre

III.17.A. Только 5% россиян правильно ответили на вопрос ВЦИОМа: «Нравится ли Вам наш Президент?».

★ Only 5% of Russian citizens have correctly answered the following question asked by the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre: “Do you like our President?”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

III.18. Putin is our forever

Zurab Tsereteli – a painter and sculptor, the author of a number of huge and rather unpopular monuments in Moscow; he is believed to be a favourite of the ruling Moscow mayor Yu. Luzhkov.

Пушкин – это наше все (‘Pushkin is our everything’) is a famous quote about the great Russian poet Pushkin, due to a 19th century poet Apollo Grigoryev.

Единая Россия (United Russia) – a name of a political party; Putin is the Head of this party from 2008.

III.18.A. Пушкин – это наше все, Церетели – это наше везде, Путин – это наше всегда.

★ Pushkin is our everything. Tsereteli is our everywhere. Putin is our forever.

(OC: 2006)

III.18.B. Для тех, кто еще не понимает, объясняю. В современной российской действительности есть три имени, которые объединены местоимением «наше». Одно имя осталось нам в наследство, другие стали достоянием нынешних дней. Итак, Пушкин – это наше все, Церетели – наше везде, а Путин – наше всегда.

★ For those who still don’t get it: in today’s Russia, there are three names that are united by the common pronoun “our”. One name is the legacy of the past, the other two are the assets of the present. So, Pushkin is our everything; Tsereteli is our everywhere; and Putin is our forever.

(PP: Dubnov 2007)

III.18.C. Анекдоты, как выяснила «Газета.Ру», и в самом деле в основном были посвящены «Единой России» и Путину и публиковались в рубрике «Анекдоты от Зюганова». Например, в первом анекдоте передавался не-

кий диалог журналиста и обывателя. «Корреспондент: «За кого вы будете голосовать?» Мужик: «Да зае...» Корреспондент, перебивая: «Правильно! За «Единую Россию!» Другой анекдот касался непосредственно Путина: «Теперь уже окончательно ясно, что Пушкин – это наше все, Церетели – это наше везде, а Путин – это наше навсегда».

★ As Gazeta.Ru has found out, the jokes were mostly about the United Russia party and Putin and were published in the column “Jokes from Zyuganov”. For example, the first joke featured a dialogue between a journalist and a man in the street. The journalist: “Whom are you going to vote for?” The guy: “F***...” The reporter, interrupting: “Correct! Ff...for the United Russia!” The other joke was about Putin himself. “Now it’s absolutely clear that Pushkin is our everything, Tsereteli is our everywhere and Putin is our forever.”

(IP: Sumskoï 2007)

III.19. New apple breed

This joke is based on the double meaning of the Russian verb *вязать*: (a) ‘to tie up’, and (b) ‘to leave in one’s mouth a particular bitter sour aftertaste of a not yet ripe apple or quince’.

The first version of this joke mentions a new breed of apples, named after Andropov. On top of leaving a particular aftertaste in one’s mouth (as, according to the joke, did the apples named after Brezhnev), these new apples also tie your hands together.

Сообщение в газете: «Советские ученые достигли новых высот в области селекции! Недавно ими выведен новый сорт яблок, названный “Андроповкой”. В отличие от прежнего – “Брежневки” – он вяжет не только рот, но и выкручивает руки.»

★ A newspaper article: “Soviet scientists have reached a new summit in plant breeding. Recently, they were able to breed a new sort of apples, “Andropovka”. By contrast with the previously bred “Brezhnevka”, these not only leave an aftertaste in your mouth, but also tie your hands together.”

(<http://humor.zooclub.ru/anekdots.php?id=75&page=2>)

III.19.A. «Выведен новый сорт яблок – путинка. Он вяжет не только рот, но и руки».

★ A new apple breed has been bred and named “Putinka”: it not only leaves a particular aftertaste in your mouth, but also ties your hands together.

(IP: Yerofeev 2006)

III.20. Putin breaks an arm

«Слышали? Андропов сломал руку!» – «Кому?» (1983 г.)

★ “Have you heard Andropov broke an arm?” – “Whose arm?” (Sturman & Tiktin, 1985: 291)

III.20.A. Далее анекдот отреагировал на ужесточение режима: «Ты слышал, что Путин сломал руку?» – «Кому?»

★ Then the joke reacted to the hardening of the regime: “Have you heard that Putin broke an arm?” – “Whose arm?”

(IP: Yerofeev 2006)

IV. PUTIN AND DISASTERS IN RUSSIA

IV.1. Putin bans the selling of sausages and patties

IV.1.A. В. Путин очередным указом распорядился изъять из продажи в Москве колбасу Останкинскую копченую и котлеты по-курски.

★ V. Putin has issued a new decree ordering to stop selling the Ostankinskaya smoked sausage and the Kurskie patties in Moscow [a reference to the fire in the Ostankino Tower and the submarine *Kursk* disaster].

(OC)

IV.2. Putin learns the good news

IV.2.A. «Владимир Владимирович, у меня две новости, хорошая и плохая.» – «Начни с хорошей.» – «Противолодочные ракеты «Гранит» работают великолепно.»

★ “Vladimir Vladimirovich, I have the good news and the bad news.” – “Tell me the good news.” – ““Granit” anti-submarine missiles work perfectly well.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3. What happened to your submarine?

IV.3.A. Мы публикуем перевод разговора Владимира Путина с Ларри Кингом в том виде, в каком он появился на сайте телекомпании CNN. «Расскажите нам, что случилось с российской подлодкой?» – «Она утонула.»

★ We publish a translation of Larry King’s interview with Vladimir Putin in the form it appeared on the CNN website. “Tell us what happened to your submarine.” – “It sank.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.B. «Что случилось с вашей подлодкой?» – «Она утонула.» – «А с вашей телебашней?» – «Она сгорела.» – «А со станцией «Мир»?!» – «Она сгорела и утонула.»

★ “What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.” – “And to your TV tower?” – “It burnt.” – “And to your Mir space station?” – “It burnt and sank.”

(PP: Вуков 2005)

IV.3.C. «Отчего сгорела Останкинская телебашня?» – «Она столкнулась с американской телебашней» [ремейк версии о столкновении «Курска» с другой подлодкой].

★ “Why did Ostankino Tower burn?” – “It ran into an American TV tower” [a reference to the hypothesis that Kursk ran into another submarine].

(PP: Вуков 2005)

IV.3.D. Президент сегодня будет улыбаться, шутить. Так, как он умеет. Или, точнее, как его к этому вынуждают обстоятельства. А после его фраз

появляются анекдоты. Один из них родился, можно сказать, по следам всем известных печальных событий:

Путин дает интервью иностранному журналисту. Тот спрашивает: «Что случилось с вашей телебашней?» – «Она сгорела.» – «Что случилось с вашей лодкой?» – «Она утонула.» – «Что случилось с вашей орбитальной станцией?» – «Она сгорела и утонула.» – «Ну, хорошо. А что у вас не сгорело и не утонуло?» – «Моя машина. Она перевернулась.»

★ The president will be smiling and joking today. He knows how to do that, especially when the circumstances force him to. His phrases are then transformed into jokes. One of them is based on the well-known tragic events.

Putin is being interviewed by a foreign journalist. The latter asks: “What happened to your TV tower?” – “It burnt.” – “What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.” – “What happened to your space station?” – “It burnt and sank.” – “Well, do you have anything that did not burn and sink?” – “My car. It turned over.”

(PP: Sazonov 2006)

IV.3.E. Прошел год, Путин дает интервью Ларри Кингу. Л. К.: «Господин Путин, скажите, пожалуйста, что же на самом деле произошло с НТВ?» Путин (широко улыбаясь): «Его закрыли.»

★ A year has passed. Putin is giving an interview to Larry King. L. K.: “Mr. Putin, please tell us what actually happened to the NTV channel?” Putin (with a wide grin): “It was closed.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.F. «Что случилось с лодкой, мистер Путин?» – «Она утонула.» – «А башня?» – «Она сгорела.» – «А НТВ?» – «Накрылось Газпром.» – «А ТВ-6?» – «Накрылось НТВ...»

★ “What happened to the submarine, Mr. Putin?” – “It sank.” – “And to the TV tower?” – “It burnt.” – “And to the NTV channel?” – “Done over by Gazprom.” – “And to the TV-6 channel?” – “Done over by NTV.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.G. «Что случилось с подводной лодкой?» – «Она утонула.» – «Что случилось с театром на Дубровке?» – «Он отравился.» – «Что случилось с бесланской школой?» – «Она штурмовалась.»

★ “What happened to the submarine?” – “It sank.” – “What happened to the Dubrovka theatre?” – “It was stunned with gas.” – “What happened to the school in Beslan?” – “It was stormed.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.H. «Что с вашей подлодкой?» – «Она утонула.» – «Что с вашими самолетами?» – «Они упали.» – «Что с вашим метро?» – «Оно взорвалось.» – «Что с вашей школой?» – «Идет процесс нормализации.»

★ “What happened to your submarine?” – “It sank.” – “What happened to your aircraft?” – “They fell down.” – “What happened to your underground?”

– “It was blown up.” – “What happened to your school.” – “The process of normalisation is under way.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.I. «Что случилось с анекдотами о лаконичности Путина?» – «Они достали.»

★ “What happened with the jokes about Putin’s brevity?” – “They began to pall.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IV.3.J. По мнению телевизионного обозревателя «Известий» Ирины Петровской, власть слишком хорошо помнит о негативной реакции общественности на меланхоличный ответ Путина Ларри Кингу («Что с лодкой?» – «Она утонула»), когда родился знаменитый анекдот («А что с башней?» – «Она сгорела»).

★ According to Irina Petrovskaya, TV reporter for “Izvestia,” the government remembers the negative reaction of the public to Putin’s melancholic answer to Larry King (“What happened with the submarine?” – “It sank”) way too well. After that notorious show, the famous joke was born (“What happened with the tower?” – “It burnt.”).

(PP: Varshavchik 2005)

IV.3.K. Однажды Владимир Владимирович Путин спал и снился ему странный сон. Как будто сидит Владимир Владимирович в психиатрическом кабинете, а напротив него за большим медицинским столом сидит телезвезда Ларри Кинг в халате и шапочке. «Что случилось с вашей журналисткой?» спрашивает Ларри Кинг. «Она захворала,» отвечает Владимир Владимирович.

★ Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin is sleeping and seeing a strange dream. He is at the psychiatrist’s office, and the TV star Larry King is sitting opposite him at a large medical table wearing in a gown and slippers. “What happened to your journalist?” asks Larry King. “She got ill,” answers Vladimir Vladimirovich.

(IP: Mysli 2007)

V. PUTIN AND 9/11

V.1. We entered the World Trade Organisation

V.1.A. 11 сентября, Кремль. На столе президента звонит телефон. На проводе – министр обороны С. Иванов: «Владимир Владимирович, помнишь, ты на совещании говорил, что мы должны попасть во Всемирную торговую организацию?» – «Да, помню.» – «Так вот, докладываю: попали.»

★ September 11, the Kremlin. The telephone on the president’s desk starts ringing. The Minister of Defence Sergey Ivanov is at the other end of the line: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, remember you said at the meeting that we should enter the World Trade Organisation?” – “Yes, I do.” – “Well, I would

like to report that we did enter / hit it” [in Russian the verb *попасть* can mean ‘enter’, ‘reach’, as well as ‘hit’].

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

V.1.B. Путину звонит Сергей Иванов. «Владимир Владимирович! Вы говорили, что надо попасть в ВТО?» -- «Говорил.» – «Докладываю: попали!!!»

★ Sergey Ivanov is calling Putin. “Vladimir Vladimirovich! Were those your words that we should enter the WTO?” – “Yes, they were.” – “Well, we entered / hit it!!!”

(PP: Вуков 2005)

V.1.C. Те, кто часто навещается в Кремль, «выносят» через Спасские ворота и такие «правдоподобные истории»... Путину звонит министр обороны Иванов: «Вы говорили, что надо попасть в ВТО?» – «Ну, говорил.» – «Так мы попали!»

★ Those who frequent the Kremlin often “carry out” the following “plausible stories” through the Saviour’s Gate... The Minister of Defence Ivanov is calling Putin: “Were those your words that we should enter the WTO?” – “Well, they were.” – “We did enter / hit it!”

(PP: Komsomolskaya 2005)

V.2. Putin offers his condolences to Bush before the explosion

This joke-type existed earlier as a joke about Brezhnev and was based on his image as a dotard.

За час до убийства Садата созывает Брежнев Политбюро. «Кто из вас может мне точно сказать, какая разница во времени между Москвой и Каиром? Только что я звонил Джихан Садат и выразил ей свое глубокое соболезнование. А она мне: «Что вы, у нас все в порядке. Анвар на парад собирается.»

★ Brezhnev summons Politburo one hour before the assassination of Sadat. “Who of you can tell me what the exact time difference between Moscow and Cairo is? I have just called Jehan Sadat and offered her my deepest condolences. And she told me that they are fine and that Anwar is getting ready for the parade.”

(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 238, the editors’ dating is October 1981)

Ельцину рассказывают старый анекдот: «В 1986 году взорвался “Челленджер”. Французы принесли соболезнования через полчаса, англичане через час, а Советский Союз за час до взрыва. Президент США и говорит: “Ох уж эти русские! Ладно, что у них там на “Ч”?» – «А мне понравилось! Что у меня тут на “Ч” есть?»

★ Yeltsin is being told an old joke. “In 1986, the Challenger space shuttle blew up. The French offered their condolences half an hour later, the English an hour later, while the Soviet Union did the same one hour before the explosion. The US president says: ‘Oh, those Russians... All right, what have they got that starts with a CH?’ – «I really like this one! Have I got anything that starts with a CH?»

(<http://www.peoples.ru/art/literature/poetry/oldage/annensky/anekdot.html>)

V.2.A. Первым, кто прислал соболезнования американцам по поводу взрывов, был Владимир Путин: телеграмма была отправлена за 15 минут до взрыва...

★ The first one to express his condolences to Americans was Vladimir Putin. His telegram was sent 15 minutes before the explosion...

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

V.2.B. Арафат выразил соболезнования США первым (за несколько минут до катастрофы).

★ Arafat was the first to express his condolences to the US (a few minutes before the disaster).

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

V.2.C. Выступление Путина по телевидению после покушения на президента США: «Я хотел бы выразить соболезнования народу США по поводу безвременной кончины президента США Джорджа Буша...» – «Постойте, но ведь он выжил...» Путин подзывает Касьянова и говорит: «Что ж ты, братец, меня позоришь?» – «Сию минуту исправим.»

★ Putin is delivering a speech on television after an attempt on the life of the US president: “I would like to offer my condolences to the US people over the untimely death of the US president George Bush...” – “Wait, he has survived...” Putins beckons Kasyanov over and says: “Listen, fellow, you are disgracing me.” – “We’ll rectify this fault right away!”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

V.2.D. Выступление президента России В. В. Путина: «Хочу выразить глубокое соболезнование американскому народу в связи со смертью американского президента Джорджа Буша-Младшего!» Реплика из зала: «Владимир Владимирович так он же ещё жив!!!» Путин к начальнику ФСБ: «Что ж ты меня братец позоришь?» – «Сию минуту исправим!»

★ The speech delivered by the Russian president Vladimir Putin: “I would like to express my deepest condolences to American people over the death of the US president George Bush Junior.” A remark from the audience: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, he is still alive!!!” Putin turns to the head of the Federal Security Service and says “Listen fellow, you are disgracing me.” – “We’ll rectify this fault right away!”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-050.html>)

V.2.E. Президент Путин высказал глубокие и искренние соболезнования гражданам США в связи с серией терактов. За час до первого крушения.

★ President Putin expressed his deep and sincere condolences to US citizens over a series of terrorist attacks. One hour before the first assault.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

V.2.F. Путин звонит Бушу и говорит: «Я вам соболезную в связи с терактами.» Буш отвечает: «Но у нас нет никаких терактов.» – «Ой, извини, попозже позвоню.»

★ Putin calls Bush and says: “My condolences to you over the terrorist attacks.” Bush answers: “But we’ve had no terrorist attacks.” – “Ooops, sorry. I’ll call a bit later then.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI. PUTIN AND HIS ACTIVITIES AS PRESIDENT

VI.1. Putin after the inauguration

Up until recently, this joke-type was circulating as a joke about Yeltsin (whose wife is called Naina):

Приходит Ельцин домой, на ногах не стоит. «Боря!» кричит Наина Иосифовна. «Где же это ты так?!» – «Наина...» – «Ну что «Наина», что «Наина!» Подумай о стране!» – «Наина...» – «Ну что «Наина!» О здоровье своем подумай!» – «Наина...» – «Боря, я шестьдесят лет Наина!» – «На ина... гу... руации...»

★ Yeltsin comes home and is so drunk that he is unable to stand firmly on his legs. “Borya!” yells Naina Iosifovna. “Where have you been boozing?” – “Naina...” – “Naina-Naina’. Think about your country!” – “Naina...” – “What ‘Naina’! Think about your health!” – “Naina...” – “Borya, I have been called by that name for 60 years!” – “At the in...augu...ration...” [In Russian, the name ‘Naina’ sounds the same as the beginning of the phrase ‘at the inauguration’ (*на инаугурации*)] (Вукон 2005)

VI.1.A. Приходит пьяный Путин домой, еле на ногах стоит. Встречает жену. Жена: «Вова, где же ты так напился-то, а?» Путин: «Наина...» Жена: «Какая же я Наина, это у Борьки – Наина.» Путин: «Наина...» Жена: «Да я всю жизнь была Людмилой, ты чего?» Путин: «На инаугурации!»

★ Putin comes home drunk and can hardly stand firmly on his legs. His wife comes out to greet him and says: “Vova, where have you been boozing?” Putin: “Naina...” His wife: “I’m not Naina. Naina is Borka’s wife.” Putin: “Naina...” – “I have been called Lyudmila my whole life! What’s wring with you?” Putin: “At the inauguration [*на инаугурации*]!” (IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.2. Putin receives the nuclear football

VI.2.A. В Кремле, в торжественной обстановке, Ельцин передал Путину чемоданчик с ядерной кнопкой. Через полчаса Путин возвращает Ельцину чемоданчик и говорит обиженно: «Вас надо в сортире мочить, Борис Николаевич. Кнопка-то не работает!»

★ Yeltsin hands over the nuclear football to Putin during a festive ceremony in the Kremlin. Half an hour later, Putin returns the football to Yeltsin and says, aggrievedly: “You should be whacked in the toilet, Boris Nikolaevich. The red button is not working!” (IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.3. Putin and vegetables

The noun *vegetable* [овощ (vulg.)] is used to denote a person in a helpless condition, for example, in a coma.

VI.3.A. Есть совершенно замечательный анекдот, как Путин, Фрадков и другие приходят в ресторан. К Путину подлетает официант и говорит: «Владимир Владимирович, что будете кушать?» Владимир Владимирович

говорит: «Мясо!» Официант: «А овощи?» Путин, обращившись к коллегам: «А овощи тоже будут мясо!»

★ There is a marvellous joke telling how Putin, Fradkov and others come to a restaurant. A waiter darts towards Putin and says: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, what would you like eat?” Vladimir Vladimirovich answers: “Meat!” The waiter: “And what about the vegetables?” Putin, turning to his colleagues: “And the vegetables will also eat meat.”

(OC)

VI.3.B. В основном анекдоты о Путине рассказывают с намеком на консолидацию власти в Кремле, о его стремлении подавить оппозицию, о том, как затыкают рот независимым фигурам и о том, как исполнительная власть доминирует над остальными властями.

Путин идет в ресторан. С ним – главы обеих палат парламента. Подходит официант и спрашивает Путина, что гости будут заказывать. «Я буду мясо» – «А как же овощи?» – «Овощи? Они тоже будут мясо.»

★ The majority of jokes about Putin contain hints at the consolidation of power in the Kremlin, at the president’s attempts to suppress opposition, at how independent figures are forced to shut up and at how the executive dominates the other branches of power.

Putin comes to a restaurant with the heads of both parliamentary chambers. A waiter walks up and asks Putin what they are going to order. “I think I’ll go for the meat.” – “And what about the vegetables?” – “The vegetables? They’ll go for the meat as well.”

(IP: Berry 2006)

VI.3.C. Кроме того, анекдот выстроил свою вертикаль власти, построенную на презрении к подчиненным: Путин со спикером Думы и министрами идет в ресторан. Официант его спрашивает: «Вы будете мясо или рыбу?» – «Мясо.» – «А овощи?» – «Овощи тоже будут мясо.»

★ This joke also builds its own ‘vertical of power’, based on contempt to one’s subordinates. Putin, the Duma speaker and deputies go to a restaurant. The waiter asks Putin: “Would you like beef or fish?” – “Beef, please.” – “What about the vegetables?” – “The vegetables will also have beef.”

(IP: Yerofeev 2006)

VI.4. Briefly about the principal

VI.4.A. В эфире новости. Сейчас коротко о главном. Главный у нас по-прежнему Путин.

★ A new bulletin on TV. And now briefly about the principal [events]. Putin is still the principal.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.4.B. На этой неделе в Кремлевском Дворце состоится гала-концерт всех звезд “Старые и Новые Песни о Главном”. На концерте будет присутствовать сам Главный.

★ This week, an All-Star Gala Concert takes place at the Kremlin Palace. It's entitled 'The old and the new songs about the Most Important'. The Most Important himself will be in attendance.
(PP: Svobodnoe 2008: 12)

VI.5. Putin at the Council of Ministers

VI.5.A. Заседание Совета министров. Выступает Путин. «Товарищи. Должен сказать вам правду. Положение в стране просто ху#вое.» Голос из зала: «А вы не приукрашиваете?»

★ Putin is holding the floor at the session of the Council of Ministers: "Comrades. I will be honest with you. The situation in the country is f***ing terrible." A voice from the audience: "Are you sure it's not a whitewash?"
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.6. Putin at the casino

VI.6.A. Вчера Путин был в казино. Сегодня был выплачен весь долг по зарплатам и пенсиям за весь год...

★ Yesterday Putin was at the casino. Today he paid off the wages and pensions debt for the entire year.
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.7. A contract with Coca-Cola

The joke-type arose after Yeltsin had issued a decree declaring the tricolor white-blue-red to be the national flag of Russia, colours which match the colour of toothpaste produced by Aquafresh.

VI.7.A. Звонок Путину из компании «Кока-Кола»: «Простите, а нельзя ли вернуть России красный флаг, только внизу мелким шрифтом пустить надпись: «Always Coca-Cola?» – «Гм-м, мне нужно посоветоваться с правительством...» Путин кладет трубку, звонит Касьянову: «Привет, ты не помнишь, когда у нас контракт с «Аквафрешем» заканчивается?»

★ Putin receives a phone call from the Coca-Cola company: "Would it be possible to make the national Russian flag red again and to place the words "Always Coca-Cola" in small print at its bottom?" – "Hmm... I need to consult with the government." Putin hangs up and calls Kasyanov. "Hi there. Do you remember when our contract with Aquafresh expires?"
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.7.B. Звонок Путину от президента компании «Кока-кола»: «Владимир Владимирович, вы меняете гимн страны, может и флаг на прежний, красный, поменяете? А если и еще в уголочке маленькими белыми буквами напишите «Coca-Cola», то мы решим все ваши финансовые проблемы с пенсиями, с зарплатами бюджетникам на несколько лет вперед...» Прикрыв трубку ладонью, Путин у Касьянова: «С «Аква Фрэш» когда у нас там контракт заканчивается?»

★ Putin receives a phone call from the Coca-Cola company. “Vladimir Vladimirovich, since you have already changed the national anthem, maybe you could also change the national flag to the one that was before? And if you would be so kind as to place a small white Coca-Cola logo in its corner we will solve all your financial problems with pensions to the elderly and salaries to the state-paid employees for several years to come.” Putin covers the receiver with his palm and asks Kasyanov: “When does our contract with Aquafresh expire?”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.7.C. Наконец, возвращение гимна было встречено великолепным и уже совершенно свежим примером политического анекдота, который не стыдно поместить в любую антологию: «Вы вернули гимн,» спрашивают президента, «так, может, и флаг вернете? Красный вместо трехцветного?» – «Минуточку,» отвечает он, «я только посмотрю, когда у нас там заканчивается контракт с «Аквафреш».»

★ The restoration of the anthem was marked by the appearance of a wonderful and entirely new specimen of the political joke, which can be readily included into any anthology: “You have restored the former anthem,” the president was asked. “Maybe you will restore the flag as well? The red instead of the tricolour.” – “One second please,” answered the president. “I just need to check when our contract with Aquafresh expires.”

(PP: Вуков 2005)

VI.8. New Stimorol commercial

VI.8.A. Новая реклама «Стиморола»: На экране – Путин: «Если застанем террористов в туалете, то и в сортире их замочим...» Титры: ИНОГДА ЛУЧШЕ ЖЕВАТЬ, ЧЕМ ГОВОРИТЬ.

★ Here’s the new Stimorol commercial: Putin is shown on the screen: “If we find terrorists in the toilet, we’ll whack them in the toilet.” Slogan: “SOME-TIMES IT’S BETTER TO CHEW RATHER THAN TALK”.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.9. The hairdresser asks about Chechnya

The joke-type used to be very popular in the 1970–1980s.

Парикмахер, стригущий Брежнева, несколько раз задает ему вопросы о Польше. В конце концов раздраженный Брежнев спрашивает: «Что это вы меня все время расспрашиваете о Польше?» – «Мне это помогает в работе. У вас от этого волосы дыбом встают,» отвечает парикмахер.

★ The hairdresser is cutting Brezhnev’s hair and keeps asking him questions about Poland. Finally, Brezhnev says irritably: “Why do you keep asking me about Poland?” – “That makes your hair stand on end and helps me do my job,” answers the hairdresser.

(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 237, the editors’ dating – 1981)

VI.9.A. Парикмахер Путина во время стрижки все время расспрашивал его о Чечне. Путин спросил: «Вы что, чеченец?» – «Нет, просто когда Вы говорите про Чечню, мне удобнее Вас стричь – у Вас волосы становятся дыбом.»

★ The hairdresser keeps asking Putin about Chechnya while giving him a haircut. Finally, Putin says: “Are you a Chechen?” – “No, I’m not. It’s just that it’s much more convenient to give you a trim when you talk about Chechnya. You hair stands on end.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.9.B. Приходит Путин в парикмахерскую. Парикмахер стрижет его и все время спрашивает Путина про Чечню. Все Чечня и Чечня. Как там в Чечне? Когда закончится война в Чечне? И т.д. Путин не выдержал: «Ну чего тебя эта Чечня слишком ебёт, что ли?» – «Да нет, мне насрать вообще-то.» – «А чего спрашиваешь тогда?» – «Да просто у вас при слове “Чечня” волосы дыбом встают, стричь удобнее.»

★ Putin is at his hairdresser’s. The hairdresser is giving him a trim and keeps asking him about Chechnya. Chechnya this, Chechnya that. How’s Chechnya? When will the war be over in Chechnya? And so on and so forth. Finally, Putin loses his patience: “Why is Chechnya is so f***ing important to you?” – “Actually, I don’t give a shit about it.” – “Why do you keep pestering me then?” – “It’s just that when you hear the word ‘Chechnya’ you hair stand on end and it is easier to trim it.”

(<http://nepom.ru/anekdots/?raz=4&ord=new>)

VI.10. Looking to trade my tennis racket for a judo outfit

President Putin, whose hobby is judo, succeeded Yeltsin, whose hobby was tennis.

VI.10.A. Из объявления в администрации президента: «Меняю теннисную ракетку на костюм для дзюдо.»

★ A notice on the announcement board in the presidential administration: “Looking to trade my tennis racket for a judo outfit.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.11. What does the Vladimir Central Prison mean?

The Vladimir Central Prison [*Владимирский централ*, ‘Vladimirs central’] is a famous penal institution.

VI.11.A. Владимирский централ – это вертикаль власти, построенная Владимиром Путиным.

★ The Vladimir Central Prison is the vertical line of power created by Vladimir Putin.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI. 12. What does the vertical line of power mean?

In Russian, the word *клетка* may mean either ‘square’, ‘cell’, or ‘cage’.

VI.12.A. После формирования горизонталей власти В. В. Путин приступил к созданию вертикалей власти. Таким образом, к 2002 году будет полностью закончена клетка власти...

★ Having created the horizontal lines of power, V. V. Putin has set out to consolidate the vertical ones. Thus, the entire cage of power will have been completed by 2002...

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.12.B. Ответом на обновление политической лексики стала такая, например, милая шутка: «Закончив строительство вертикалей власти, президент приступил к отстраиванию горизонталей власти. К 2008 году клетка власти будет достроена.»

★ Among the responses to political neologisms was, for example, the following sweet joke: “Having completed the vertical lines of power, the president has set out to build the horizontal ones. By 2008, the cage of power will have been completed.”

(PP: Выков 2005)

VI.13. Where does the horizontal line of power come from?

VI.13.A. Буш созвал аналитиков ЦРУ и спрашивает: «Россия ведет себя не так, как раньше. Каковы ваши объяснения?» Почесали аналитики репу: «Путин укрепляет горизонталь власти.» Буш снова их спрашивает: «Откуда эта горизонталь взялась?» – «А это вертикаль рухнула...»

★ Bush summons the CIA analysts and asks them: “Russia’s behaviour has changed dramatically. How would you explain that?” The analysts scratch their heads: “Putin has been consolidating the horizontal line of power.” Bush: “Where does this horizontal line come from?” – “Well, the vertical line has collapsed...”

(OC: 19.09.2004)

VI.14. Why did Putin kiss the baby-boy Nikita on the tummy?

VI.14.A. «Почему ВВП поцеловал мальчика Никиту в живот?» – «Это была попытка ВВП сгладить неприятное впечатление от разгона гей-парада перед саммитом «большой восьмерки».»

★ “Why did VVP [Putin] kiss the baby-boy Nikita on the tummy?” – “He did it in an attempt to counteract the unfavourable impression created by the dispersal of the gay parade before the G8 Summit.”

(OC: N. B., born in 1970, Moscow, 7.07.06)

VI.15. A refusal to shake hands with Putin

VI.15.A. Встречаются два мужика, один другому говорит: «Я,» говорит, «теперь правую руку не буду мыть!» – «Это чего это?» спрашивает второй. «А к нам на предприятие вчера Путин приезжал... руки всем жал...» – «Ну!» – «А я не подал!»

★ Two guys meet and one says to the other: “I will not wash my right hand from now on.” – “Why not?” – “Putin came to our company yesterday and shook hands with everyone.” – “Well?” – “I did not hold out mine!”
(LJ: 26.10.2007)

VI.16. The success of Putin’s reforms

VI.16.A. В случае успеха всех путинских реформ меняю два телевизора на один хороший радиоприемник.

★ If Putin’s reforms prove successful, I will swap two TV-sets for one good radio.

(PP: Vasilyev 2001)

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdote/anekdote20-030.html>)

VI.17. Chechens are eager to go to Kazakhstan

VI.17.A. Сталин Путину: «Что ты возишься с этими чеченцами? Выслал в Казахстан – и дружба народов.» Путин – Сталину: «Кто возится? Они у меня сами в Казахстан просятся.»

★ Stalin says to Putin: “Why do you keep wet-nursing those Chechens? Deport them to Kazakhstan and you’ll get friendship between peoples par excellence.” – “Who’s wet-nursing, I wonder? Nowadays, they are eager to go to Kazakhstan themselves.”

(CA: Krikmann 2004: No. 279)

VI.18. Putin promises to show who is the boss

VI.18.A. После выборов, Путин с женой ложатся спать, жена толкает его: «Володь, ты не боишься, ведь посмотри – Ленина обосрала, Сталина, Хрущева, Брежнева обосрала, про Горбачева с Ельциным и говорить нечего.» Путин отвечает, поворачиваясь на бок: «Не мешай спать, я им такую жизнь устрою, им срать нечем будет.»

★ After the elections, Putin and his wife go to bed. She pushes him and says: “Volodja, aren’t you afraid? Just think about it: they are saying so much crap about Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, not to mention Gorbachev and Yeltsin.” Putin answers turning over to his side: “Lemme sleep will ya? I’ll give them hell, so they will have no more crap.”

(CA: Krikmann 2004: No. 349)

VI.19. Putin and the Basmanny District Court of Moscow

The terms ‘Basmannyi court’ and ‘Basmannyi-style judiciary’ were coined by political opposition in Russia and named after the Basmannyi District Court in Moscow following a number of prominent cases. The terms imply complete lack of judicial independence.

VI.19.A. Вот меня часто инвесторы спрашивают: «Владимир Владимирович, если в Россию инвестировать, дивиденды будут?» Я им отвечаю, что будут обязательно, а какие и сколько – это уж Басманнский суд определит.

★ I am often asked by investors: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, if we invest into Russia, will we get our dividends?” I always answer them that they surely will and that the Basmannyi District Court will determine the kind and size of those dividends.

(OC: 30.05.2004)

VI.20. Putin is visiting a centre for mentally challenged children

Apparently, this joke derives from the 1930s joke-type about Stalin and Hitler’s visit to a lunatic asylum (Arkhipova & Melnichenko 2009: 218):

Во время инспекции другой клиники Геринг замечает двух людей, которые стоят впереди согнанных больных и не приветствуют его. Он спрашивает, в чем причина такого упущения, и они ему в ответ говорят: «Все эти люди – сумасшедшие, а мы – дежурные санитары.»

★ When visiting another asylum, Göring notices that two men standing in the front line of the assembled patients have failed to give the Hitler salute. When he asks them the reason for this omission he is told: “All these chaps are the crazy ones, but the two of us are the charge nurses.”

Гитлер посещает сумасшедший дом. Проходя мимо выстроенных в ряд больных, он замечает человека, который не приветствует его [«Хайль Гитлер!»]. Он рявкает на него: «Почему вы не делаете, как другие?» – «Мой фюрер, я санитар, а не сумасшедший,» отвечает ему этот человек.»

★ Hitler visits a lunatic asylum. The patients give the Hitler salute. As he passes down the line, he comes across a man who isn’t saluting [“Heil Hitler!”]. “Aren’t you like the others?” he barks. “Mein Führer, I’m the nurse, I’m not crazy!” comes the answer.

VI.20.A. Владимир Владимирович Путин, следуя своей привычке совершать неординарные поступки, приехал в детский дом для умственно отсталых детей. Навстречу мальчик. ВВП: «Тебя как зовут, мальчик?» Мальчик (гнусаво): «Не знаю!» Мальчику подсказывают: «Вася! Вася!» Мальчик: «Вася!» ВВП: «Молодец! А какой сегодня день недели?» – «Не знаю!» ВВП: «А как зовут маму?» – «Не знаю!» ВВП: «А где ты находишься?» – «Не знаю!» ВВП: «А я кто? Знаешь?» – «Знаю!» (Вокруг оживление: Ну, молодец, Пугина знает!!!) ВВП: «Кто я?» Мальчик: «Новенький!!!»

★ Demonstrating once again his propensity for extraordinary behaviour, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin comes to visit a centre for mentally challenged children. There, he comes across a little boy. VVP asks: “What’s your name, lad?” The boy answers (in nasal tones): “I don’t know.” The child is being prompted: “Vasya! Vasya!” The boy: “Vasya!” VVP: “Good boy! And what day of the week is it today?” – “I don’t know.” VVP: “And what’s your mother’s name?” – “I don’t know!” VVP: “And where are you?” – “I don’t know.” VVP: “Do you know who I am?” – “I do!” (This answer elicits encouraging whispers: Good boy, knows who Putin is!) VVP: “Well, who am I?” The boy: “A newcomer!”

(OC: 29.09.2000)

VI.21. Putin promises to help prisons out

Alexander Voloshin was the Chief of staff during Putin’s terms as President and has been seen as the power behind the throne in Moscow since Yeltsin’s administration.

VI.21.A. Путин наносит официальный визит вместе с Волошиным в одну из российских школ. Интересуется у директора, какие проблемы имеются, на что директор отвечает: «Да вот, здание школы того и гляди развалится, ремонт нужен, никто из детей ни разу в жизни не видел компьютера, нужно бы организовать компьютерный класс. Но у школы нет денег.» Путин: «Я отлично понимаю вашу проблему, но в настоящее время страна находится в глубоком экономическом кризисе и у нее нет возможности помочь вам материально. Однако ваша просьба не останется без внимания, и как только у страны будут деньги, вам обязательно будет оказана помощь.»

Следующее место посещения Путина – Лефортовская тюрьма. Там начальник тюрьмы, естественно, тоже жалуется ему на свои проблемы. Путин распоряжается: «Приказываю в кратчайшие сроки устранить перенаселенность камер, чтобы в каждой камере был телевизор, а у каждого заключенного – свой компьютер!» После того как они уходят, Волошин интересуется: «Владимир Владимирович, а почему вы отказались помочь школе, но помогли тюрьме?» – «Так ведь согласитесь: снова попасть в школу нам с вами вряд ли когда-нибудь доведется.»

★ Putin and Voloshin paying an official visit to one of Russian schools. The president is willing to know what problems the school has. The headmaster answers: “The building will soon fall apart, so it desperately needs renovation. None of the children has ever seen a computer, so we would like to organise a computer class. The school, however, does not have money for all this.” Putin: “I understand your problem perfectly well, but at the moment the country is experiencing a severe economic recession and we do not have the financial means to help you out. However, your request shall be processed and as soon as the money is available, you will receive the funds you are asking for.”

The next destination is the Lefortovo prison. There, the prison governor also starts complaining about the troubled times. Putin orders: “Eliminate the overcrowding problem as soon as possible and put a TV-set and computers into every prison cell!” After they leave, Voloshyn asks: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, why did you refuse to support the school and helped the prison instead.” – “Well, you must admit that it is highly unlikely that we will ever get into school again.”
(OC: 3.06.2003)

VI.22. Putin invites the chief joke-teller to the Kremlin

The 1930s saw the birth of the joke-type about a conversation between “the supreme ruler” and “the chief joke-teller”:

Известный большевистский деятель и сочинитель многих советских политических анекдотов Карл Радек был вызван Сталиным. «Ты что это обо мне анекдоты сочиняешь?» набросился на него Сталин. «Товарищ Сталин, но анекдот, что вы вождь революции, на самом деле не мой анекдот!»

★ The famous Bolshevik figure and the author of many Soviet political jokes Karl Radek was once summoned to Stalin: “How dare you write jokes about me!” – “But Comrade Stalin, the joke about you being the leader of the revolution is not actually my joke!” (n.d. – 194?)
(Antisovetskie 194?: 50)

Задержали анекдотчика, доложили Хрущеву. Хрущев распорядился привести его к нему, чтобы послушать анекдоты. Вводят анекдотчика. «Какая мебель!... Какая обстановка! Какие ковры!» говорит анекдотчик. «Скоро у всех в нашей стране будет такое,» отвечает Хрущев. «Одно из двух: или вы будете рассказывать анекдоты ИЛИ Я.»

★ Khrushchev was informed that a joke teller had been detained. Khrushchev wanted to listen to his jokes and ordered his men to fetch him. “What furniture, what interiors, what carpets!” began the joke teller. “Soon every person in our country will enjoy such comfort,” answered Khrushchev. “It’s either-or. Either you will be telling jokes, OR I will do that.”
(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 201)

Как-то раз Ельцин узнал, что про него Лигачев рассказывает анекдоты. В приступе гнева он ворвался на заседание. Политбюро и с порога закричал: «Егор Кузьмич! Как Вы смеете?! Или Вы не знаете, что руководимая мною оппозиция из последних сил борется за консолидацию всего общества на платформе перестройки?» – «Борис, ты не прав,» спокойно возразил Лигачев, «этот анекдот я еще никому не рассказывал!»

★ Yeltsin once learned that Ligachev had been telling jokes about him. In a fit of anger he stormed into the room where the Politburo session was taking place and started yelling from across the threshold: “Egor Kuzmich! How dare you! Don’t you know that the opposition that I lead is doing its utmost to unite the entire society under the banner of Perestroika!” – “Boris, you are wrong,» rejoined Ligachev calmly. “I haven’t told this joke to anyone yet!”
(Vot takoi 1990: 14)

VI.22.A. Путин решил познакомиться с главным анекдотчиком страны и пригласил его в Кремль. Тот пришел, оглядывает кабинет и восхищается: «Какая обстановка!» Путин: «Скоро так будет в каждой российской квартире!» – «Одно из двух: или вы будете рассказывать анекдоты, или я.»

★ Putin decided to get to know the chief joke teller of the country and invited him to the Kremlin. The invitee came into the office and began to express his admiration. “What wonderful furnishings!” Putin: “Soon such furnishings will be in every Russian flat!” – “It’s either or: either you will be telling jokes, or I will do that.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VI.23. Putin gathers a collection of joke tellers

See also Krikmann 2004: No. 3. This joke-type usually features Brezhnev. In Estonia, there was usually a dialogue between Kekkonen and Brezhnev: Kekkonen collected jokes about himself, Brezhnev collected the joke tellers.

«Леонид Ильич, какое у вас хобби?» – «Я собираю анекдоты о себе.» – «И много вам удалось собрать?» – «Два с половиной лагеря.»

★ “Leonid Plyich, what’s your hobby?” – “I collect jokes about myself.” – “How large is your collection already?” – “Two and a half penal labour camps.”

(1972)

(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 229)

У Сталина интересуются его хобби. Он отвечает, что коллекционирует анекдоты. «И много вы их уже собрали?» спрашивают его. «Да сотня лагерей будет,» отвечает Сталин.

★ Stalin is asked about his hobby. He answers that he collects jokes. “Have you got a large collection already?” – “Over a hundred camps.”

(Arkhipova & Melnichenko 2009: 179)

VI.23.A. Разговор двух мужиков: «Ты знаешь, кто у нас в стране больше всех политические анекдоты любит?» – «Не-а.» – «Путин!» – «Ну да??» – «Угу, он их коллекционирует... Вместе с рассказчиками.»

★ Two guys are having a conversation: “Do you know who is the greatest lover of political jokes in the country?” – “Nope.” – “Putin!” – “Really?” – “Yep. He collects them... Together with those who tell them.”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20.html>)

VI.24. A call from Saint-Petersburg

VI.24.A. «Алло, добрый день, я звоню из Петербурга». Ответ: «Зачем же сразу начинать с угроз?»

Этот анекдот хорошо иллюстрирует важность, которую приобрел в Кремле клан петербуржцев, приведенный Владимиром Путиным и делящийся на две подгруппы: силовиков, имеющих важные министерства, и либералов вроде министра экономики Германа Грефа или министра финансов Алексея Кудрина.

★ “Hello, I am calling from Saint-Petersburg.” – “There is no need to begin a conversation with a threat.”

This joke is a perfect illustration of the enormous importance that has been attained by the clan of Petersburgers promoted by Vladimir Putin and consisting of two basic groups: defense and law enforcement officials controlling the key ministries and liberals such as the Minister of Economics German Gref and the Minister of Finance Aleksey Kudrin.

(PP: Belgorodskaya 2002)

VI.24.B. Помните анекдот: в Москве раздается междугородный звонок. «Алло, Москва? Это вас Петербург беспокоит.» – «Ну, зачем же начинать с угрозы?»

★ Do you remember this joke? A long-distance call to Moscow. “Hello, Moscow? We are calling you from Saint-Petersburg.” – “Why do you start a conversation with a threat?”

(PP: Petrov 2002)

VI.25. A Petersburger in Moscow

VI.25.A. Приехал петербуржец в Москву. Гуляет по Арбату. Вдруг подходит мент и спрашивает документы. Петербуржец (недоуменно): «А что, с Владимиром Владимировичем что-то случилось?»

★ A Petersburger has come to Moscow and is walking along the Arbat Street. Suddenly a cop approaches and asks to show the identification papers. The Petersburger (looking puzzled): “Has anything happened to Vladimir Vladimirovich?”

(IP: <http://taina.aib.ru/an/putin/putin1.htm>)

VI.26. The Chinese are shifting the oil pipeline

VI.26.A. Сегодня мы публикуем анекдоты, которые прислал нам читатель из Зейского района В. Кочегаров. [...] Оба анекдота касаются строительства нефтепровода «Восточная Сибирь – Тихий океан», который, как известно, проходит и по территории Амурской области. Звонит Путин директору «Транснефти» Вайнштоку: «Сеня, не делайте из меня идиота! Не можете справиться сами – обратитесь за помощью к китайским товарищам. В конце концов, это их нефть.» На следующий день группа китайских товарищей в количестве 400 млн. человек отодвинула Байкал на 200 км от трубы.

★ Today we would like to publish the jokes that were sent to us by one of our readers, Mr. Kochegarov from the Zeya region. Both jokes are about the construction of the Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean pipeline running across the Amurskaya oblast. Putin is calling Vainstock, the CEO of the Transneft state company: “Senya, stop making a fool of me! If you cannot handle it yourself, turn to our Chinese friends for help. This is their oil after all.” The next day a group of Chinese colleagues numbering 400 million people shifted Lake Baikal 200 km away from the pipe.

(PP: Amurskaya 2006)

VI.27. The shifting of the oil pipeline

VI.27.A. Вызывает Путин директора «Транснефти» Вайнштока по поводу прокладки нефтепровода: «Семен, у нас гражданское общество. Власть ответственна перед людьми за свои решения. И все такое. Ну, вы в курсе. Словом, что вам необходимо для переноса нефтепровода к северу от Байкала, чтобы мы смогли предъявить народу карту с новой трассой?» – «Да практически ничего, Владимир Владимирович. Только резинка и карандаш.»

★ Putin summons Vainstock, the CEO of Transneft, to discuss the construction of the oil pipeline with him: “Semen, we live in a civil society. The government bears responsibility before the people for its decisions. Bla-bla-bla. Well, you know what I’m talking about. To put it simply, what do you need to shift the pipeline to the north of Lake Baikal, so that we could present a map with the new motorway to the public?” – “Not much, really, Vladimir Vladimirovich. We just need a pencil and a rubber.”

(PP: Amurskaya 2006)

VI.28. Putin’s online conference

VI.28.A. Интернет-конференция В. В. Путина. «Мне вот тут пришло 4 миллиона сообщений с одним вопросом: когда наконец, увеличат зарплату? По-моему, это просто спам!»

★ The online conference of V. V. Putin: “I have received 4 million messages with one and the same question: when will there finally be a wage increase? I think this is simply spam!”

(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004b)

VI.29. Putin is returning home by underground

VI.29.A. В ответ на участвовавшие жалобы на перекрытие центральных магистралей города Владимир Владимирович Путин принял решение поехать домой на метро. В связи с чем пресс-служба московского метрополитена сообщает, что сегодня с 16:00 до 21:00 для пассажиров будут закрыты арбатско-покровская и филевская линии, а так же с 17:00 до 21:00 будут остановлены все поезда кольцевой линии.

★ In response to the growing number of complaints about the closure of the major thoroughfares, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin has decided to go home by underground. In view of that, the press service of the Moscow underground reports that today the Arbatsko-Pskovskaya and Filevskaya lines will be closed for passengers from 16.00 until 21.00 and that the trains of the circular line will be stopped from 17.00 until 21.00.

(PP: Bykov 2005)

VI.30. The deputation of teachers comes to Putin

Обделенная категория общества – учителя – решили к Ельцину прийти, пожаловаться на проблемы. Ельцин: «Чаво вам?» Учителя: «Да вот, Борис Николаевич, денег нету...» Ельцин: «Ну, эта... вот... панимашь... без денег заходите.»

★ The disadvantaged section of the society – the teachers – have decided to come to Yeltsin and air their grievances. Yeltsin: “What dya want?” The teachers: “Well, Boris Nikolaevich ... we are practically penniless...” Yeltsin: “Eh.. Well... Ya see... Come in without money then.”

(IP: <http://www.peoples.ru/art/literature/poetry/oldage/annensky/anekdot.html>)

VI.30.A. «Владимир Владимирович! Это делегация учителей! Мы давно хотим к вам попасть, у нас совсем нет денег!» – «Ничего страшного, заходите так.»

★ “Vladimir Vladimirovich. We are a deputation of teachers. We have long wanted to make an appointment with you. We have absolutely no money!” – “That’s all right. You may come in without money.”

(PP: Выков 2005)

VI.31. Putin on the export of raw materials

VI.31.A. Словно подтверждая этот тезис, народ срочно сочинил предельно циничные, лишённые всяких иллюзий анекдоты, скажем, о том, как Путин выступает с заявлением: «Пора прекратить богатеть исключительно за счет вывоза сырья!» – и приказывает начать ввозить радиоактивные отходы.

★ As if supporting this claim, the public has quickly began to compose cynical and skeptical jokes as, for instance, the following one featuring Putin’s announcement: “It’s high time to stop accumulating wealth merely through the export of raw materials and to also start importing radioactive waste.”

(PP: Выков 2005)

VI.32. Putin’s achievement is the falling standard of life

VI.32.A. Причем шутит он подчас весьма остроумно – вот, например, такой свежак из коллекции Раскина: Письмо благодарных россиян: «Уважаемый господин президент! В ответ на клеветнические выпады противников монетизации льгот, утверждающих, что ухудшение нашей жизни – ваша вина, мы твердо отвечаем: нет! Это ваша заслуга!»

★ It should be pointed out that his jokes can sometimes be really witty. Check out the following fresh specimen in Raskin’s collection: A letter from the grateful public: “Dear Mr. President, in response to the slanderous attacks of those who decry the monetisation of benefits claiming that the falling standard of life is your fault, we would like to assert: No! It is your achievement!”

(PP: Выков 2005)

VI.33. Fradkov's resignation

VI.33.A. За день до отставки председателя правительства Михаила Фрадкова Путин вызывает его к себе: «Слушай, Фрадков! Никак не могу найти тебя на моей школьной фотографии...»

★ Putin summons the chairman of the government Mikhail Fradkov the day before the latter's resignation: "Listen, Fradkov! For some reason I cannot find you on my school photograph..."

(IP: Mysli 2007)

VI.34. Politkovskaya's assassins

Anna Politkovskaya was a Russian journalist, author and human rights activist well known for her opposition to the Chechen conflict and then-Russian President Vladimir Putin; the government of Russia was accused for not trying to identify the assassin(s) effectively enough.

VI.34.A. Однажды Владимир Владимирович Путин сидел в своем кремлевском кабинете и тихо жалел, что закончилось лето. Вдруг высокие двери кабинета растворились, и в помещение один за другим стали заходить незнакомые президенту люди. «Э,» пробормотал президент. Люди заполняли кабинет и смирно выстраивались в шеренги вдоль стен. Когда в кабинете почти уже не осталось места, в открытые двери вошел генеральный прокурор РФ Юрий Чайка. «Выбирай, брателло!» радостно сказал Чайка. «Кого выбирать?» не понял Владимир Владимирович. «Убийц Политковской,» пояснил Чайка, «нам нужно не менее десяти.»

★ Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was once sitting in his Kremlin office and feeling sorry that the summer had ended. Suddenly, the tall office doors were flung open and unfamiliar people started streaming into the room. "Mmm...", murmured the president. The people were filling the office and forming lines along the walls. When the room was almost full, the Prosecutor General Yury Chaika came through the open doors. "You pick, chap!" said he merrily. "Whom am I supposed to pick?" – "Politkovskaya's assassins" explained Chaika. "We need at least ten of those."

(IP: Mysli 2007)

VI.35. Putin's daughter is being admitted to the university

VI.35.A. Дочь Путина собралась поступать в институт – при таком огромном конкурсе – 100 институтов на место!

★ Putin's daughter has decided to enter a university. The competition is really fierce: 100 universities per person.

(OC: 2006)

VI.35.B. Дочь Владимира Путина поступила в Институт. Конкурс был огромный – 40 институтов на место.

★ Vladimir Putin's daughter entered the university. The competition was tough: 40 higher education institutions per person.

(IP: Mysli 2007)

VI.36. Oligarchs at the meeting with Putin

VI.36.A. Собрались олигархи на встречу с Путиным. Зашли в зал, расселись. Путин входит, все вскакивают и кричат: «Здра-а-аствуйте, Владимир Влади-и-имирович!» Путин проходит к своему креслу и говорит: «Здравствуйте, садитесь.» Все садятся. Путин открывает журнал: «Абрамович!» – «Я!» – «Бендукидзе!» – «Я!» – «Вексельберг!» – «Я!» ... Проверив всех по списку, Путин закрывает журнал «Форбс».

★ The oligarchs are about to meet Putin. They enter the hall and take seats. Putin comes in; all jump to their feet and shout: “Good morning, Vladimir Vladimirovich!” Putin walks up to his chair and says: “Good morning, sit down.” All sit down. Putin opens the register / magazine [*журнал*] and starts a roll-call: “Abramovich!” – “Present!” – “Bendukidze!” – “Present!” – “Vekselberg!” – “Present!” ... Having checked the entire list, Putin closes the Forbes Magazine [*журнал*; in Russian the word *журнал* can mean ‘magazine’, ‘log’, ‘diary’, ‘register’, etc.]

(IP: Mysli 2007)

VI.37. Putin finds a watch

This joke-type about the heads of Soviet delegations stealing valuable objects used to be very popular.

Рассказывали также такую историю, утверждая, что это совершеннейшая правда. Два советских дипломата были в Лондоне на банкете чуть ли ни у самой королевы. Один дипломат заметил, как второй спер со стола золотую ложку и положил ее во внутренний карман пиджака, и потребовал, чтобы тот ложку вынул и положил обратно на стол или отдал ему (рассказывали по-разному), но второй отказался это сделать и заявил, что ложку не брал. Тогда первый дипломат встал и предложил присутствующим показать фокус. Он сказал: «У нас, в СССР, происходят такие чудеса: я кладу к себе в карман ложку (он положил в свой карман точно такую же ложку, какую взял второй дипломат), а достаю из кармана своего друга.» И он полез в его внутренний карман и вынул из него ложку. Глупые англичане пришли в восторг. Им ведь не могло прийти в голову, что дипломат украл со стола ложку!

★ There was also the following story that was claimed to be the gospel truth. Two Soviet diplomats were attending a royal banquet in London. One of them noticed that the other stole a golden spoon from the table and put it into the inside pocket of his jacket. He demanded that the thief took the spoon out and placed it back on the table (or, according to another version, gave it to him). The colleague, however, refused to do so and claimed that he did not take any spoons. Then the first diplomat offered to show a trick to all those present. He said: “In the USSR, we are able to perform all kind of miracles. Look: I am putting this spoon into my pocket (he took the same spoon as the other diplomat) and then taking it out the pocket of my friend.” He indeed stuck his hand into his friend’s inside pocket and took out the stolen spoon. The stupid Englishmen were very much impressed. It could never have occurred to them that a diplomat could steal a spoon from the table!

(Andreevsky 2003: 548–549)

После того, как в августе 1968 года высшие чехословацкие руководители были отпущены из Москвы, Брежнев говорит Косыгину: «Какие мировые часы были на Дубчеке!» – «Покажь!» просит Косыгин. (1968 г.)

★ After the top Czechoslovakian leaders were granted permission to leave Moscow in August 1968, Brezhnev told Kosygin: “What a wonderful watch did Dubček wear!” – “Let me take a look!” asked Kosygin. (1968)
(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 222–223, the same in Telesin 1986: No. 227)

VI.37.A. Большой прием в Кремле. Путин обращается к английскому послу: «Мне показалось, что вы чем-то озабочены и расстроены...» Посол: «Мне не хотелось бы об этом говорить, но у меня пропали часы. Это подарок королевы, и они очень дороги мне.» Путин: «А с кем вы общались на моем приеме? Кого бы вы заподозрили?» Посол: «Вот с этим господином с белой хризантемой в петличке...» Путин: «Это глава моей администрации.» Посол: «О, приношу глубочайшие извинения.» Путин покидает посла и через некоторое время возвращается к нему, поигрывая золотыми часами: «Это ваши часы? Забирайте.» Посол: «А что же сказал глава вашей администрации?» Путин: «Сказал? Да он ничего не заметил!»

★ At a large reception in the Kremlin, Putin turns to the British ambassador: “It seems to me that you are concerned about something...” The ambassador: “Sorry, I did not mean to mention it, but I lost my watch. It was a present from Her Majesty the Queen, and it is very dear to me.” Putin: “Whom have you spoken to at this reception? Would you suspect anyone?” The ambassador: “I spoke to that gentleman with a white chrysanthemum in his buttonhole...” Putin: “This is the head of my administration.” The ambassador: “Please accept my sincere apologies.” Putin leaves the ambassador and, after a while, returns to him with a golden watch in his hands. “Is this your watch? Here, take it.” The ambassador: “What did the head of your administration say?” Putin: “What did he say? He did not even notice.”
(<http://anekdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-030.html>)

VI.38. Who supports Putin?

VI.38.A. Путин спрашивает своего помощника: «Кто еще из интеллигенции меня поддерживает?» – «Писатель Проханов.» – «Про каких ханов?! Не надо меня ханом называть.»

★ Putin asks his assistant: “Who else among the intelligentsia supports me?” – “The writer Prokhanov / [who writes] about khans” [in Russian: *Проханов / про ханов*] – “About what khans? Don’t call me a khan!”
(www.anekdot.ru 21.11.2007)

VI.39. Mikhailov and his moustache

VI.39.A. У Путина спрашивают: «Почему вам нравится общаться с Михалковым? Он интересный человек, приятный собеседник?» Путин отвечает: «Нет, просто у него усы прикольно задницу щекотят.»

★ A question to Putin: “Why do you like meeting and talking to Mikhailov? Is he good company, an interesting person?” Putin answers: “No, it’s just nice to feel his moustache tickling my ass.” [a reference to arse-kissing]
(OC: from A. B. 15.11.2007)

VI.40. Putin and half of McCartney

VI.40.A. Путину говорят: «К нам приезжает Пол Маккартни.» Путин отвечает: «А в чем дело? Почему половина? Давайте пригласим этого Маккартни целиком.»

★ Putin is told about the coming visit of Paul McCartney [in Russian, *пол*, as the given name is pronounced, means also 'half']. He asks: "What's the matter? Why just one half? Lets invite the entire McCartney guy."
(OC)

VI.41. Putin is talking to McCartney

This joke uses the similarity between the names 'Lenin' and 'Lennon' to mock an original Soviet song about Lenin (music by Alexandr Holminov, lyrics by Yury Kome-necky)

VI.41.A. Путин говорил Маккартни: «Пол, я же музыку Битлз с самого детства обожаю! Помню, еще в детском садике песню учил:

Леннон – это весны цветенье!

Леннон – это победы клич!

Славься в веках, Леннон,

Наш дорогой Ильич!»

★ Putin is talking to McCartney: "Paul, I have been a Beatles fan since my early childhood. I even remember learning the following song in the kindergarten: Lennon is the blooming spring! / Lennon is the victorious cry! / Long live Lennon, / Our beloved Ilyich [Lenin]!

(IP: http://jokescounter.org/index_060810_1.html)

VI.42. He is also from Saint-Petersburg

VI.42.A. «Он, кстати, тоже из Питера.» – «Почему кстати?» – «А это теперь всегда кстати...»

★ "Incidentally, he is also from Saint-Petersburg." – "Why incidentally?" – "Nowadays, it is always welcome." [In Russian, the word *кстати* can mean 'incidentally', as well as 'welcome', 'come in handy']

(PP: Выков 2005)

(IP: http://anekdoti.ru/jokes.php?joke_category=31)

VII. PUTIN AND KHODORKOVSKY

VII.1. Putin suggests taking a seat before a long journey [a Russian tradition]

See the comments in III.9 and III.13 on *сидеть* ('to sit') and on Khodorkovsky in VII.2.

VII.1.A. Приходит Ходорковский к Путину и говорит: «Налоги все я заплатил, деньги отдал, от оппозиции отказался, можно мне наконец уе-

хоть за границу?» – «Конечно, конечно, только по русскому обычаю посидим на дорожку?!»

★ Khodorkovsky comes to Putin and says: “I have paid all the taxes, returned the stolen money and left opposition. Can I finally go abroad now?” – “Of course! But please take a seat before a long journey as is the custom in Russia.” [a reference to sitting in prison]
(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004b)

VII.1.B. Березовский заявил, что навсегда покидает Россию! Путин обиделся: «А посидеть на дорожку?»

★ Bereзовsky declares that he is leaving Russia for good. Putin takes offense: “And what about taking a seat?!”
(PP: Arsenyevskie 2004b)

VII.2. Putin wishes Khodorkovsky a happy new year

At the moment of writing this article, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former owner of a major Russian oil company (ЮКОС), is serving a long prison sentence on charges of tax evasion. Many see his imprisonment as retaliation for financial support of political opposition to Putin. The ‘new year’ implies another year in prison for Khodorkovsky.

VII.2.A. Ходорковский поздравил Путина с днем рождения. В ответ Путин незамедлительно поздравил Ходорковского с новым годом.

★ Khodorkovsky wishes Putin happy birthday. In his turn, Putin immediately wishes Khodorkovsky a happy new year.
(OC: 8.11.2005)

VII.3. Putin planted a pinetree at the subbotnik

See the comments on *subbotnik* in III.4, *posadit'* (‘to plant’) in III.3 and on *ЮКОС* in VII.2.

VII.3.A. «Сегодня в России прошел субботник, Путин посадил сосну.» – «А что, Сосна тоже работал в ЮКОСе?»

★ “A subbotnik took place in Russia today. Putin planted a pinetree.” – “Did this Pinetree also work in the Yokos oil company?”
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VIII. PUTIN AND OTHER RULERS

VIII.1. Yeltsin’s letter about pension payments

VIII.1.A. [как первый анекдот о Путине] В Кремль пришло письмо: «Уважаемый Владимир Владимирович, когда же, наконец, будет выплачена пенсия за январь? С уважением, Ельцин.»

★ [as the first joke about Putin] The following letter has come to the Kremlin: “Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich, when will I finally get my retirement benefit for January? Sincerely, Yeltsin.”
(IP: NEWSru 2002)

VIII.2. A debt to Yeltsin

See the comment about the interest in tennis of the former president Boris Yeltsin in VI.10.

VIII.2.A. Контракт Путина со старой ельцинской элитой закончился. По кремлевским коридорам ходит новый анекдот: В кабинет к Президенту заходит один из его помощников и говорит: «Владимир Владимирович, наши кубок Дэвиса выиграла.» – «Вот и отлично. Позвоните Борису Николаевичу и скажите, что я ему больше ничего не должен.»

★ Putin's contract with the old Yeltsinist elite has expired. A new joke is circulating the Kremlin corridors: One of the president's PAs enters his office and says: "Vladimir Vladimirovich, we have won the Davis Cup." – "Great. Call Boris Nikolaevich and tell him that I do not owe him anything anymore."

(PP: Krutakov 2003)

VIII.3. Stalin's message to Putin: to paint the Kremlin in blue

An early variant of this popular joke figures in the book by Yu. Borev (1992: 263). No earlier variants have been found in print. However, post-Borev incarnations abound (Krikmann 2004: No. 24):

Ожил Сталин, решил по Москве пройтись. Пересек Красную площадь, вышел в Александровский сад. Посмотрел, понаблюдал и сделал вывод, что все распустились, везде царит бардак, разруха, о построении коммунизма совсем забыли. Решил навести порядок. Идет напрямик на заседание Политбюро. Все члены Политбюро сразу вытянулись в струнку, место ему уступили, готовы исполнить все, что прикажет «отец народов». Сталин закурил трубку и говорит: «Сначала надо собрать депутатов межрегиональной группы и расстрелять; во-вторых, предлагаю перекрасить Мавзолей в зеленый цвет.» Тут один из членов Политбюро не выдержал и говорит: «Товарищ Сталин, а зачем – в зеленый цвет?» – «Я так и знал, что по первому вопросу не будет возражений.»

★ Stalin awoke from the dead and decided to take a walk around Moscow. He crossed the Red Square and entered the Alexander Garden. Having looked around, he concluded that the discipline was lacking, everything was in a state of mess and ruin and that people had completely forgotten about the building of Communism. He decided to rectify the situation and went directly to the Politburo session. All the members of the Politburo immediately stood to attention, gave him a seat and were ready to fulfill anything "the father of the peoples" would order them. Stalin lit his pipe and said: "First, it is necessary to gather the delegates of the interregional group together and shoot them. Then, I propose to paint the Mausoleum in green." One of the Politburo members could not help asking: "Comrade Stalin, why green?" – "I knew that the first issue would not generate any objections."

VIII.3.A. Спит Владимир Владимирович, и снится ему Иосиф Виссарионович. Спрашивает Путина Сталин: «Могу я тебе как-нибудь помочь, а?» – «Почему у нас все плохо, экономика разваливается и т.п... Что мне делать?» Сталин, не задумываясь, отвечает: «Расстрелять все правительство и покрасить стены Кремля в голубой цвет.» – «Но почему именно в голу-

бой?» – «Я так и предполагал, что дискуссия будет только по второму вопросу!»

★ Vladimir Vladimirovich is sleeping and having a dream about Joseph Visarionovich in which Stalin [the latter] asks him: “Is there anything I can do to help?” – “Why is the situation so bad? Why is the economy falling apart? etc... What am I to do?” Stalin answers without hesitation: “Shoot the government and paint the Kremlin walls in blue.” – “Why exactly blue?” – “I was right to assume that there would be a discussion only regarding my second suggestion.”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdote/anekdote20-040.html>)

VIII.3.B. Так что самый важный факт об анекдотах о Путине – то, что их немного. Этому, например, уже три года, и не скажу, чтобы в последнее время мне приходилось его слышать: Путин сидит в кабинете, обхватив голову руками. Появляется призрак Сталина. Путин жалуется ему на некомпетентность своих кремлевских подчиненных. «Ну, это нетрудно,» говорит Сталин. «Расстреляй всех, кто не умеет работать и покрась стены Кремля в голубой цвет.» – «А почему в голубой?» – «Вот и все зададутся только второй частью вопроса.»

★ Thus, the most important fact about jokes concerning Putin is that there are quite few of them. This one, for example, is already three years old and, to tell the truth, I have not heard it being told lately. Putin is sitting in his office with his arms around his head. Suddenly, Stalin’s ghost appears. Putin starts complaining to him about the incompetence of his subordinates in the Kremlin. “Well, it’s a piece of cake,” says Stalin. “Shoot all those who cannot work properly and paint the Kremlin walls in blue.” – “And why blue?” – “That’s the point: the others will also be preoccupied only with the latter action.”

(PP: Berry 2006)

VIII.4. Putin and Bush are comparing the living standards of their people

VIII.4.A. Разговаривают по телефону Путин и Буш о том, как их народы живут. Путин спрашивает: «Буш, а какой у вас прожиточный минимум?» – «1000 долларов.» – «А средняя зарплата какая?» – «2000 долларов.» – «Буш, а куда же они остальные деньги девают?» – «Не знаю...» Буш у Путина спрашивает: «Путин, а какой у вас прожиточный минимум?» – «1000 рублей.» – «А средняя зарплата какая?» – «500 рублей.» – «Путин, а где же они остальные деньги берут?» – «Не знаю...»

★ Putin and Bush are having a telephone conversation about how their people are living. Putin asks: “Bush, what is the minimum subsistence level in America?” – “1000 dollars.” – “And what’s the average salary?” – “2000 dollars.” – “Bush, what do they spend the remaining money on?” – “I have no idea...” Then Bush asks: “Putin, what is the minimum subsistence level in

Russia?” – “1000 rubles.” – “And what’s the average salary?” – “500 rubles.” – “Putin, where do they take the rest of the money from?” – “I have no idea...” (OC: 27.08.2002)

VIII.5. A pension raise

VIII.5.A. Кстати, у нас тут гуляет анекдот, может, заинтересуетесь: звонит Путин Бушу: «А мы своим пенсионерам снова пенсию добавили.» Буш: «Да, и на сколько долларов?» – «Да нет,» замялся Путин, «они у нас доллар не любят, мы им, знаете, в... центах.»

★ By the way, there is one joke circulating around which might interest you: Putin calls Bush and says: “We have given our pensioners another pension raise.” – “By how many dollars?” – “Well, you know...” Putin’s voice faltered. “They do not exactly like dollar very much. So we made it in ... cents.” (PP: Kuznetsova 2003)

VIII.6. Russian and American achievements

D. N. Bantish-Kamensky included the following joke into K. G. Razumovsky’s biography:

В 1770 году, по случаю победы, одержанной нашим флотом над турецким при Чесме, митрополит Платон произнес в Петропавловском соборе, в присутствии императрицы и всего двора, речь, замечательную по силе и глубине мыслей. Когда вития, к изумлению слушателей, неожиданно сошел с амвона к гробнице Петра Великого и, коснувшись ее, воскликнул: «Встань теперь, великий монарх, отечества нашего отец! Встань теперь и возри на любезное изобретение свое!» – то среди общих слез и восторга Разумовской вызвал улыбку окружающих его, сказав им потихоньку: «Чего вин его кличе? Як встане, всем нам достанется.»

★ In 1770, on the occasion of the victory gained by our navy over the Turks at Chesma, Metropolitan Platon delivered a remarkably moving and deep speech in the presence of the Empress and the entire court in the Peter and Paul Cathedral. When, to the amazement of the audience, the orator suddenly descended from the ambo to the tomb of Peter the Great, touched it and cried: “Rise now, the great monarch, the father of our homeland! Rise now and look at your beloved creation!” Razumovsky added a merry touch to the general atmosphere of tears and exaltation having said in a subdued voice to those around him: “Why is he trying to raise him? If Peter awakens, we’ll all get a dressing-down.”

Хрущев вернулся из США в плохом настроении и жалуется Микояну: «Кеннеди сказал, что у них есть машина, оживляющая мертвых. Я взамен приврал, что у нас есть допинг, от которого человек бегаёт быстрее любого автомобиля. Где теперь его взять, этот допинг?» Микоян в ответ: «Ничего, если они смогут оживить Сталина, ты побежишь быстрее любого автомобиля!»

★ Khrushchev returned from the United States in a bad mood and started complaining to Mikoyan: “Kennedy told me that they have a device that rises the dead. Not to lose face, I had to lie to him that we have a dope that allows a man to run faster than any car. Where can we get this dope now?” Mikoyan answers: “Don’t worry, if they raise Stalin, you’ll run faster than any car!”

(Sturman & Tiktin 1985: 207; Krikmann 2004: No. 56)

VIII.6.A. Встречаются Буш с Путиным. Буш: «У Америки небывалые достижения. Например, у нас есть профессор, который может оживлять давно умерших людей.» Путин: «У нас тоже очень большие достижения.» – «Где?» – «Ну, в спорте, например. У нас есть спортсмен, который может бежать со скоростью 100 км/час.» Буш: «Неужели? Это удивительно, какой прогресс в наших странах. Давайте будем обмениваться достижениями. Мы вам направим нашего профессора, он вам показательно кого-нибудь оживит, к примеру, Ленина. А вы нам пришлите вашего спортсмена, мы ему организуем турне по США. Договорились?» Возвращается Путин в Кремль мрачный, вызывает Касьянова, объясняет ситуацию: «Ну и где мы возьмем такого бегуна? Позор!» Касьянов: «Да ничего страшного. Если этот профессор Ленина оживит, у нас столько народу со скоростью 100 км/час побежит...»

★ Bush and Putin are having a meeting. Bush says: “America can boast outstanding achievements. For example, we have a professor who can rise people that died long ago.” Putin: “We can also boast great achievements.” – “Which, I wonder?” – “Well, in sport, for instance. We have a sportsman which can run at a speed of 100 km/h.” Bush: “Really? It’s simply amazing: our countries have made such tremendous progress. Let’s share our achievements with each other. We will send our professor to you and he will give you a brief demonstration of his abilities. Well, he can rise Lenin, for example. And you will send your sportsman to us and we will organise a tour of the US for him. Deal?” Putin returns to Kremlin in a gloomy mood, summons Kasyanov and explains the situation to him: “Well, where can we find such a sportsman? What a disgrace!” Kasyanov answers: “There’s nothing to worry about. If this professor rises Lenin, so many people will be able to run at a speed of 100 km/h...”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VIII.7. Putin and Bush are using body language

See also ATU: No. 924 “Discussion in Sign Language” (*ibid.* – the related bibliography), Barag et al. 1979: No. 924A*.

The ATU 924 joke-type is quite widespread in Eastern and Northern Europe, Asia and the Near East, and its earlier versions in Jewish, Arab and European texts. Interestingly, however, it is quite rare in the Slavic folklore: just one incarnation of a distantly related story in Western Ukraine and a variant of this joke-type in later Old Russian parables. The version that is known to us from the texts 1) about Khrushchev and 2) Putin (see below) is fully in line with the classical ATU joke-type and repeats Jewish parables about an argument with the rabbi.

В Англии некто показал Хрущеву кулак. В ответ Хрущев постучал по своему лбу. Показавшего кулак задержали и стали допрашивать в полиции: «Что означает ваш жест?» – «Чтобы держал своих, как Сталин, а не то скинут.» – «Хм, а как же тогда понять жест советского премьера?» – «Видел, понял, но ума не хватает.»

★ Someone showed a fist to Khrushchev during his visit to England. Khrushchev knocked on his own forehead in return. The fist-man was detained and questioned by the police: “What does your gesture mean?” – “That he should be as strict with his

people as Stalin was. Otherwise they will topple him.” – “Hmm... How should we interpret the gesture of the Soviet leader then?” – “That he has understood my message but does not have enough brains to follow the advice.”

(Sturman & Tikhtin 1985: 211)

VIII.7.A. Летят Буш и Путин в одном самолете, Путин показывает Бушу кулак, Буш в ответ делает тоже самое, тогда Путин показывает Бушу два кулака, Буш крутит указательным пальцем у виска. На следующий день Буш прилетает домой, жена спрашивает: «Ну, как прошла встреча?» На что Буш отвечает: «Да русские совсем озверели, представляешь, летим мы в самолете, а он мне показывает, я тебе глаз выбью, а ему показываю, что я ему тоже, после этого он показывает, что выбьет мне два глаза, ну а я показываю, что дурак что ли.» Прилетает Путин, та же ситуация: «Ну, как прошла встреча?» – «Короче американцы совсем с ума сходят, я ему на жестах показываю – ты власть держи, а он мне, держу, я ему показываю как ты сильнее держи, а он мне – УМА НЕ ХВАТИТ.»

★ Bush and Putin are on an airplane together. Putin shows a clenched fist to Bush and Bush reciprocates in the same way. Then Putin shows two fists to Bush and Bush makes a cuckoo sign by circling his index finger near his temple. The next day Bush arrives home and his wife asks him: “How was you meeting?” Bush answers: “Russians have lost all decency lately. Can you imagine, we are on a plane with Putin and he is gesturing to me that he’ll punch me in the eye. I start gesturing back that I will do the same thing to him. Then he starts gesturing that he’ll punch me in both eyes and I start gesturing that he is a complete fool.” Putin arrives home and explains to his wife: “How was you meeting?” – “Americans are going crazy. I am gesturing to Bush: “Hold on to power.” He is gesturing back: “I will!” I am gesturing to him: “Hold on tighter!” and he is gesturing back: “I’m too feeble-minded for that.”

(08.07.2006)

(IP: <http://humor.e-sochi.ru/anekdote/misc/327.xml>)

VIII.8. What is the difference between our democracies?

VIII.8.A. После Братиславского саммита, на котором Владимир Путин заверил Джорджа Буша, что демократия в России будет самая настоящая, только с незначительными отличиями, обусловленными национальным характером, стремительно реанимировался старый, еще горбачевских времен анекдот: «Разница между нашей и западной демократией совсем незначительная. Примерно как между двумя стульями – твердым и жидким» (сейчас, правда, в ходу вариант про электрический).

★ After the summit in Bratislava when Vladimir Putin assured George Bush that Russia was going to have a real democracy but with a number of minor differences driven by the peculiarities of national character, an old joke of the Gorbachev era was quickly revived: “The difference between our democracies is really minor. Just like between solid and liquid stool. (Nowadays, a version with electric chair versus regular one is more popular). [No-

tice that ‘chair’ and ‘stool’ are both equivalent to the same Russian word *стул*]

(PP: Bykov 2005)

VIII.9. Putin and Bush are discussing Chechnya

VIII.9.A. Встречаются Путин и Буш. Разговор, конечно, заходит о Чечне. Путин объясняет что там дела улаживаются постепенно... «Степ бай степ...» кивает с пониманием Буш. «Да...» соглашается Путин и заканчивает: «пока не получится степь да степь кругом.»

★ Putin and Bush are having a meeting. The conversation, of course, turns to the subject of Chechnya. Putin explains that the problems there are gradually being solved. “Step by step,” nods Bush signaling his understanding. “Yes indeed,” agrees Putin, “until there is just steppe [*степь да степь*] everywhere.”

(IP:<http://v2.anekdot.ru/an/an0106/x010614.html#13>)

VIII.10. Putin and Lukashenko are on a plane together

This joke elaborates on the joke-type that appeared in the Nazi Germany and in the Soviet Union in the 1940s. The first two of the following examples were taken from Arkhipova & Melnichenko 2009: 259.

Самолет, на котором находятся Гитлер, Геринг и Геббельс, терпит крушение. Все трое погибли. Кто спасся? Ответ: немецкий народ.

★ The plane carrying Hitler, Goering and Goebbels crashed. All three died. Question: “Who survived?” Answer: “The German people.”

Однажды Сталин и Политбюро плыли пароходом по каналу Москва-Волга. Вдруг, пароход начинает тонуть. Спрашивается, когда пароход утонет, то кто спасется? – Народы СССР.

★ Stalin and the Politburo are on a steamboat going along the Moscow-Volga Canal. Suddenly, the steamboat begins to sink. Question: “Who will survive when the steamboat sinks?” Answer: “The peoples of the Soviet Union.”

★ A plane carrying Stalin, Molotov, and Trotsky crashes. Who survives? Answer: Russian people.

(Krikmann 2004: No. 106).

Летят в самолете Ельцин и Назарбаев. «Борис, как ты думаешь, если этот самолет упадет и разобьется, а мы погибнем, чей народ будет больше горевать?» – «Украинский.» – «Почему?» – «Кравчука с нами нет.»

★ Yeltsin and Nazarbayev are on a plane: “Boris, if this plane crashes and we die, whose people, do you think, will grieve most?” – “Ukrainians.” – “Why?” – “Because Kravchuk is not with us.”

(<http://www.peoples.ru/art/literature/poetry/oldage/annensky/anekdot.html>)

VIII.10.A. Летят в самолете Лукашенко и Путин. Лукашенко спрашивает Путина: «Что Вы, Владимир Владимирович, думаете, если самолет разобьется, где больше будут плакать – в России или Белорусии?» – «На Украине,» отвечает Путин. «А почему?» спрашивает Лукашенко. «А потому,» отвечает Путин, «что с нами не было Кучмы...»

★ Lukashenko and Putin are on a plane. Lukashenko asks Putin: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, if our plane crashes, who, do you think, will grieve most: people in Russia or people in Belarus?” – “People in Ukraine,” answers Putin. “And why is that?” asks Lukashenko. “Because Kuchma was not with us...” answers Putin.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VIII.11. Putin and Kuchma

VIII.11.A. Встречается Путин с Кучмой. Путин: «Эх, что ни говори, а Украина для нас – отрезанный ломоть сала!» Кучма: «Ах так?! Тогда вы для нас – отрезанный... отрезанный...» Путин: «Ну, например, газопровод! Хотите?»

★ Putin meets Kuchma and says: “Say what you will, but Ukraine is lost for us: it’s a cut-off chunk of salo [pig fat, traditional Ukrainian dish]». Kuchma: “If that case... For us, you are a cut-off... a cut-off...” Putin: “A cut-off gas pipeline, for instance. This could be easily arranged if you like.”

(25.10.2001)

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-050.html>)

VIII.12. A question about gas

In the following joke, the punch line implies the first letter of a swear word.

VIII.12.A. «А сегодня у нас на передаче «О, счастличик!» Владимир Путин. И я задаю вопрос: «Когда Украина рассчитается за газ?» Есть 4 варианта ответа: «А» – в первом квартале, «Б» – во втором квартале, «В» – в третьем квартале, и «Г» – в четвертом квартале.» – «А можно звонок другу?» – «Пожалуйста...» – «Алло, Леонид Данилович, когда вы рассчитаетесь за газ?» – «Ну, розумієте...» – «Нет, Леонид Данилович, мне нужен правильный ответ.» – «А які с варіанти?» – «Буду краток: «А», «Б», «В», «Г»...» – «А «Х» там немає?»

★ Vladimir Putin is going to play with us today on ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire?’ Here’s the question: “When will Ukraine pay for the gas?” The four possible answers are: A – in the first quarter; B – in the second quarter; C – in the third quarter; D – in the fourth quarter.” – “I would like to call a friend.” – “Please do.” – “Leonid Danilovich [Kuchma], when will you pay for the gas?” – “Well, you see...” – “No, Leonid Danilovich, I need the correct answer.” – “What are the variants?” – “I’ll be brief: A, B, C, D.” – “Is there by any chance the letter F as well?”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VIII.13. Putin is roasting Yushchenko

VIII.13.A. Президент России Владимир Путин жарит на вертеле президента Украины Виктора Ющенко, но при этом вертел старается крутить

как можно быстрее. «Владимир Владимирович, а зачем так быстро?» – «А что делать? Иначе он начнет воровать уголь.»

★ The Russian president Vladimir Putin is roasting the Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko, but is trying to turn the spit really fast. “Vladimir Vladimirovich, why are you doing it so fast?” – “I have no choice. Otherwise he’ll start stealing coal.”

(PP: Berry 2005)

VIII.14. Russia should replace the entire system

VIII.14.A. Пришла в Россию зима, стали все города разом замерзать. Собрались в Кремле начальники, спорят, что делать. Путин говорит: «Надо поменять батареи.» Шойгу отвечает: «Нет, прогнили трубы, надо менять трубы.» Никак не могут ответ найти, решили спросить у народа. Позвали из кочегарки слесаря, говорят: «Вот рассуди, не знаем, надо нам трубы поменять или батареи?» Слесарь подумал-подумал и говорит: «Нет, батареями да трубами здесь не обойдешься. Тут вся система прогнила. Систему надо менять.»

★ Winter came to Moscow and all cities and towns began to freeze. The authorities gathered in the Kremlin and started arguing about what should be done. Putin said: “Radiators need replacing.” Shoigu said: “No, pipes have deteriorated and need replacing.” Since no solution could be agreed on, a decision was made to ask what common people thought about the problem. Putin summoned a boiler room mechanic and said: “Please be our arbiter. We are at a loss what to replace: radiators or pipes?” Having thought for a while, the mechanic replied: “Replacing batteries and pipes won’t really help matters. The whole system has deteriorated. The whole system needs replacing.”

(IP: http://ruek.narod.ru/jumor/an_putin.html)

VIII.15. Putin and Chubais

VIII.15.A. Если в Кремле ночью горит свет – это работает Путин. Если свет не горит – работает Чубайс.

★ If the lights are on in the Kremlin at night – Putin is working. If there the lights are off – Chubais is working.

(http://ruek.narod.ru/jumor/an_putin.html)

(<http://anekdoty.narod.ru/anekdot/anekdot20-040.html>)

VIII.15.B. Глава РАО «ЕЭС России» как-то рассказал анекдот: «Если в Кремле горит свет, значит, работает Путин. Если не горит – работает Чубайс.»

★ The head of the Unified Energy System of Russia Anatoly Chubais once told the following joke: “If the lights are on in the Kremlin – Putin is working; if the lights are off – Chubais is working.”

(IP: NEWSru 2002)

VIII.15.C. Но Чубайсу это, похоже, не мешает. Он отвечает анекдотом со своего сайта: «Если ночью в Кремле горит свет, значит, работает Путин. Если свет не горит, значит, работает Чубайс.»

★ But Chubais is not troubled by that. He rejoined with the following joke posted on his website: “If the lights are on in the Kremlin at night – Putin is working. If the lights are off – Chubais is working.”

(PP: Belgorodskaya 2006)

VIII.16. Putin and Schroeder

VIII.16.A. На встрече с Герхардом Шредером В. В. Путин разговаривал на безупречном немецком языке. Шредер его внимательно слушал, время от время поднимая руки и предъявляя документы.

★ At a meeting with Gerhard Schroeder, V. V. Putin spoke perfect German. Schroeder was listening to him very attentively and from time to time rose his hands up and produced his identity papers.

(OC: 6.07.2004)

(IP: <http://nepom.ru/anekdots/?raz=4&ord=new>)

VIII.16.B. Президент Путин беседовал с канцлером ФРГ на чистейшем немецком языке, без переводчика. Беседа прошла в теплой, дружественной обстановке, только канцлер ФРГ почему-то то поднимал руки, то вынимал документы.

★ President Putin talked to the German Chancellor in flawless German without the help of an interpreter. The meeting took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere, but for some reason the Chancellor kept rising his hands up and producing his identity papers.

(PP: Выков 2005)

VIII.17. Putin and Condoleezza Rice at a human rights hearing

VIII.17.A. В ООН слушания по правам человека. Кондолиза Райс вылезает: «А вот в России все совсем ужасно – бизнес преследуют, прописку не отменяют, самолеты с террористами сбивают... в общем – жуть! Тоталитарные порядки!» Тут же на трибуну выходит Путин: «Уважаемые дамы и господа, выступление предыдущего докладчика – ложь! Какие «тоталитарные порядки»? В России сроду никакого порядка не было!»

★ A human rights hearing is taking place at the UN. Condoleezza Rice butts in: “The situation in Russia is simply terrible: businessmen are being persecuted, the practice of registering citizens at their place of residence is not abolished, planes with terrorists are brought down... A horrible mess! Totalitarian order par excellence!” Putin takes the floor and says: “Ladies and Gentlemen, the previous speaker has lied! What totalitarian order can one speak of, when there has never been ANY kind of order in Russia!”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

VIII.18. Putin and the Orange Revolution

VIII.18.A. «Моня, как вы думаете, шо хотел сказать Путин оранжевым платьем жены?» – «Не знаю, наверное, что, типа, Витек, понял, виноват...» – «Не, Моня... Я думаю, он хотел сказать: «Мне, типа, пофиг. Будьте вы хоть оранжевые, имел я вас и буду иметь...»

★ [Spoken with the typical Odessa accent]: “Monya [a diminutive of ‘Emmanuel’], what did Putin mean by his wife’s orange dress?” – “I don’t know. Maybe he wanted to say: ‘All right, Vityek [a diminutive of ‘Viktor’, Viktor Yushchenko], I plead guilty...” – “No, Monya. I think he wanted to say: ‘I don’t give a shit if you are orange or not. I’ve f***ed you before and I’ll keep f***ing you in the future.’”

(IP: <http://www.yanukovich.nm.ru/>)

VIII.19. The bold and the hairy

VIII.19.A. Все вы хорошо знаете, что: Ленин был лысый; Сталин – с волосами; Хрущев – лысый; Брежнев – с волосами; Андропов – лысый; Черненко – с волосами; Горбачев – лысый; Ельцин – с волосами. Отсюда вывод – Путин носит парик!

★ As you well know, Lenin was bold; Stalin had hair; Khrushchev was bold; Brezhnev had hair; Andropov was bold; Chernenko had hair; Gorbachev was bold; Yeltsin had hair. It can be therefore concluded that Putin wears a wig! (CA: Krikmann 2004: No. 89)

VIII.20. Bush, Chirac and Putin are arguing whose soldier is the bravest

The full commentary on this joke is provided in the article “On the formation of the Russian political anecdote: From Peter the Great to Putin” (see this edition, pp. 237 ff.).

Поспорили Сталин с Рузвельтом, у кого телохранители преданнее, и приказали им выпрыгнуть из окна пятнадцатого этажа. Телохранитель Рузвельта категорически отказался прыгать, сказав: «Я думаю о том, что будет с моей семьей.» Телохранитель же Сталина выпрыгнул в окно и разбился насмерть. Рузвельт был сильно поражен, и спросил Иосифа Виссарионовича: «Скажите, а почему ваш человек это сделал?» Сталин, раскурив трубку, ответил: «Он просто подумал о том, что будет с его семьей.»

★ Stalin and Roosevelt started arguing whose bodyguards were the most loyal and ordered them to jump out of the window from the 15th floor. Roosevelt’s bodyguard flatly refused saying: “I care about my family’s future.” Stalin’s bodyguard, on the contrary, jumped out of the window to his death. Roosevelt was amazed and asked Joseph Vissarionovich: “Why has your fellow done that?” Stalin lit the pipe and said: “He cared about his family’s future.”

(Krikmann 2004: No. 11)

VIII.20.A. Заспорили Буш, Ширак и Путин, у кого солдаты выносливее. Решили, пусть из каждой страны пришлют по солдату для проверки. На следующий день собираются, первым делом подходят к американскому морскому пехотинцу. Буш разворачивается и ему прямым в челюсть – трах! Тот только поморщился. Буш его спрашивает: «Больно?» – «Yes, Mis-

ter President.» – «Но ведь терпишь?» – «Американская морская пехота может все вытерпеть!» – «Молодец!» Тогда Ширак берет у начальника почетного караула шпагу, подходит к французскому парашютисту и шпагой ему в плечо – раз! Тот зубами скрипит, но стоит. Ширак спрашивает: «Больно?» – «Oui, Monsieur le President.» – «Но ведь терпишь?» – «Парашютисты Франции презирают боль!» – «Молодец!» Тут Путин берет у начальника охраны пистолет, подходит к нашему солдатику и ему в ступню из пистолета – бабах! У того в сапоге дырка, а сам даже не поморщился. Путин спрашивает: «Больно?» – «Никак нет!» Буш с Шираком: «Ну ни хрена себе!» Путин сияет. Потом подходит к солдату и шепотом на ухо ему: «Че, прямо нисколько не больно?» – «Не-а.» – «Молодец! Благодарность объявлю в приказе.» – «А можно мне еще сапоги нормальные? А то у меня 40-й размер, а у нас на складе второй год только 45-е.»

★ Bush, Chirac and Putin started arguing whose soldiers are harder and decided that every party should send one soldier for a trial of strength. The following day they assembled together and came up to an American marine. Bush turned around and punched him directly in the jaw – wham! The soldier merely winced. Bush asked: “Does that hurt?” – “Yes, Mister President.” – “But you endure it?” – “The American Marine Corps can endure anything!” – “Attaboy!” Then Chirac took the sword from the commander of the guard of honor, came up to a French paratrooper and pierced his shoulder with the sword – zap! The soldier gritted his teeth but stood still. Chirac asked: “Does that hurt?” – “Oui, Monsieur le President.” – “But you endure it?” – “French paratroopers despise pain!” – “Well done, my boy!” Then Putin took the gun from the head of security, came up to our soldier and made a shot into his foot – bang! The guy got a hole in his boot but did not even flinch. Putin asked: “Does that hurt?” – “No, sir!” Bush and Chirac exclaimed: “Holy shit!” Putin was radiant. In a while, he came up to the soldier and whispered into his ear: “Cmon, aren’t you really hurt a bit?” – “Nope.” – “Way to go! I will issue a commendation order for you.” – “May I also have a normal pair of boots? I wear size 40, you see, and there has been only size 45 at the warehouse for the second year in a row.”

(IP: <http://anegdoty.narod.ru/anedkot/anedkot20-030.html>)

VIII.21. The leaders of the country as trainmasters

This joke apparently appeared in Brezhnev’s time. The first record, at least, dates back to 1978.

The train metaphor is not accidental here. In 1930s the press began to liken the Party to a locomotive rushing ahead and crashing everything in its way.

Поезд идет к коммунизму на всех парах. В нем едут Ленин, Сталин, Хрущев и Брежнев. Вдруг поезд остановился, и ни туда, ни сюда. Возмущенный Ленин выходит и кричит (картавя): «Это безобразие! Так мы никуда не доедем! Сейчас же расстрелять всю бугжуазию в этом гоюде!» Чекисты приводят остатки ни в чем неповинных зажиточных людей и расстреливают (трупы падают). А поезд стоит. Выходит Сталин и говорит (с кавказским акцентом): «Расстрелат всэх пассажиров

и начальника станции!» Приводят и расстреливают (трупы падают). Но поезд ни с места. Тогда поднимается Хрущев и говорит, улыбаясь: «Я знаю, что нужно сделать.» Обращается к трупам расстрелянных: «Я вас реабилитирую. Вы больше не враги народа.» И к КГБ-истам: «Выдать пенсию всем родственникам пострадавших!» Возвращается, садится и, довольный, говорит: «Теперь мы поедем.» Но поезд все равно стоит. Все четверо в смущении переглядываются. Наконец, вскакивает Брежнев: «Товарсти, у меня идея! Закроем занавески на окнах и будим ститать, сто поезд идет дальсе!» (Korolenko 1978)

★ A train carrying Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev is rushing towards Communism at full speed. Suddenly, it comes to a halt. Lenin is outraged and shouts with a burr: “What a disgrace! We’ll never get anywhere from here! The bourgeoisie in this town should be immediately shot!” The Cheka officers haul a bunch of innocent bourgeois and shoot them (corpses fall down on the ground). The train does not move. Stalin comes out and says with a pronounced Caucasian accent: “All passengers and the stationmaster should be shot.” The order is fulfilled: the corpses fall on the ground. The train does not move. Then Khrushchev stands up and says with a smile on his face: “I know what we should do.” He turns to the corpses: “I’m going to rehabilitate you. You are no longer enemies of the people.” Then he turns to the KGB officers: “Grant pensions to the relatives of the dead.” After that he sits down again and says: “Now we will finally move on.” But the train is standing still. The four leaders exchange confused glances. Finally, Brezhnev jumps up: “Comrades! I have a wonderful idea! Let’s draw the curtains and imagine that the train is moving forward.”

Поезд, отправленный в коммунизм, стал. Путь кончился. Ленин: «Всем выйти на субботник, строить насыпь. Рельсы закажем у капиталистов. Не мы, так наши дети будут жить при коммунизме!» Сталин: «Поездную бригаду и персонал станции расстрелять. Прочих укладывать вместо шпал по пятилетним планам.» Хрущев: «Всех реабилитировать. Снять рельсы позади поезда и укладывать их впереди него – через двадцать лет будем на месте.» Брежнев: «Задернуть занавески на окнах и раскачивать вагоны. Каждый нормальный советский человек поймет, что едем.» Андропов – попытался выглянуть в окно и умер. Черненко – умер, не попытавшись выглянуть. Горбачев – вышел на платформу, оглянулся: «Пути вперед нет, товарищи, и назад тоже нет. И потому нам необходима ускоренная переформировка нашего поезда!»

★ The train heading for Communism reaches the end of the track and comes to a halt. Lenin: “Everyone should come to subbotnik and build an embankment. We will order the tracks from capitalists. If not we ourselves, then our children will live under Communism.” Stalin: “Shoot the train crew and the station staff. Use the remaining people as tracks according to the five-year plans.” Khrushchev: “All should be rehabilitated. Take the tracks from behind the train and place them in front of it. In twenty years we will reach our destination.” Brezhnev: “Draw the curtains and shake the carriages. All normal Soviet people will think that we are moving on.” Adropov tries to look out of the window and dies. Chernenko dies without even trying to look out. Gorbachev steps down on the platform and turns around: “There are no tracks forward and no tracks backs. That is why we need to transform our train as soon as possible!” (Sturman & Tiktin, 1987: 32. Later incarnations of this joke-type are recorded also in Krikmann 2004: No. 2)

VIII.21.A. Поезд мчится на всех парах в коммунизм. Вождь доволен. Вдруг вбегает взволнованный машинист и говорит начальнику поезда: «Товарищ Сталин, рельсы кончились!» – «Высадить из поезда всех пассажиров: пусть заготовливают шпалы, рельсы и настилают путь дальше!» Рельсы настелили, поезд пошёл вперед. Через некоторое время машинист снова вбегает в купе начальника поезда: «Опять рельсы кончились, Никита Сергеевич!» – «Сзади поезда нам рельсы не нужны. Этот путь мы уже прошли. Снимайте их и переносите вперед.» Опять поезд двинулся, но через некоторое время машинист вновь обращается к начальнику: «Снова рельсы кончились. Что будем делать, Леонид Ильич?» – «Закройте занавески во всех купе, и раскачивайте поезд. Пусть пассажиры думают, что поезд идет вперёд.» Вновь обращается к начальнику поезда машинист: «Михаил Сергеевич, пассажиры спрашивают, почему поезд не едет!» – «Объясните им, что у нас идет перестройка. Как закончим её, поезд пойдет с удвоенной скоростью.» И вновь машинисту пришлось обратиться к начальнику поезда: «Борис Николаевич! Поезд стоит, пассажиры волнуются, а впереди рельсов нет.» – «Дайте задний ход, а пассажирам объявите, что поезд идет вперед!» Снова вбегает машинист в купе начальника: «Владимир Владимирович! Поезд зашёл в тупик. Что сказать пассажирам?» – «Скажите народу правду: «Рельсы кончились, горячее распродано, все вагоны приватизированы!»»

★ The train is rushing at full steam towards Communism. The leader is quite satisfied. Suddenly, the engine driver comes in and says to the trainmaster with a tremor in his voice: “Comrade Stalin, there are no more tracks ahead!” – “Tell all the passengers to come out of the train and start constructing the railway!” The new tracks are built; the train can move on. In a while the engine driver comes in again and says to the trainmaster: “Nikita Sergeevich, there are no more tracks ahead!” – “We do not need the tracks that are behind the train. We have passed this path already. Take them off and place them in front of the train.” The train can proceed again, but in a while the engine driver addresses the trainmaster again: “There are no more tracks ahead! What shall be do, Leonid Ilyich?” – “Draw the curtains and shake the carriages. Let the passengers think that the train is moving forward.” The engine driver has something to impart to the trainmaster again: “Mikhail Sergeevich, the passengers wonder why the train is standing still.” – “Tell them that perestroika is underway. As soon as we are done with it, the train will go at double speed.” The engine driver is forced to address the trainmaster once again: “Boris Nikolaevich, the passengers are worrying; the train is standing; there are no more tracks ahead!” – “Reverse the train and tell the passengers that we are moving forward.” The engine driver comes to the trainmaster one more time: “Vladimir Vladimirovich, the train has reached the dead-end. What should I tell the passengers?” – “Tell people the truth! That there are no more tracks ahead, that we have run out of fuel and that all the carriages have been privatized!”

(MM: Pavlov 2005: 277)

VIII.22. Mikhalkov comes to all leaders in turn and asks for the permission to publish Mukha Tsokotukha [a children's poem]

Apparently, this joke has had a long literary life and was born in 1970s. See the article by Sergey Neklyudov "The origin of the anecdote: "Mukha Tsokotukha" [The Buzzing Fly] submitted for consideration to Soviet rulers" (this volume, pp. 211–224).

VIII.22.A. 90-летию Михалкова посвящается.

Встретились Михалков с Чуковским и написали поэму. Пришли к Сталину на утверждение и читают: «Муха, муха, цикадуха / Позолоченное брюхо. / Муха по полю пошла, / Муха денежку нашла ...» – «Как так денежку нашла?» говорит Сталин, «у нас деньги на дорогах не валяются. Не пойдет ваша поэма.» Умер Сталин. Чуковский тоже. Уже один Михалков приходит к Хрущеву и говорит: «Я поэму написал, при жизни Сталина не публиковали.» – «Читайте!» – «Муха, муха, цикадуха / Позолоченное брюхо. / Муха по полю пошла ...» – «Как по полю пошла? Нельзя по полям ходить! У нас там кукуруза растет! Нет, не пойдет.» Ушли Хрущева. Идет Михалков к Брежневу и говорит: «Я поэму написал, Сталин и Хрущев не публиковали.» – «Читай!» – «Муха, муха, цикадуха / Позолоченное брюхо...» – «Это на кого ты намекаешь – позолоченное брюхо? Нет, не пойдет.» Помер Брежнев. Идет Михалков к Андропову и говорит: «Я поэму написал, Сталин, Хрущев, Брежнев не публиковали.» – «Читай.» – «Муха, муха, цикадуха ...» – «Какая такая ЦэКатуха? Что там про ЦэКа? Нет, не пойдет.» Помер Андропов. Идет Михалков к Горбачеву и говорит: «Я поэму написал, Сталин, Хрущев, Брежнев и Андропов не давали опубликовать.» – «Читай.» – «Муха, муха ...» – «Это кто там "под мухой"? Мы тут с пьянством боремся! Нет, не пойдет.» Союз развалился. Идет Михалков к Ельцину и говорит: «Я поэму написал, Сталин, Хрущев, Брежнев, Горбачев запрещали публиковать.» – «А нам вообще поэты не нужны!» Дождался Михалков Путина, приходит к нему и говорит: «Я поэму написал, никак опубликовать не могу.» – «Читайте!» – «Муха, муха, цикадуха, / Позолоченное брюхо. / Муха по полю пошла, / Муха денежку нашла. / Пошла муха на базар / И купила самовар!» – «Замечательные стихи!» И дал Путин Михалкову медаль за прославление рыночной экономики, инвесторов в российское производство и недр России, которые богаты золотом, нефтью и газом. А о Чуковском забыли.

★ Dedicated to Mikhalkov's 90th anniversary.

Mikhalkov and Chukovsky wrote a poem together and came to Stalin to present it. "The Buzzing Fly with a gilded tummy was walking across the field and found some money..." – "In what sense did she find some money?" asks Stalin. "There is no money lying around along the roads in our country. This is a bad poem. It won't do!" Stalin died. As did Chukovsky. Mikhalkov comes to Khrushchev alone and says: "I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin was alive." – "Read it out!" – "The Buzzing Fly with a gilded tummy was walking across the field..." – "In what sense was she walking across the field? One should not walk across fields. We grow corn there! No, this poem won't do!" Khrushchev is removed from his office. Mikhalkov comes to

Brezhnev and says: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin and Khrushchev were alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly with a gilded tummy...” – “What do you mean by a gilded tummy? No, this won’t do!” Brezhnev died. Mikhalkov comes to Andropov: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev were alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly...” [in Russian, *цикатуха* sounds similar to “TseKa” – abbreviation for ‘Central Committee’] – “What do you mean by Tseka? Why are you writing about Tseka? No, that won’t do!” Andropov died. Mikhalkov comes to Gorbachev and says: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov were alive.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly...” [in Russian slang the expression *под мухой* (“under the fly”) refers to being drunk] – “What do you mean by being drunk! We are fighting against alcoholism here! No, that won’t do!” The Soviet Union collapses. Mikhalkov comes to Yeltsin and says: “I wrote a poem but could not publish it while Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and Gorbachev were alive.” – “We do not need poets now!” Finally Putin becomes president. Mikhalkov comes to him and says: “I wrote a poem but cannot publish it.” – “Read it out!” – “The Buzzing Fly with a gilded tummy was walking across the field and found some money. The Fly went to the market and bought a samovar there.” – “What a wonderful poem!” Putin gave Mikhalkov a medal for promoting the market economy, investors, Russian industry and mineral resources of gold, oil and gas. Chukovsky was forgotten, however.”

(CA: Krikmann 2004: No. 136)

IX. PUTIN AND VOVOCHKA

IX.1. Jokes about Vovochka are declared political

Vovochka is the diminutive of a Russian male name Vladimir. A naughty schoolboy named Vovochka is the protagonist of a popular genre of (mostly obscene) jokes.

IX.1.A. С 1 января 2000 года все анекдоты о Вовочке считать политическими.

★ Starting from January 1, 2000, all jokes about Vovochka should be viewed as political.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IX.1.B. Все старые анекдоты про Вовочку с 1 января считать политическими!

★ All old jokes about Vovochka should be viewed as political starting from the 1st of January.

(IP: NEWSru 2002)

IX.2. Stirlitz + Vovochka = Putin

IX.2.A. Ещё одна причина, по которой Путин – наш президент. В его личности соединились два любимых персонажа анекдотов – Штирлиц и Вовочка.

★ Yet another reason why Putin is our beloved president: as a person, he represents two of our favourite joke characters – Stirlitz and Vovochka.
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

IX.3. Vovochka as Putin in his childhood

IX.3.A. «Ах, Вовочка, ну что ж ты опять домашнюю работу не сделал и стекло разбил!» – «Марь-Иванна, вот я вырасту, стану главным человеком в стране, и будет вам стыдно!» – «Путин! Прекратишь ты издеваться или нет?!»

★ “Dear me! Vovochka! You haven’t done your homework and have broken the window again!” – “Marivanna [a contraction of Maria Ivanovna], when I grow up and become the most important person in the country, you will be ashamed of yourself!” – “Putin! Will you stop sneering!”
(PP: Выков 2005)

X. WORDPLAY ON PUTIN’S NAME / SURNAME

X.1. Your favourite political figure

X.1.A. «Ваш любимый поэт?» – «Владимир Владимирович Маяковский.» – «Ваш любимый писатель?» – «Владимир Владимирович Набоков.» – «Ваш любимый политический деятель?» – «Ну сколько можно?!»

★ “Who’s your favourite poet?” – “Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky” – “Who’s your favourite writer?” – “Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov” – “Who’s your favourite political figure?” – “C’mon, enough of this!”
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

X.2. The renaming of the kolkhoz “Lenin’s course”

X.2.A. Колхоз «Путь Ленина» переименован в «Лень Путина».

★ The kolkhoz [collective farm] “Lenin’s Course” [*Путь Ленина*] has been renamed into “Putin’s Sloth” [*Лень Путина*].
(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

X.3. Putin and Rasputin

In Russian, *раз* means ‘one’, ‘once’, and is pronounced as “ras” before unvoiced consonants; the sound sequence “ras-putin” can be interpreted both as ‘Rasputin’ (an infamous Russian political figure of the early 20th century) and as ‘Putin once’.

X.3.A. Зачем нам Путин-2? РАС-Путин уже был..

★ Why do we need Putin-2 if we already had Putin-1?
(OC: 15.02.2000)

Х.3.В. В России было две беды – Рас-путин и два-Путин.

★ There have been two woes in Russia: the first Putin [*Рас-путин*, reference to Rasputin, see the comment above] and the second Putin.

(OC: 03.01.2001)

Х.3.С. 1904 – правит монах Распутин, 2004 – правит царь Путин, 2104 – правит китаец Ин.

★ 1904 – the monk Rasputin is in power. 2004 – the tsar Putin is in power. 2104 – the Chinaman Yin is in power.

(OC: 24.02.2004)

X.4. The marshalling yard

In Russian, *сортир* [sortir] is a slang word for a toilet ('shithouse'); *Вова* [Vova] is a popular diminutive of V. Putin's given name Vladimir. Upon modification, the name of the railway station hints at the toilet and at V. Putin, and thus evokes the famous anti-terrorist quote by V. Putin: "We will catch them (the terrorists) in the toilet, we will whack them in the shithouse".

Х.4.А. Трудовой подарок. К дню рождения В. Путина железнодорожники известной станции Москва-Сортировочная переименовали ее в Москва-Сортирвоочная.

★ A gift from the labour force. To celebrate the birthday of V. Putin, the workers of the famous Moskva-Sortirovochnaya railway station have renamed it into the Moskva-Sortirvochnaya Station.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI. PUTIN AND GDP

XI.1. The doubling of GDP

The Russian equivalent of GDP [*gross domestic product*] is ВВП [*валовой внутренний продукт*], which coincides with the initials of Владимир Владимирович Путин [Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin].

XI.1.А. Общество неправильно поняло идею ВВП об удвоении ВВП. Удвоить ВВП – это значит удвоить срок президентства ВВП.

★ The society has understood VVP's idea about the doubling of GDP in a wrong way. The doubling of GDP (*ВВП*) has been taken to mean the doubling of the term of VVP's presidency.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI.1.В. 2003 – удвоение ВВП; 2007 – утроение ВВП; 2011 – пожизненное ВВП.

★ 2003 – the doubling of GDP / VVP; 2007 – the tripling of GDP / VVP; 2011 – perpetual GDP / VVP.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI.1.C. Услышал старый еврей, что президент сказал о росте ВВП к 2010 году в два раза и сделал вывод: «Остается, таки, ВВП на второй срок.»

★ Having heard what the President had said about a twofold increase in GDP (VVP) by 2010, the old Jew concluded: “VVP *will* stay for a second term after all.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI.1.D. Сидят два алкаша, пьют. По телевизору крутят выступление ВВП. «О чем это он?» – «Говорит, ВВП еще не удвоился.» – «А, это он правильно говорит. Давай еще по сто – тогда точно удвоится.»

★ Two drunks are sitting and boozing while VVP’s speech is being broadcast on TV. “What’s he talking about?” – “He says that GDP (VVP) has not doubled yet.” – “Well, he’s right about that. Let’s have another 100 grams each and it will double for sure.”

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI.2. The growth of GDP

XI.2.A. Из новостей.

МЭРТ РФ докладывает о росте ВВП. Рост ВВП составляет 170 см.

★ From a news bulletin:

The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade is reporting about the growth of GDP (*o росте ВВП*). The height of VVP (*рост ВВП*) is 170 cm. now.

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

XI.3. Vladimir Vladimirovich is always right

XI.3.A. ВВП: Вова Всегда Прав. Удвоение ВВП: Владимир Владимирович Всегда-Всегда Прав, Пройдемте!

★ VVP: an abbreviation for: Vova is Always Right (*Вова Всегда Прав*). The doubling of VVP: an abbreviation for: Vladimir Vladimirovich is Always-Always Right, Follow me [follow me (*пойдемте*) – invitational motion imperative used when hauling people to the police station (*Владимир Владимирович всегда-всегда прав, пройдемте*)].

(IP: www.anekdot.ru)

SOVIET CHILDREN'S HUMOROUS FOLKLORE: THE TECHNIQUES OF THE COMIC

Mikhail Lurie

Abstract

The present article comprises three small essays, each of which is devoted to one of the genres of children's humorous folklore that reached their peak in the last decades of the Soviet era. This layer of children's culture gravitates towards a number of universals, the main ones of which are obscenity and destructiveness. In each of the genres in question, a certain technique for the creation of comic effect is honed: in all three cases this is achieved by poetic means.

Key words: children's humour, parody, jokes, sadistic verse

The present article comprises three small essays, each of which is devoted to one of the genres of children's humorous folklore that reached their peak in the last decades of the Soviet era. The tradition is described in the condition in which it was in the 1970s – 1990s when the author of these lines could observe it, first as a bearer and then as a researcher of folklore. The genres in question – children's jokes, parody poems, sadistic rhymes – were at different times borrowed from the adult folklore and assimilated by the children's tradition. In the latter part of the 20th century they tended to emerge already among the youngest children in kindergarten groups (children's jokes, song remakes) and continued their existence up until the last years of secondary school (parodies of the poems of the classics, remakes of Soviet songs, sadistic verses), i.e. their lifespan covered the entire period when the children's culture differs from the adult culture.

Different in their size, methods of analysis and time of writing, the essays are fully autonomous but, in the context of the present paper, united by a common perception of the specific character of the children's humorous folklore in general. On the one hand, in content and thematic terms, this layer of children's culture gravitates towards a number of universals, the main ones of which are obscenity and destructiveness. This is also quite typical of the adult humorous folklore (children's humour, though, is indifferent to satirical political meanings which characterise the late-Soviet folkloric tradition). The use of a limited set of thematic focal points creates a system of interconnections between the genres and texts, thus making for the integrity of

the children's fun folklore. On the other hand, in each of the genres in question, a certain technique for the creation of comic effect is honed: in all three cases this is achieved by poetic means. Each technique is normally based on one key principle actualised through a number of devices: in children's jokes it is the absurdly unintelligible ending which renders the plot meaningless; in parody poems it is the contrastive associatedness of the secondary text with the well-known original; in sadistic verses it is the incarnation of the "black" plot in an artistic form strictly defined by various criteria (ranging from poetic metre to composition). By mastering these techniques, children get the opportunity to create new pieces and new versions within the framework of the generic paradigm, which ensures not only the distinctiveness of each genre, but also its vitality within the tradition. Particularly notable examples of this are the sadistic verses, the youngest and most productive genre of the Soviet children's humorous folklore.

JOKES

Joke is one of the most popular genres of the Russian prose folklore of the 20th – 21st century. In recent decades, the tradition of the Soviet joke has attracted the attention of many folklorists and has been extensively discussed in articles, monographs, collected volumes, and dissertations.¹ The layer of jokes, however, which could be defined as children's jokes proper² and which belongs exclusively to the children's subculture remains practically unresearched.

Modern children gain comprehension of the notion of "joke" by the age of three or four. In their understanding, a joke is any funny story, "a funny little tale" as one of our informants in a kindergarten defined it. Asking children of that age to tell some jokes (this experiment was carried out in several nursery schools in Saint-Petersburg in the late 1990s), we elicited retellings of cartoon episodes, mostly from popular Disney animation series ("Tom and Jerry", "The Pink Panther", etc.), fairy tales, and funny real-life incidents. Children often invent or elaborate such quasi-jokes in the process of telling them, which constitutes their attempts to master the genre. Children of that age are not yet aware of the essential anonymity of jokes. Similarly to how teenagers and grown-ups compete in the role of connoisseurs and storytellers, kids find it more prestigious to be able to invent "funny little tales" themselves.

Children of that age comprehend the functionality of the joke but have no conception of the peculiarities of the generic poetics that dis-

tinguish the joke from other types of "funny little tales". The defining factor is the very situation of telling jokes to each other, not the structure of the texts. In other words, the model for the circulation of jokes is perceived already at this age, i.e. practically before children's repertoire expands to encompass first jokes resembling adult specimens of the genre. Children intuitively understand that they should retell jokes to each other, repeat them over and over again and create their own versions. Similarly to adults, groups of children may engage in spontaneous competitions between joke tellers and, most importantly, give themselves over to that special merry exaltation at the moment of telling / listening that allows almost any text successfully to take the joke's place.

Children's repertoire may also contain jokes known to teenagers and grown-ups. Of particular interest, however, are jokes "with a fixed expiry date" which start circulating among children aged three or four and completely disappear from their repertoire by the time they are ten or eleven years old on the grounds of being too "childish" and therefore not "funny" anymore. According to my observations, these jokes, which can be classified as children's jokes proper, tend to be of one particular type: they are not so much stories with a funny ending but rather stories with a funny text at the end. The humorous core of such jokes is not the unexpected dissonance in the denouement, but the inserted text pronounced at the end of the story by one of the characters. This text, from children's point of view, has its own comic potential and supplies the punch-line to the whole joke. Here are two popular children's jokes which appeared in the repertoire of Soviet preschoolers and primary school students in the 1970s at the latest.

A hare has bought a motorcycle. He comes across a wolf who asks him: "What is this?" The hare answers: "It's a motorcycle." The wolf goes to the store, bumps into a tree and forgets the word. He comes to the hare again and says: "I have forgotten how this thing is called." The hare answers: "A motorcycle." The wolf goes, bumps, forgets and asks the hare again: "How is this called?" The hare is fed up with that and says: "An arse." The wolf comes to the store and tells the sales assistant: "Could you show me the arse please!" – "No, I won't do that!" The wolf demands to see the manager. The manager comes and says: "If this is what the customer wants, show him the arse." Well, the sales assistant shows her arse, but the wolf says:

*«Жопа не такая,
Жопа голубая,
Жопа дрынь-дрынь-дрынь –
и поехала.»*

★ *"No, the arse is not like that.
The arse is blue in colour.
The arse goes vroom-vroom
and is off."³*

A foreigner came to the Soviet Union and went to watch "The Thief of Bagdad"⁴ in the cinema. He sat down next to an old lady who was knitting. His trousers caught on her needle and unravelled. He wrote a letter to his wife [in rhymes]:

<i>О, Мери, Мери, Мери! Как трудно жить в Сэсэре: Пока смотрел «Багдадский вор», Советский вор штаны унёр.</i>	<i>★ Oh, Mary, Mary, Mary! / It's so hard to live in the USSR: / While I was watching "The Thief of Bagdad", / A Soviet thief has stolen my pants.</i>
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As far as the final text pronounced by one of the characters is concerned, it is usually either a stanza, as in the first example, or a text obviously striving to assume a poetical mould, as in the second one. However, it may also take the form of several lines (jokes about the talking parrot) or have dialogical structure. For instance, in the joke about Neznaika ("The Dunno Boy"), the hero must learn the already provided answers to a number of questions. In class, though, he mixes everything up mismatching the answers and the questions and ends up taking absurd nonsense:

"What should you do if you friend is leaving on a train?" – "Take him by the hand and drag him out." – "What should you do if you friend is drowning?" – "Wave him goodbye."

In another joke, it is the interpretation of the dialogue, not the dialogue itself, that is funny and preposterous: a cowboy and an Indian cannot understand each other and have to use sign language. Later on, each of them retells the dialogue to his friends, one construal of which is perfectly neutral, while the other one, serving as the closing text, is absurd:

"Who are you?" – "I'm a goat." – "A mountain goat?" – "No, a swimming one."

Finally, there is one joke (or, possibly, several such jokes) in which the closing text is limited to a single word. The comic potential of this word for a given collectivity of children, however, is so high that the invention of an anecdotal plot seems to be fully warranted:

A wife sent her husband to buy her a swimming costume. He bashed his head and forgot how the thing was called. The husband came to the store and said: "Could you please give me... well, how you call it... a tits-and-pussy-holder [сиськописькодержатель]!"

Although being important by virtue of the narrative character of the genre, the plot in jokes of this type is still a minor element: it is as if clipped to a funny quatrain or dialogue which closes the narration

and ensures the comic effect. The function of the plot is not so much to develop into a comic situation and provide an unexpected denouement at the end (strictly speaking, there may be no denouement at all, as in the majority of the jokes cited above), but rather to create the circumstances in which a character can pronounce the closing "punchlining" text. In order to achieve this, one should, firstly, make the character speak and, secondly, endow him with such a quality that would make his words sound absurd and therefore funny. In other words, the hero of the joke should be psychologically and socially inadequate and lack proper linguistic and/or cultural competence, while the plot situation should be such as to allow the expression of this inadequacy through verbal behaviour. The armoury of the genre contains several popular motifs which make this result possible. These motifs, as well as their illustrations, are listed below:

1. The hero forgets how the thing is called.

It is this motif that underlies the plots of the two jokes cited above: "The arse is not like that..." and "A tits-and-pussy-holder".

2. The hero mishears the words.

A Chukchi is riding in a taxi. He asks the driver: "What are we riding in?" – "In a car." He mishears the answer as "on a tyre" [in Russian: На машине (in a car) / на шине (on a tyre)]. The Chukchi sees a policeman. He asks the driver: "Who is standing over there?" – "A policeman." He mishears the answer as "a pussiceman". "What is it in front of us?" – "A fence." The Chukchi mishears the answer as "a lettuce". The car crashes into the fence; the policeman starts scolding the driver; the Chukchi comes out of the car and says [in verse]:

*Товарищ Милиписькин,
Шофер не виноват,
Мы ехали на шине
И врезались в салат.*

*★ Comrade pussiceman,
It's not the driver's fault.
We were riding on a type
And ran into the lettuce.*

3. The characters connected with the hero have strange names.

An old woman had four dogs: Aba, Srusja, Pira and Gumy. Once she went for a walk with them and all the dogs ran away. The old woman started running around and calling their names: "Aba, Srusja, Pira, Gumy! Aba, Srusja, Pira, Gumy!"⁵ The policeman told her: "You can shit the pancakes out, if you want. But do not do it on my beat!"

A man had three daughters called *Otka*, *Motka* and *Tutka*. Once he said to the first one: “Run, *Motka!*” [In Russian, *Беги, Мотка!* → *бегемотка*, ‘a female hippopotamus’], to the second one: “Go, *Otka!*” [*Иди, Отка* → *идуотка*, ‘a female idiot’] and to the third one: “Forgive me, *Tutka!*” [*Прости, Тутка* → *проститутка*, ‘a prostitute’].

A woman had a dog called *Pushok* [= ‘fluff’]. Once she went for a swim. In the meantime, thieves came and stole all her clothes and the dog. She got out of the water naked, covered herself with a burdock leaf and started running around looking for her dog. She comes up to a man and asks: “Have you seen my *Fluff?*” He answers [in rhyme]:

«Вижу, вижу твоей пушок ★ “I can surely see your fluff
Сквозь дырявый лопушок!» Through that holey burdock leaf!”

4. The hero becomes verbally inadequate having had contact with a magic object.

Gena the Crocodile and *Cheburashka* [famous cartoon characters] are riding on a bus. A pasty is lying on a seat. There is an inscription on the pasty: “The person who eats this pasty will pronounce G instead of R.” The friends divide the pasty up and eat it. When they get out of the bus, *Gena* says: “*Cheburashka*, what would you like: an ice-c[gleam or a [g]oll?” – “It’s all the same [shit] to me!”⁶
(Lurie 1992)

Gena and *Cheburashka* have four sweets. *Cheburashka* says: “*Gena*, I want to eat this sweet.” – “Don’t eat it, *Cheburashka*. Otherwise you’ll get the hiccups.” *Cheburashka* eats it anyway and gets the hiccups. The second sweet makes you fart. *Cheburashka* eats it. The third one makes you sing. *Cheburashka* eats it. The remaining sweet makes you pray. *Cheburashka* eats it as well and starts hiccupping, farting, singing and praying at the same time.

Ик! Пук! Тра-ля-ля! ★ *Hic! Poot! La la lee!*
Господи, спаси меня! *Oh, Lord, save me!*

5. The hero is inadequate because he is very different from others.

This motif is most often found in jokes about a foreigner, a parrot and *Neznaika*. In the first case, the cultural and linguistic alienness of the character is involved, in the other two, his inability to apply human logic, which leads to a dissonance between the situation and the texts describing it.

A teacher had a parrot which kept squawking profanities. The teacher said to him: “Go fly around the whole wide world and learn some good words.” The parrot did as he was told. He met some boys on the way who

were playing a war game and shouting: "Beat the bastard, beat him!" The parrot flew on and came across some boys who had caught a frog and were shouting: "Piss on it! Piss on it!" The parrot memorised this. He flew on and met a group of penguins: "We are penguins, we are never cold, we live in the North." The parrot memorised this and flew back to the teacher to show what he had learned. When the teacher fell down, the parrot squawked: "Piss on him! Piss on him!" When the teacher stood up and put him into the fridge, the parrot squawked: "We are penguins, we are never cold, we live in the North." When the teacher took him out and put him into the cage, he squawked: "Beat the bastard, beat him!" The teacher sold the parrot.

(Lurie 1992)

A foreigner came to the USSR. As he was walking he suddenly felt the urge to go to the toilet. He asked: "When can I find a toilet?" and got the answer: "Go straight ahead until you see the letter M. There will be the men's toilet." He walked ahead and saw the letter M. It was a shop [магазин in Russian]. He started shitting, but was not able to shit out much. People saw it and punched him in the face. He walked on and saw another letter M. It was a subway station [метро in Russian]. He started shitting again and this time shitted out way too much. The policeman came and fined him. The foreigner decided to write a letter to his wife:

О, Мери, Мери, Мери!

Как трудно жить в Сэсэре:

За недосрачу морду бьют,

За пересрачу штраф берут.

★ Oh, Mary, Mary, Mary

'tis so hard to live in the USSR

If you shit too little, you'll be punched,

If you shit too much, you'll be fined.

To sum up, the main function of the plot is to provide background circumstances and to create a situation that can give rise to the closing funny text. As can be seen from the examples given above, all kinds of devices are used to achieve this goal: exceptional forgetfulness of characters, bizarre names, strange reactions, etc. It should be noted that many of these elements are so absurd and preposterous that they create additional comic effects while the joke is being told or listened to, making the audience giggle "in advance" before the final text is pronounced (as mentioned above, such behaviour is also prompted by the very situation of telling each other funny things). It is funny that the customer asks the sales assistant to show him the arse; it is funny that the foreigner loses his trousers in the cinema; it is funny that the hero first shits too little ("undershits") and then too much ("overshits"); it is funny that the dog is called Srusja (in Russian this means 'I'm shitting myself'; 'the one who shits himself') and the girl is called Tutka; it is funny that a person may continually bump into a tree; it is funny to hear the word *милиписькин* 'pussiceman' which stands out

from the other mishearings of the Chukchi in that it is a nonce word; it is funny that a sweet can make you hiccup and fart; in fact, hiccups and farts are hilarious in themselves to the children's subculture. Thus, being the bridgehead for the closing text, the narrative creates the emotional preconditions for its comic perception.

Certainly, the closing text, the punch-line, plays the chief role in the creation of the comic effect. Children find these texts to be funny in themselves and sometimes even "quote" them in isolation from the rest of the joke when the source and the context are common knowledge. The comic effect of the joke, however, relies not simply on the telling of these texts but specifically on the contrast between their linguistic and/or logical absurdity and their literariness. The latter quality is perceived by the child, firstly, in the fact that the incongruous text as if naturally and logically flows from the narration and seems to be the direct result of a chain of events and, secondly, through the text's integrity and orderliness, and, in the case of poems, through poetic completeness of the form. Any incongruity, disproportion, and outright folly is funny, but well-turned folly is funnier still. This seems to be the main secret of the poetics of the comic in early children's jokes, and this is what makes them "not funny" for older kids. For a small child, on the contrary, it is easier to understand a funny text than a funny situation. That is why children's audiences do not have problems comprehending such jokes, and it is not necessary or even appropriate for the teller to ask "Do you get it?" (which is usually done when children tell jokes to each other) in order to check whether the listeners have understood the plot in the right way.

It should be pointed out, though, that practically all motifs both mentioned and omitted above underlying the motifs of children's jokes of this type can be traced back to the world's plot stock. In view of this fact, it is possible to find their counterparts both among medieval and Renaissance European short stories and Eastern-Slavic anecdotal folktales, which cannot be said about the majority of adult Soviet jokes of the 20th century. In a children's joke, however, these plots often remain unactualised: as soon as there arises a possibility to vocalise the closing text, the plot ceases its development. Incidentally, many anecdotal folktales told by the peasantry and written down by the collectors in the 19th – 20th centuries are also of this type: a funny situation is supplemented or substituted by a funny text at the end. In this sense, one can say that small children's jokes are closer to the "old" folklore as far as the techniques for the creation of the comic effects are concerned.

PARODIES AND REMAKES

A substantial share of the children's and teenage (school) humorous folklore is made up of poetic works united by one common trait: they all have come into being as a result of the remaking of some existing literary and literary-musical texts. Such derivative texts become known to children by the time the latter are 5–6 years old and reach their maximum popularity in the school years. The presence of a certain literary background makes it possible to subsume this body of children's folklore under the category of parody poems. Only some of those texts, however, can be called parodies in the sense conventional to that terms' usage in literary criticism. Although there is no one single definition of a parody as a literary phenomenon, most researchers consider as such those works of literature which are characterised by a heightened orientation towards a certain level of poetics of a literary source (genre, authorial style, particular work of art). At the same time, as A. A. Morozov (1960: 56) wrote, "a parodying treatment is first and foremost a derogatory treatment". If the derivative text does not have this pejorative orientation, does not aim to deride the original and simply "parasitises" on a famous work in order to create a new one, then we have no grounds for regarding it a parody and may only talk about this as its structural characteristic. Seen from this point of view, parody in children's folklore can also be divided into two text types: 1) parody in both form and content and 2) parody only in form, or "parodical," to use Y. Tynyanov's term.

Two groups of children's folklore texts can be deemed to be particularly close to literary parodies. First of all, there are poems that reproduce the individual poetic style of this or that author in a comic way. It is noteworthy that the majority of parodies in school lore of this type imitate the poetic manner of Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose works are included in the school curriculum. All these texts are scabrous in content and full of obscene language, which can, apparently, be explained by the fact that schoolchildren perceive his poetic style as "rude" above all other things, as well as by the presence of the word *блядь* ['whore'] in two of his famous poems, which invariably attracts students' attention and sets them laughing.

Interestingly, the parodies of Mayakovsky's poems enjoy a dual status in the school tradition: they can be perceived both as an imitation of his style and as real poetry by the classic Soviet poet. This situation is analogous to the one that arose with regard to the burlesques on V. K. Trediakovsky in the 19th century: in the course of

time, many of them came to be regarded as authored by him. “It can be said that in the reader’s, or more precisely, in the literary consciousness [...],” Tynyanov (1931: 7) wrote on that score, “the real or once existing Trediakovsky was entirely replaced by running parodies.” These words are equally applicable in full measure to schoolchildren’s idea of Mayakovsky’s creative endeavours, which was, among other things, influenced by folkloric pastiches attributed to him: he is perceived both as a rude fellow, a foul mouth, an enemy of sentimentality and morals, and as an ardent patriot of the Soviet homeland for whom “usefulness to the country” is the only true virtue:

*Я лежу на чужой жене,
Одеяло прилипло к жопе.
Я лежу и штатную детей,
Назло буржуазной Европе!*

...

*Вы любите розы?
А я на них срал!
Стране нужны паровозы
И драгоценный металл.*

*★ I am lying on somebody else’s wife.
The blanket is clinging to my ass.
I am lying and churning children out
To spite the bourgeois Europe.*

...

*★ Do you like roses?
I don’t give a shit about them!
The country needs steam locomotives
And precious metal!⁷*

The other group of school folkloric poems that can be likened to literary parody is comprised of the texts in which comic imitation is focused not on the individual poetic manner, but on the style and intonations of the Russian lyric poetry of the second part of the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century. The generalised idea of this style with individual idiosyncrasies blurred out is formed on the basis of numerous works by F. Tyutchev, A. Fet, A. Plescheev, A. Maykov, S. Esenin and other lyric poets included in the school curriculum. Here, the parodic effect is achieved by means of contrastive combination of the exaggerated emotionality of poetic clichés and the scabrous content:

*Осень настала,
Холодно стало,
Птички дерьмо перестали клевать.
Выйдешь, бывало,
Раскроешь ебало –
Ну и погодушка, ёб твою мать.*

...

*А глаза ее синие-синие
В обрамлении черных ресниц...
У меня половое бессилие
И гангрена обоих яиц.*

*★ Autumn has come.
The cold spell has set in.
Birds have stopped pecking shit.
I used to come outside,
To open my gob and say:
What motherfucking weather!*

...

*★ Her blue-blue eyes
Are framed with black lashes...
I’m suffering from sexual impotence
And gangrene of both balls.*

In addition to poems in which comic disparagement is directed against the poetic style, children's folklore also includes texts that reproduce in a distortedly pejorative way particular works of literature. Such works are conventionally called "remakes". It is them that constitute the bulk of the children's parodic poetry. The essence of this parody, however, is of a somewhat different character: this body of school poems is typologically (and also partly genetically) related not so much to the literary parody of today as to the earlier burlesque tradition that was known in antiquity and reached its height in the middle ages – the so-called "profane poetry". What comes to the fore here is the caricaturing of the generic and stylistic peculiarities of the original and not the denigration of its high cultural status. As pointed out by M. M. Bakhtin (1965: 95), "medieval parody played a completely unbridled game with all that was most sacred and important from the point of view of official ideology". Children's remakes also engage in this game with the high-status, serious and sacred. Similarly to hymns being the preferred target of Greek parodic poetry and to prayers, liturgical texts and sermons favoured by medieval parody, poems by Russian and Soviet classic poets as well as war and blatantly patriotic songs supplied the material for Soviet children's poetic remakes.

Another group of "victims" of folkloric remakes is comprised of the most popular children's songs, and this is also no coincidence. Children's songs (just as books, cartoons, plays, etc.) are adult creations for children. The lyrics are usually either too sentimental or excessively straightforward in their preaching of moral values: friendship, loyalty, kindness, etc. At a particular age, such songs stop being perceived as "one's own", even if at first children may like them. That is why these songs provoke the appearance of disparaging folkloric interpretations in no lesser degree than textbook classics.

In children's subculture, such poetic remakes play the role of "parodia sacra": a work of art canonised by tradition, official acclaim, school instruction, repeated broadcasting on radio (in short, by the adult culture) is comically discredited through distorting the text or replacing it with an "anti-text". These works are distinguished not by the qualitative imitation of style, but by the destruction of the known original, for which no holds are barred. As a rule, such remakes are characterised by minimal changes to the verbal makeup with certain lines retained in their initial form (the altered elements are shown in bold):

Однажды, в студеную зимнюю пору
Я из лесу вышел; был сильный мороз.
Гляжу, поднимается медленно в гору
Лошадка, везущая хворосту воз.
И шествуя важно, в спокойствии чинном,
Лошадку ведет под уздцы мужичок
В больших сапогах, в полушубке овчинном,
В больших рукавицах... а сам с ноготок!
«Здорово, парнище!» – Ступай себе мимо! –
«Уж больно ты грозен, как я погляжу!
Откуда дровишки?» – Из лесу, вестимо;
Отец, слышишь, рубит, а я отвожу.
(Н. А. Некрасов, «Крестьянские дети»)

★ *Once in the freezing wintertime, / I came out of the forest; there was a hard frost. / I saw a horse plodding uphill / And pulling a cartful of brushwood. / A peasant strutting at a sedate pace / Was holding it by the bridle. / He was of a very small height / But was wearing large boots, a sheepskin coat and large mittens. / "Hello, fellow!" – "Mind your own business!" / "I see you are very harsh. / Where is the firewood from?" – "From the forest, of course. / My father is chopping and I am carting away."*
(N. A. Nekrasov "The Peasant Children")

Однажды в студеную зимнюю пору
Я с **крыши свалился**. Был сильный мороз.
Гляжу: поднимается медленно в гору
Машина, везущая **золота** воз.
И шествуя важно, в спокойствии чинном,
В машине сидит за рулем мужичок.
В больших сапогах, а полушубке овчинном,
С обрезом в ручонках, а сам – с ноготок.
«Здорово, парнишка!» – «Ступай себе мимо!»
«Уж больно ты **наглый**, как я погляжу!
«Откуда **златишко**?» – «**С Госбанка**, вестимо.
Отец, слышь, **грабит**, а я отвожу.»

★ *Once in the freezing wintertime, / I fell from the roof; there was a hard frost. / I saw a car plodding uphill / And carrying a cartful of gold. / A peasant strutting at a sedate pace / Was sitting behind the wheel. / He was of a very small height / But was wearing large boots, a sheepskin coat and had a sawn-off shotgun in his hands. / "Hello, fellow!" / "Mind your own business!" / "I see you are very impudent. / Where is the gold from?" – "From the State Bank, of course. / My father is robbing and I am carting away."*

But even when the source text has been selectively altered, its parts have been rearranged in a different order and the total share of new words and sentences in the text of the remake is larger, the original is

still constantly shining through. Its specific textual elements never disappear for long but, on the contrary, occur regularly: the remake as if follows on the heels of text of the parodied work and its plots:

*У лукоморья дуб зеленый;
Златая цепь на дубе том:
И днем и ночью кот ученый
Все ходит по цепи кругом;
Идет направо – песнь заводит,
Налево – сказку говорит.
Там чудеса: там леший бродит,
Русалка на ветвях сидит;
Там на неведомых дорожках
Следы невиданных зверей;
Избушка там на курьих ножках
Стоит без окон, без дверей;
Там лес и дол видений полны;
Там о заре прихлынут волны
На брег песчаный и пустой,*

*И тридцать витязей прекрасных
Чредой из вод выходят ясных,
И с ними дядька их морской;
Там королевич мимоходом
Пленяет грозного царя;
Там в облаках перед народом
Через леса, через моря
Колдун несет богатыря;
В темнице там царевна тужит,
А бурый волк ей верно служит;
Там ступа с Бабою Ягой
Идет, бредет сама собой;
Там царь Кащей над златом чахнет;
Там русской дух... там Русью пахнет!*
(А. С. Пушкин, «Руслан и Людмила»)

★ *A green oak is growing on the curved seashore. / With a golden chain attached to it. / Day and night a learned cat / Keeps walking round upon that chain. / He walks to the right and sings a song. / He walks to the left and tells a tale. / There, marvels are everywhere: a wood goblin is wandering around; / A mermaid is sitting on the boughs. / There, untrodden trails are strewn with tracks of outlandish beasts. / There, a hut on chicken feet has neither windows nor doors. / There, forests and valleys are teeming with phantoms. / There, at dawn, tidal waves / are surging against the sandy barren shore / And thirty three dazzling knights / Are stepping out of the clear waters in rows / Escorted by their old commander. / There, a prince is easily capturing a cruel tsar. / There, in the sky, as people are watching, / A sorcerer is carrying a mighty warrior / Across the sea and over the plain. / There, a princess is languishing in a dungeon / And a brown wolf is serving her faithfully. / There, an evil witch is riding in a giant mortar / Which is moving all by itself. / There, Tsar Koshchei is keeping a greedy watch over his gold. / There, Russian spirit is everywhere, everything breathes of Russia.*
(A.S. Pushkin “Ruslan and Lyudmila”)

*У лукоморья дуб срубили,
Кота на мясо зарубили,
Русалку в бочку засадили
И на Венеру запустили.
А по Венериным дорожкам
Чертята ходят в босоножках
И ступа с Бабою-Ягой*

*Идет-бредет за колбасой.
Там царь Кащей повсюду ходит
И спекуляцию наводит.
Там тридцать три богатыря
В помойке ищут три рубля,
А ихний дядька Черномор
Уже две тысячи нашел.*

★ *A green oak was chopped down on the curved seashore. / The cat was butchered for meat. / The mermaid was forced into a barrel / And launched to Venus. / Venus trails are frequented by devils in slingbacks. / There, the evil witch is traveling in a giant mortar to get some sausages. / There, Tsar Kaschei is walking everywhere / Engaged in speculations. / There, thirty three knights / Are looking for three rubles in the dump, / And their old commander / Has already found two thousand.*

Such an accurate and careful treatment of the object of parody, the retention of its metrical and syntactic structure and a considerable number of words and phrases can be explained by the desire to blow up a serious work of literature from inside and, at the same time, to keep its formal shell as intact as possible. This makes for the attainment of the intended result consisting in the creation of a profaned analogue of a “sacred and important” poem and not of a new caricature work, as is usually done by literary burlesque. It is this particular effect that medieval parodies tried to achieve: “The text that is being parodied is distorted,” D. Likhachev (1984: 12) wrote about them. “This is a sort of “out-of-tune” reproduction of the parody of the original – a faulty reproduction akin to out-of-tune singing.”

That is why, along with the masterpieces of school burlesque, the tradition has also spawned a whole number of primitive, sketchy remakes that impress with the simplicity of their humour and the arbitrariness of changes to the original:

*Лес дремучий снегами покрыт,
На посту пограничник стоит.
Ночь темна, и кругом тишина –
Спит советская наша страна.
(Муз.: С. Богуславский,
сл.: О. Высотская, «Песня о пограничнике»)*

*Лес дремучий сметаной покрыт,
На посту черт с дубиной стоит.
Ночь темна, и кругом тишина –
Спит в курятнике бага-яга.*

★ *The dense forest is covered in snow.
/ The frontier guard is on duty. / The
night is dark and silent. / Our Soviet
country is asleep.
(Music: S. Boguslavsky; lyrics:
O. Vysotskaya, “The Song about the
Frontier guard”)*

★ *The dense forest is covered in sour
cream./The devil with a club is on
duty. / The night is dark and silent. /
An evil witch is asleep in the coop.*

Such a reworking of the text is quite enough for texts of this type, because the remake is supposed to be not a sophisticated mockery of the original but merely its ugly double.

Nonetheless, the changes made to the source text even in such a primitive remake cannot be considered fully arbitrary. Formally related to the original, the derivative should be opposed to it content-

wise and create "a world with 'a confused system of signification' giving rise to nonsense, drivel, gibberish" (Likhachev 1984: 47). In this sense, the replacement of snow with sour-cream and the frontier guard with the devil holding a club and guarding an evil witch (and what is more, a "Soviet" one) seems to be entirely logical in its own way.

The desire to create a version that would maximally differ from the original in content and/or stylistic terms and be the latter's reflection in a distorting mirror accounts for the thematic homogeneity of the majority of children's poetic remakes. The main devices for disparaging a text are the use of obscenities and the reliance upon sexual, scatological and bacchic themes. In this case, the content of the parody stands in the sharpest and boldest conflict to the high status of the original (as far as a poem of a classic poet or a patriotic song is concerned) and to the childish sentimental intonations (if a children's ditty is involved):

*Однажды, в студеную зимнюю пору
Я из лесу вышел; был сильный мороз.
Гляжу, поднимается медленно в гору
Лошадка, везущая хворосту воз.
(Н. А. Некрасов,
«Крестьянские дети»)*

*Однажды в студеную зимнюю пору
Лошадка прилипла пиздою к забору.*

*Я, ты, он, она,
Вместе – целая страна.
(сл.: Р. Рождественский,
муз.: Д. Тухманов, «Родина моя»)*

*Я, ты, он, она –
Вместе выебем слона!*

*С голубого ручейка
Начинается река,
Ну, а дружба начинается с улыбки.
(сл.: М. Пляцковский, муз.: В. Шаинский,
«Улыбка» из м/ф «Крошка Енот»)*

*С голубого ручейка
Начинается река,
Ну а дружба начинается с бутылки.*

★ *Once in the freezing wintertime, /
I came out of the forest; there was a
hard frost. / I saw a horse plodding
uphill / And pulling a cartful of
brushwood. (N. A. Nekrasov
"The Peasant Children")*

★ *Once in the freezing wintertime,
/The horse's cunt froze to the fence.*

★ *I, you, he, she
Together we are a whole country.
(Lyrics: R. Rozhdestvensky; music:
D. Tikhmanov "My Homeland")*

★ *I, you, he, she
Together we will fuck an elephant.*

★ *With a blue little brook / Starts a
river, / And friendship starts with a
smile. (Lyrics: M. Plyatskovsky;
music: V. Shainsky "A Smile" from
the animated film "Tiny Raccoon")*

★ *With a blue little brook / Starts a
river, / And friendship starts with a
bottle.*

In view of the fact that obscene language and indecent content of the remakes is directed against the seriousness and infantilism of the original, many parodies are based on images of destruction in order to

more effectively discredit the cosmic, constructive, and positive essence of poems and songs offered to children by adult culture. Everything that lives, moves, grows and prospers in source texts, deteriorates, suffers injuries, perishes, and collapses in remakes. Parodies with such content usually exhibit more differences from the original:

*От улыбки солнечной одной
Перестанет плакать самый
грустный дождик.
Сонный лес простится с тишиной
И захлопает в зеленые ладоши.
(сл.: М. Пляцковский,
муз.: В. Шаинский,
«Улыбка» из м/ф «Крошка Енот»)*

*От улыбки лопнул бегемот,
Обезьяна подавила все бананы,
Темный лес спалили дикари...*

*Голубой вагон бежит-качается,
Скорый поезд набирает ход,
Ах, зачем же этот день кончается,
Лучше б он тянулся целый год.
(сл.: Э. Успенский,
муз.: В. Шаинский,
«Голубой вагон» из м/ф
«Шапокляк»)*

*Голубой вагон разбился вдребезги,
Шапокляк повисла на суку,
Дядя Гена улетел в Америку,
Чебурашка плавает в пруду.*

*У лукоморья дуб зеленый;
Златая цепь на дубе том:
И днем и ночью кот ученый
Все ходит по цепи кругом.
Идет направо – песнь заводит,
Налево – сказку говорит.
Там чудеса: там леший бродит,
Русалка на ветвях сидит...
(А. С. Пушкин, «Руслан и
Людмила»)*

★ *One sunny smile / Is enough to
make the saddest rain stop crying. /
The sleepy forest will say goodbye
to silence / And start clapping its
green hands. (Lyrics: M. Plyats-
kovsky; music: V. Shainsky “A
Smile” from the animated film
“Tiny Raccoon”)*

★ *One sunny smile made the hip-
popotamus burst. / The monkey
crushed all bananas. / The dark
forest was burnt by savages.*

★ *The blue carriage is rolling and
swaying; / The fast train is gaining
momentum. / Why, oh why, is this
day coming to an end? / I wish it
lasted the entire year.
(Lyrics: Uspensky; music: Shain-
sky, “The Blue Carriage” from the
animated film “Shapoklyak”)*

★ *The blue carriage crushed to
pieces;/Old Lady Shapoklyak is
hanging on a bough;/Uncle Gena
flew away to America;/Chebura-
shka is floating in a pond.*

★ *A green oak is growing on the curv-
ed seashore./With a golden chain at-
tached to it./Day and night a learned
cat/Keeps walking round upon that
chain./He walks to the right and sings
a song./He walks to the left and tells a
tale./There, marvels are everywhere:/a
wood goblin is wandering around; A
mermaid is sitting on the boughs.
(A. S. Pushkin, “Ruslan and Lyud-
mila”)*

*У лукоморья дуб срубили,
Кота на мясо зарубили,
Русалку в бочке засолили,
А леших на огне сожгли.*

★ *The green oak was chopped down
on the curved seashore;/The cat was
butchered for meat;/The mermaid
was pickled in a barrel;/And the
wood goblins were burned in a fire.*

Thus, the content of these works correlates with their basic function which consists in “destroying the sign system of a world regulated by signs” (Likhachev 1984: 13).

In some remakes (of works by Krylov, Nekrasov and Esenin), the ending features the name of the author of the parody poem. This corresponds to the original only as far as the latter of the following examples is concerned. The appearance of such a metatext reinforces the burlesque sonance of the remake adding an epigrammatic tone to it (see Begak 1930):

*Ну, мертвая! – крикнул малюточка басом,
Ванул под уздцы и быстрей зашагал.*

(Н. А. Некрасов, «Крестьянские дети», 1861)

★ *“Come on, slow one!” shouted the tiny man in a low voice,
Jerked at the bridle and started walking faster.*

(N. A. Nekrasov, “The Peasant Children”, 1861)

*«Ну, мертвая!» – крикнул малюточка басом,
Нажал на курок – и Некрасов упал.*

★ *“Come on, slow one!” shouted the tiny man in a low voice,
Pulled the trigger and Nekrasov fell to the ground.*

*Живите так,
Как вас ведет звезда,
Под куцей обновленной сени.
С приветствием,
Вас помнящий всегда
Знакомый ваш Сергей Есенин.*

(С. Есенин, «Письмо к женщине»)

*Ебите баб в душистом сене!
С приветом к вам,
Сергей Есенин.*

★ *Live your life /
As the star bids you. /
Greetings / From the one who al-
ways remembers you. /
Your friend, /
Sergey Esenin.*

(S. Esenin “A letter to a woman”)

★ *Fuck chicks in fragrant hay, /
Friendly greetings from / Sergei
Esenin.*

Another group of children's parody poetry is comprised of various instances of the so-called “parodic use” (A. A. Morozov's term). The author, style and content of the original as well as its cultural status do not hold any interest for the tradition, which simply uses a famous work as a basis for the creation of a new one, rather than starting “from scratch.” The sources for such texts have always been concrete

works, most commonly songs. These remakes of well-known songs and poems which aim neither to parody nor disparage have been recorded for a long time already. Thus, the folkloric repertoire of seminarists in the 19th century included their own versions of Lermontov's "Kazak's Lullaby" and Nekrasov's "Why are you watching the road so avidly?"⁸, telling about seminarists' hard life and ordinary priests' hardships and miseries. Such remakes of pressing contemporary relevance figure also among the songs of students of the Kazan University of the 1840s – 1860s published by A. P. Aristov:

*В минуту жизни трудную
Теснится ль в сердце грусть:
Одну молитву чудную
Твержу я наизусть.
(М. Ю. Лермонтов, «В минуту
жизни трудную»)*

*★ In a difficult moment of my life /
When my heart is filled with sad-
ness, / I keep repeating one wonder-
ful prayer from memory.
(M. Yu. Lermontov "In a Difficult
Moment of My Life")*

*В минуту жизни праздную
Я рожу написал.
Одну такую грязную
Я в свете отыскал.*

*★ In an idle moment of my life / I
drew a funny face. / There is only
one such ugly countenance / In the
whole world.
(Aristov 1904: 96)*

According to Туньянов (1931: 8), "parody can be used as a means, as a form. Such is its role in political, social and literary satire". Of course, in certain remakes circulating in teenage groups one can detect political satire as, for instance, in the following very famous remake of a children's song portraying Soviet military aggression.

*Медленно минуты уплывают вдаль,
Встречи с ними ты уже не жди,
И хотя нам прошлого немного жаль,
Лучшее, конечно, впереди.
Припев: Скатертью, скатертью дальний путь стелется
И упирается прямо в небосклон.
Каждому, каждому в лучшее верится,
Катится, катится голубой вагон.*

(сл.: Э. Успенской, муз.: В. Шаинский,
«Голубой вагон», из м/ф «Шапокляк»)

*★ Minutes are slowly flowing away into the distance, / Do not expect to meet
them again. / Although we are a little bit sorry for the past, / The best
things, of course, are waiting ahead. / Chorus: / The long road meanders
like a tablecloth. / It runs directly into the horizon. / Everyone believes in a
brighter future. / The blue train carriage keeps rolling.
(lyrics: E. Uspensky, music: V. Shainsky, "Blue Train Carriage", from the
animated film "Shapoklyak")*

*Медленно ракеты уплывают вдаль,
Встречи с ними ты уже не жди.
И хотя Америку немного жаль,
У Китая это впереди.*

*Припев: Скатертью, скатертью хлорциан
И забирается под противогаз
Каждому, каждому в лучшее верится:
Падает, падает ядерный фугас.*

★ *Slowly missiles are flowing away into the distance, / Do not expect to meet them again. / Although we are a little bit sorry for America, / The same destiny is awaiting China. / Chorus: / Cyogen chloride meanders like a tablecloth. / And gets directly under the gas mask. / Everyone believes in a brighter future. / The nuclear fougasse keeps falling.*

Such texts emerged among adults (often among university students) and then “descended” to the children’s folkloric repertoire. They gain popularity in children’s and teenage circles not due to their political sharpness but due to the contrasting effect existing between the contents of the remake and the original (a children’s song) as well as due to the destructivity of the content itself. In this sense, the given text is a typical teenage remake. The realities of life that matter for children rarely become themes for folkloric song remakes. This is more typical of the so-called “amateur art”. I know only a small number of texts that have as its basis a literary original (usually a song) and describe in mocking or grotesquely violent images the easily-recognised realities of life in a summer camp or a school:

*Пора-пора-порадуемся на своем веку
Красавице и кубку, счастливому клинку.
Пока-пока-покачивая перьями на шляпах,
Судьбе не раз шепнем: «Мерси боку!»
(Сл.: Ю. Ряшенцев, муз.: М. Дунаевский,
«Песенка мушкетеров» из к/ф «Три мушкетера»)*

★ *Let us rejoice in our lifetimes / At a beautiful girl, a goblet and a fortunate blade. / Swaying the plumes on our hats, / We'll whisper to the fate many times: “Merci Bocu”.*

(lyrics: Yu. Ryashentsev, music: M. Dunaevsky, “The Song of the Musketees” from the film “The Three Musketeers”)

*По ка, по ка, по камушкам мы школу разберем,
Директора повесим, а завуча уьем.
Учителя английского мы спустим в унитаз,
Пускай себе поплавает, английский водолаз.
Учителя по русскому заставим мы писать,
А если не напишет, ему не сдобровать.⁹*

★ *We'll take the school to pieces, / Hang the head master and kill the head teacher. / We'll flush the teacher of English down the toilet / And let this English scuba diver swim. / We'll make the teacher of Russian write, / And if he refuses, he'll be in trouble.*

By 1970s – 1980s, some remakes had become a permanent part of the folklore and had lost any connection with their sources in the mind of schoolchildren. Thus, few teenagers know that the verse about Susanin emerged as a parody on K. F. Ryleev's poem called "Ivan Susanin":

*«Куда ты ведешь нас?.. не видно ни зги! –
Сусанину с сердцем вскричали враги: –
Мы вязнем и тонем в сугробинах снега;
Нам, зная, не добраться с тобой до ночлега.*
(К. Ф. Рылеев, «Иван Сусанин»)

★ *"Where are you taking us? ... we cannot see a thing! / Shouted the enemies to Susanin angrily. / We are sinking and drowning in snowdrifts; / It seems we'll not be able to find any shelter for the night with you.*
(K. F. Ryleev "Ivan Susanin")

*«Куда ты завел нас? Не видно ни зги.» –
«Идите за мной, не бейте мозги!» –
«Куда ты завел нас, проклятый старик?» –
«Идите вы на хуй, я сам заблудился.»
Сказал им Сусанин и вмиг испарился.*

★ *"Where are you taking us? We cannot see a thing!" / "Follow me, and don't fuck my brain!" / "Where have you taken us, you damned old man!" / "Fuck off, I am lost myself," / Said Susanin to them and disappeared.*

The same fate (of turning from a remake into an independent work) befell the series of verses beginning with the words "It's quiet all around..." or "It's quiet in the forest" which were extremely popular among children in the 1970s – 1980s and had the waltz "On the Hills of Manchuria" as its source:

*Тихо вокруг,
Сопки покрыты мглой.
Вот из-за туч блеснула луна,
Могилы хранят покой.*

(Сл.: С. Петров (Скиталец), муз.: И. Шатров, «На сопках Манчжурии»)

★ *It's quiet all around. / The hills are covered in darkness. / Suddenly, the moon flashed from the clouds. / The graves are peaceful.* (lyrics: S. Petrov (Wanderer), music: I. Shatrov, "On the Hills of Manchuria")

*Тихо в лесу,
Только не спит барсук:
Яйца свои он повесил на сук,
Вот и не спит барсук.*

★ *It's quiet in the forest. / Only the badger is not asleep. / He has hung his balls on the bough. / That's why he is not asleep*

Such cases when the source loses its immediate relevance and the remake, in its turn, sheds its original cultural connotations are typical of the literary life as well. "What is the number of such unidentified parodies?" wrote Yu. N. Tynyanov. "If a parody is not identified, the work is changed [...]. A parody [...], being separated from its background (which might be simply forgotten), naturally loses its parodic quality" (Tynyanov 1977: 226). In this sense, certain remakes circulating among children and teenagers are remakes only from the historical point of view. It goes without saying that these texts lose much of their sub-cultural orientation, and these examples are just another demonstration of the importance of the "exposure" device in the poetics of the genre of children's parody.

SADISTIC VERSES

A peculiar genre of poetic urban folklore called "sadistic verses" (or "sadistic couplets") emerged and spread among teenagers at the end of 1970s, early 1980s. Sadistic verses are quatrains or couplets written in dactylic tetrameter and telling terrible stories about a child or a group of children (a grown-up is far more rare) who become either victims or, on the contrary, perpetrators of varied and hideous crimes of killing or maiming. Verses often describe in the most graphic detail not the act of violence itself but its consequences or cynical reactions of other characters. I will cite three common examples of sadistic verses:

*Маленький мальчик по стройке гулял,
В бочку с бензином случайно попал.
Стал задыхаться – высунул нос.
Добренький дядя спичку поднес.¹⁰*

★ *A small boy was wandering around on a construction site / And, by accident, found himself in a barrel of petrol. / He started choking inside and stuck his nose out. / But a kind man put a match to the barrel.*

*Девочка Маша по полю гуляла,
Девочка Маша на мину попала.
Долго мне будут сниться во сне
Ее голубые глаза на сосне.*

★ *A girl called Masha was having a stroll in the field. / The girl called Masha walked over a mine. / I will long be haunted in my sleep / By her blue eyes on a pine tree.*

*Дети в подвале играли в Гестапо:
Зверски замучен сантехник Потапов.
Но у него еще все впереди,
Если он вытащит лом из груди.*

★ *Children were playing Gestapo in the basement. / The plumber Potapov was brutally tortured. / But he will have a whole life to live, / If he is able to take the crowbar out of his chest.*

Many things have been written about sadistic verses. On my part, I will try to outline an answer to the question regarding the specific nature of the genre. In order to do that it is necessary to consider in consecutive order the potential conceptions of the phenomenon in question.

First of all, I would like to argue against the popular idea that defiance and topicality are the dominant characteristics of the genre. Trying to account for the gigantic popularity and productivity of these short and chillingly funny texts, researchers mostly agree on one thing: they unanimously view sadistic verses as a genre of “alternative folklore” of the late Soviet era, the principal intention of which is the ironic disparagement achieved through the use of grotesque images, situations and black humour intonations. According to M. Yu. Novitskaya (1992: 103), “[...] The whole system of allusions in ‘sadistic verses’ of the second part of the 20th century perceives the tragic contradictions of the present as consequences of the total dominance of mendacity and doublethink”. O. Yu. Trykova (1997: 97) claims that “socio-political motifs [...] also penetrate ‘sadistic verses’ and are expressed in a biting satirical manner typical of the genre”. “The genre is almost entirely based not merely on clichés borrowed from children’s literature of the sentimental and parentese-like type, but also on the myth about a happy childhood invented by adults and transferred along with the clichés,” points out K. K. Nemirovich-Danchenko (1992: 131), the author of one of the first scholarly articles on sadistic verses and so far the most thorough one, in our opinion. S. M. Loiter and E. M. Neelov (1995: 74) also think that sadistic verses “reconceive stilted themes, motifs, images, rhythms, and intonations of the Soviet children’s poetry”. “The background against which the ‘stanzas’ have arisen is recreated and discredited. Deriding the literature that is distinguished by a special emotional expressiveness, the ‘stanza’ runs counter to the usual manner of narrating ‘the fears and horrors’ connected with children,” says A.F. Belousov (1998 : 550) speaking of the currency of verses (“stanzas”) among young people and university students, while “the object of polemic” in children and teenagers’ percep-

tion of the genre, in the opinion of the researcher, "is the incessant stream of parents' admonitions and warnings [...]". The same thing was discussed a few years earlier by M. P. Cherednikova (1995: 62), according to whom "adventures of a little boy" is an ironic reproduction of the myth of adults in whose fevered imagination the triumph of a terrible occurrence is the inevitable law of life. Horror stories told by parents to illustrate the system of educative prohibitions return like a boomerang in the form of outrageous 'sadistic verses'. In A. S. Mutina's dissertation (2002 : 19) on the genres of modern children's folklore, the chapter dedicated to sadistic verses bears the title of "Sadistic Verses: Teenage Protest".

Despite all their differences and contradictions, the opinions mentioned above are united by the common intention to cast sadistic verses as a biting satirical genre, to see in it, first and foremost, a scathing folk parody of the dominant culture, gleeful dissident fervour of denunciation, defamation all things pro-governmental, adult, serious, sentimental, pathetic, etc. It makes sense to discuss at greater length the idea of ideological anti-Soviet content of sadistic verses. On the one hand, the presence in these texts of a destructive ironic essence directed, in particular, at social, cultural, and ideological priorities of its time appears to be quite obvious. On the other hand, the idea that "polemical poignancy" of sadistic verses and their general counter-propagandistic meaning are the central hidden nerve of the genre seems to us, firstly, somewhat exaggerated, secondly, true, to a large extent, for the adult variation of the genre rather than for the teenage one. Let us take a look at the following illustrative example.

<p><i>Мальчик на улице доллар нашел, С долларом мальчик в «Березку» пошел. Дедушка долго ходил в Комитет. Доллар вернули, а мальчика нет.</i></p>	<p>★ <i>A boy found a dollar in the street. /He took this dollar to café "Berezka". /His grandpa had to visit the Committee many times./The dollar was returned, the boy was not.</i></p>
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The political subtext of this verse is quite clear: the boy perishes in the murderous paws of the vigilant KGB from where, as is generally known, there is no return. This, however, begs the question of whom the subtext is supposed to be clear to. Who is able appreciate the likelihood / typicality of the grotesquely reproduced situation as well as understand and welcome the irony of the verse? Children of the 1980s aged 9–13 can scarcely be seen as adequate recipients of the text, or rather its meaning, being the main bearers of the tradition of school folklore, mostly indifferent to any kind of political problems and ideological issues, having a very vague idea of what the KGB is and what

it is notorious for, and hardly able or trying to understand what kind of “committee” is meant here.

This is what M. P. Cherednikova (1995 : 60) had in mind when, polemicalising with M. Yu. Novitskaya, she wrote the following: “[...] the appraisals and interpretations of this phenomenon are normally dominated by a strictly ideological approach. [...] However, the generic characteristics mentioned (“opposition to the clichés and canons of the official ideology of the 1970s” – M. L.) are more likely the manifestation of cognitive idiosyncrasies of grown-ups who contributed to the emergence of ‘ironic’ poetry.” It can be added that the tradition of satirical verses was not only “born” but also kept living in parallel with the spreading of verses among children. As for the soil that nourished the new genre of children’s folklore, in other words, the “adult” roots of this phenomenon, it will be more correct to say that “the nutrient medium for satirical verses was supplied not by the Soviet reality and the Soviet myth of the 70s – 80s” (Neelov 1996 : 104) but the reality of the intellectual and cultural consciousness, the dissident myth and the folklore of that age.

By the terms “intellectual” and “dissident”, we imply not the narrow circle of the highbrow elite or the rare groups of people purposefully engaged in human rights activities (the so-called professional dissidents), but on the contrary, a rather broad social stratum of those who received and transmitted the everyday anti-Soviet text at the level of daily conversations and arguments, running jokes, scary stories, jokes about the Soviet system, the Communist party, the leaders of the country, the KGB and its officials, etc.

We would like to start the discussion of the next example with a quote from Novitskaya’s article. Citing the following verse:

Красная площадь, трибуны в цветах.

Маленький мальчик в зеленых штанах.

«Волга» проехала, шиной шурша.

Напрасно родители ждут малыша.

★ *On the Red Square, the tribunes are strewed with flowers. / A little boy is standing in green trousers. / A Volga car has passed by making a swishing sound with its tyres. / The parents are waiting in vain for their child to return.*

The researcher writes: “The seventies, the Afghan war, the crossed off lives of “little boys”, mothers bereaved of their sons at a single stroke of a pen held by an aged hand...” (Novitskaya 1992 :118). Although somewhat emotionally overcharged, the interpretation is quite justified, if we look at the text from the point of view of an intelligent

grown-up person of the era of perestroika. The author of the lines cited above perceives the verse in terms of the ideological and ethical dominants existing in the social consciousness where this verse has been born. The cultural semantics of "the black Volga" (a prominent image in the urban political folklore of the stagnant years) comes to the fore. Thus, in the 1980s, there circulated a story about a policeman who decided, out of interest, to measure the speed of a government Volga passing by, directed the radar gun at it and that very moment was shot by a sniper bodyguard. Without doubt, it is within these rather broad circles lacking any distinct social demarcation that verses "with a subtext" not only emerged but also had most currency. In our view, rather than "deriding things in the official ethos that were particularly alien and antithetical to young people" (Belousov 1998: 548), such texts transmitted the established stereotypes of an unofficial, alternative, intellectual culture which, in the seventies, was moulding the younger-aged metropolitan intelligentsia who originated and followed these stereotypes.

To the mass of children listeners, such meanings are, for the most part, obscure and uninteresting, and this audience easily sheds them in the process of varying the texts. There exists, for example, a version of the text about the black Volga in which the black Volga itself ("A car came rushing by" (Nemirovich-Danchenko 1992: 135)) and, together with it, the whole political subtext have been omitted but the verse itself, or rather its comicality as perceived by children and teenagers, has not suffered at all as a result of this change.

In many "political" sadistic verses, their derivativeness in relation to plots of other genres in urban, mostly youth folklore of the stagnation period is even more obvious. A telling example is a group of verses about a careless handling of "the control panel" (for nuclear arms) and "the red button" (for launching nuclear missiles):

*Дочка полковника именем Надя
Красную кнопку нажала в Неваде.
С ревом из ямы взлетела махина...
Хорошей страной была Аргентина.*

★ *A colonel's daughter called Nadya / Pressed a red button in Nevada. / A roaring whopper flew out of the pit. / Argentina was a very good country.*

All these texts are nothing else but plots of then popular jokes invariably beginning with the words of an enraged officer: "Who pressed the red button?!" or "Who threw a boot onto the control panel?!", etc. that were transformed into sadistic verses. The primacy of jokes in relation to corresponding verses does not raise any doubts. As a matter

of fact, the quatrains (in particular the one mentioned above) contain direct references to concrete anecdotal sources. Let us compare, for example, the verse:

*Солдаты на пульте капусту рубили
Какую-то кнопку случайно разбили.
Долго смеялись над шуткой в ООН
В бесплодной пустыне ища Вашингтон...*
(Novitskaya 1992 : 116)

★ *Soldiers were chopping cabbage on the control panel / And, by accident, broke a button. / Representatives in the UN had a long laugh at this joke / Trying to find Washington in a desert wasteland...*

... and the joke:

Two submarines, ours and an American one, break surface. On ours, the captain is giving a roasting to the crew: "Who was chopping cabbage on the control panel? I'm asking you: who was chopping cabbage on the control panel?" An American officer pops out and comments: "Such a thing could never happen in the States!" Our captain: "Your States do not exist any more... And I repeat my question: who was chopping cabbage on the control panel?!"

More examples can be given, but even the one cited above is enough to compel the conclusion that sadistic verses with a political subtext are, to a large extent, derived from prose folkloric narratives (memorats, jokes, gossips and hearsay) of the partly teenage, partly adult urban repertoire. In these cases, the sadistic verse turns into a kind of rhymed joke: a rapid response genre offering an unexpected interpretation of a "hot" event in its own, "sadistic" format. The existence of such texts, though, just as the existence of the texts with a pronounced anti-Soviet orientation, is that very exception that proves the rule. Sadistic verses have to do with universal categories and use faceless heroes and notional situations; the shift of the ironic accent to topical problems inevitably leads to the erosion of the initial specific nature of the genre.

To sum up, the effect of discrediting something official is possible, natural, but not specific to sadistic verses in teenage circles, which can be explained in the following way. Firstly, this function is successfully performed by other, one may even say "specialised", genres of school folklore: primarily, by remakes of classics covered by the curriculum, parodic texts, as well as, to a lesser extent, by jokes about different kinds of "great people": Pushkin, Chapaev, Lenin, etc. Secondly, folklore, just as any other "low" form of creative activity, is characterised

by the rejection of "high" culture. Teenage folklore is no exception in this respect; on the contrary, it illustrates the general pattern. Sadistic verses are polemical to the same degree as the entire children's folklore is polemical and alternative in relation to adult culture, no more and no less.

If one accepts the logic of our argument, then it follows that the sum and substance of the specific generic nature of sadistic verses at the level of content is their basic, "sadistic" theme and the related system of images, motifs and plots. Nonetheless, even this is not so unambiguous. The thing is that, even in this respect, sadistic verses do not exhibit any uniqueness in the context of the children's oral tradition. Generally speaking, the idea of destructiveness is one of the fundamental shaping principles as far as the children's and teenage folkloric humorous poetry is concerned. In this sense, the entire children's folklore harbours a certain supply of alternativeness, as has been demonstrated above using the example of remakes. By the time the mass writing down of children's and school folklore began in the mid-1980s, the tradition already had at its disposal a large corpus of texts, resonating with the motifs of death, murder, annihilation, and destruction of corporality. In generic terms, these texts are different. Below are a couple of extracts from various remakes of a popular children's song entitled "It's fun to stride together":

Refrain:

*Вместе весело шагать по болотам,
с пулеметом, да по зеленым
И деревни поджигать лучше ротой,
а лучше целым батальоном.
Вместе весело шагать по газонам,
по цветочкам, да по зеленым
И девчонок поливать ацетоном,
ацетоном, ацетоном.¹¹*

★ *It's fun to stride together across marshes, / green marshes, / with a machine gun. / It's better when the whole company of soldiers sets villages on fire. / It's better still / when the whole battalion does that. / It's fun to stride together across lawns / on flowers / on green flowers / And to water girls / with acetone / with acetone.*

A variant of a line in the refrain:

*... Черепушки пробивать лучше ломом
★... It's better to break skulls with a crowbar*

Couplet:

Раз бутылка, два бутылка – будет пьяница,

Раз кулак, два кулак – и он валяется,

Раз лопатка, два лопатка – ямка роется,

Раз дощечка, два дощечка – гробик строится.

★ *A bottle and a bottle – and you have a drunk; / A fist and a fist – and he is lying on the ground; / A spade and a spade – and a pit is being dug; / A board and a board – and a coffin is being made.*

This particular remake has many things in common with sadistic verses: the plot about the annihilation of the entire settlement; concrete and hideous methods of torturing and killing (breaking skulls with a crowbar, watering girls with acetone); the dissonance between the brutal content and the optimistic intonation (*it's fun to stride together...*); the contrast between the cynicism of the actions being described and the lexical infantilism evident in the concentration of words with diminutive suffixes (in the Russian original, the words “pit”, “coffin”, “spade”, “board”, and “flowers” all have diminutive suffixes). All these characteristics of the functional poetics of sadistic verses are well-known and have been described in academic literature.

In another remake that circulated among schoolchildren in the 1980s as a song in its own right, we encounter, typically of sadistic verses, the image of a chilling lone punisher who methodically and calmly destroys everything in his way using various types of arms:

*На меня надвигаются
восемь пьяных ребят,
Ну и пусть надвигаются,
у меня автомат.*

*Нажимаю на кнопочку –
восемь трупов лежат.
Эх, выпью я стопочку
за погибших ребят.*

*На меня надвигается
по реке пароход.
Ну и пусть надвигается,
у меня огнемет.*

*Нажимаю на кнопочку –
пароход весь в огне.
Эх, выпью я стопочку
за погибших в огне.*

*На меня надвигается
по дороге КАМАЗ.
Ну и пусть надвигается,*

★ *I am being approached
by eight drunk guys.*

Let them approach.

I have a machine gun.

I press a small button:

And eight corpses are on the ground.

I'll drink a shot

To the perished guys.

I am being approached

By a steamboat on the river.

Let it approach.

I have a flame-thrower.

I press a small button:

And the entire steamboat is on fire.

I'll drink a shot

To those who perished in the flames.

I am being approached

By a truck on the road.

Let it approach.

<i>у меня есть фугас.</i>	<i>I have a fougasse.</i>
<i>Нажимаю на кнопочку –</i>	<i>I am pressing the small button:</i>
<i>и КАМАЗ на куски.</i>	<i>And the truck blows to pieces.</i>
<i>Эх, выпью я стопочку</i>	<i>I'll drink a shot</i>
<i>за КАМАЗа куски.</i>	<i>To the truck pieces.</i>

An obvious parallel to this text is offered by a series of couplets about a small boy who has found a pistol, a machine gun, a flame-thrower, some dynamite, a Messerschmitt, a Pershing-2, etc. A similar “cheerful monster” who boldly disposes of any person or object opposed to him is the lyrical hero of another remake based, effectively, on the very same model:

Мне кричит милитон: «Заплатите штраф!»
Я ему заплатил – вон лежит в кустах.
А другой милитон вытащил наган.
Я ему каратэ – ах ты хулиган.
А другой милитон палочкой грозит.
Я ему кирпичом – ах ты, паразит.
А другой милитон в броневик залез,
Я ему – сто гранат – броневик исчез.
 ★ *A policeman shouted to me: “You should pay a fine!” / I paid him – he is lying there in the bushes. / Another policeman took out a gun. / I challenged him with karate – you rowdy. / Another policeman is threatening me with a baton. / I threw a brick at him – you parasite. / Another policeman got into an armoured car. / I threw a hundred grenades at him – the armoured car vanished.*

The ostentatious and shocking anatomism of the images so typical of sadistic verses (“spooling blue intestines onto the rod”, “her blue eyes on a pine tree”, “children’s bones quickly became charred”, “the iron penetrated the flesh with a clank”, etc.) is also widely represented in other texts of school folklore, the content focus of which is the savouring of physiological details in order to elicit disgust. Under this category falls, for instance, the remake of the song called “Winter” which is extremely popular among younger teenagers and contains the following lines:

<i>Потолок весь в крови,</i>	★ <i>The ceiling is covered in blood;</i>
<i>Дверь шатается,</i>	<i>The door is rickety;</i>
<i>За шершавой стеной</i>	<i>Behind the rough wall</i>
<i>Труп валяется</i>	<i>A corpse is lying.</i>
<i>Как пойдешь за порог –</i>	<i>When you step outside,</i>
<i>Всюду кости,</i>	<i>Bones are everywhere,</i>
<i>А из окон скелет</i>	<i>And through the window</i>
<i>Лезет в гости.</i>	<i>A skeleton is trying to pay a visit.</i>

the no less popular original children's folkloric poem:

*Как приятно утром рано
Сесть на краешек дивана,
Кожу с черепа сдирать
И жевать, жевать, жевать,
Теплым гноем запивать
И хрустящую болячку
закусывать.¹²*

*★ It is so nice, early in the morning,
/ To sit down on the edge of the sofa,
/ To peel off some skin from the
skull, / And to chew, to chew, to
chew, / Washing it all down with
warm pus / And nibbling at a
crispy scab.*

and a number of other texts.

It follows that even the “sadism” of sadistic verses is not their unique characteristic but, on the contrary, a commonplace in children's folklore of the second part of the 20th century.

In view of everything said above, it can be concluded that, however paradoxical it may sound in relation to such peculiar material, in conceptual and thematic terms, the sadistic verse is derivative from other forms of school, youth and adult folklore, against the backdrop of which it emerged and developed. As is generally known, sadistic verses appeared rather late, at the end of the 1970s, by which time jokes, remakes, songs, and *chastushkas* – both the whole genres and certain individual texts – had been circulating among teenagers for several decades. The new genre had been growing in a well-prepared soil and had been constantly feeling the influence of the contemporaneous folkloric tradition. The uniqueness of sadistic verses, in our view, is determined first and foremost by the fixed assemblage of certain artistic principles, parameters and devices, which, for the most part, were pointed out in isolation by researchers but so far have almost never been looked at as a unified paradigm. We are talking about such characteristics of the genre's poetics as the tendency towards laconism and formulaicity, the observance of the comics' principle of alternating the planes of expression, the reliance on the metonymic method of portraying death, the limited set of plot motifs and topical range, the fixedness and sparseness of structural and compositional schemas and a whole number of other factors. What should be pointed out separately is the particularly important role played among the characteristics of the poetic structure of verses by the strict consistency of the formal poetic factors: the unity of metre, the observance of rhyme, and the sameness of syntactic constructions.

The immense popularity that sadistic verses have been enjoying as well as their truly fantastic productivity are determined most directly not by their “counter-propagandistic” or “bitingly satirical” content,

not by the adolescent psychological need for black humour, but by both the clarity and obviousness of the poetical system of this genre. As far as this indicator is concerned, sadistic verses outstrip all other genres of Russian poetic folklore except *chastushkas*. This is indirectly confirmed by a large number of individual texts and whole series of quatrains composed in the image and likeness of sadistic verses on topics of contemporary relevance and either used in amateur performances or enjoying narrow, local currency among university students and, what is even more telling, schoolchildren. These fantasies on the theme of sadistic verses represent various levels of using the material of the tradition: from simple remakes of famous verses to the creation of fully original texts that strictly (though, probably, intuitively) observe all conventions of the genre. The following verses about older colleagues, for example, were composed in the mid-1990s by young lecturers of one of Saint-Petersburg's higher education institutions that teach humanities:

*Как то Семенова по лесу шла
Тихо в избушку лесную зашла.
Долго потом вспоминал людоед
Рыжую даму бальзаковских лет!*

★ *Once Semyonova was walking in
a forest / And stepped into a forest
hut. / For a long time afterwards,
the ogre remembered / The red-
haired middle-aged lady!*

*Как-то пошел Бородин на охоту,
В тумане блуждая, вышел к болоту.
Эх, не успел он в манок подудеть:
Слишком был голоден старый
медведь!*

★ *Once Borodin went hunting. /
Wandering in a fog, he came across
a marsh. / He did not have time to
blow a hunter's whistle: / The old
bear was too hungry!*

Among a group of students at another Leningrad university in 1990s, there existed a whole series of such texts. The following example is a verse about a lecturer who taught a course on folklore:

*Доцент Аникеев курил под сосной,
Вышел из чащи Хозяин Лесной,
Тихо свое заклинанье изрек...
На кафедре жив еще умный хорек.*

★ *Assistant professor Anikeev was smoking under a pine tree. / Out of the
depths of the forest there came the Forest Magician / And quietly recited a
spell... / The intelligent ferret is still alive and works at the department.*

O.Y. Trykova cites a similar school verse:

*Ребята по школе катали покрышки –
Зверски задавлен был физик Кубышкин.*

(Trykova 1997 :98)

★ *Children were rolling tyres at school. / The physics teacher Kubyshkin was brutally run down.*

There exist plenty of instances of such use of sadistic verse form in amateur poetic art and in the creative endeavours of anonymous poets and publishers presenting texts of their own creation as works of folklore. These facts testify not so much to the vitality of the sadistic verse in folkloric tradition but to the force of the genre's inertia. Having absorbed a whole number of commonplaces, thematic universals, humour devices, and content motifs of children's and adult folklore of the late Soviet era, the sadistic verse has created an original generic model – a model that is extremely compact, intonationally rich, formally stable and, at the same time, transparent, which makes it very attractive and convenient for the construction of ever new texts. To date, the attempts to conduct a consistent structural analysis of these verses is not limited to the detection of ideological focal points, to the search for intertextual connections, and to social and psychological interpretations, etc. (Lyskov 2003). However, this does not exhaust the possibilities of formal and poetic analysis of the artistic characteristics of this genre. The study of the morphology of sadistic verses, i.e. the description of the systematic combination and interaction patterns of the elements in the structure of the text is, in our view, the most urgent and promising direction of future efforts to research this genre, which is one of the most vivid poetic phenomena of the Soviet humorous folklore of the end of the 20th century.

Notes

1. See, for example: Anecdote 1989; Belousov 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Kurganov 1997; Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002; Arkhipova 2003; Krikmann 2004 and many others.
2. On the topic of children's anecdotes, see the few existing articles: Mukhlynin 1990; Dmitriev 1996; Lurie 1998a; Arkhipova 2001; Utekhin 2001.
3. The texts of the anecdotes, except for the two specifically identified cases, were written down by the author in the 1970s–1990s either by hand or from memory from the children aged 6–9 and are rough renderings of the oral texts that were elicited.
4. "The Thief of Bagdad" (1940) is a famous English film inspired by oriental tales which was extremely popular in the USSR in the 1940s–1970s.
5. When pronounced one after another without pauses, these names form the phrase *Обосрися пирогами* which can be translated into English as: "I'm going to shit the pasties out".
6. If you switch the sound R for the sound G in the Russian phrase *Мне всё равно* → *гавно*, you turn a neutral expression into a very rude one: *равно* – 'all the same'; *гавно* – 'shit'.
7. All texts of children's burlesques and remakes quoted here were taken from the following article: Lurie 1998b.
8. On these and other seminarist remakes see Nadezhdin 1908.
9. Written from Vera Lurie, born in 1997, and Nina Lurie, born in 1999, in Saint-Petersburg in 2008.
10. Here and hereafter, the texts of sadistic verses, except for specifically mentioned cases, are cited in accordance with the most complete and representative of all existing articles, the one by A. Belousov (Belousov 1998), compiled mainly on the basis of notes made at the end of 1980s, i.e. representing the cross-section of oral verses circulating among teenagers in the Soviet era.
11. Here and hereafter, the text of the remakes are cited according to Lurie 1998b.
12. Written down as told by Nadya Mirgorodskaya (born in 1983) in 1997 in Saint-Petersburg.

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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Liisi Laineste

In the globalising world, there is an increasing necessity to “know thy neighbour”, and alongside other things, to know their tastes in humour. In this respect, not much is known of Eastern Europe, the former socialist bloc. The best overview of the present status can be provided by studies which do not underestimate the historical context, and address this in terms of a process, of change and continuity. Another argument for researching post-socialist humour is embedded in the opportunity presented by the exceptional context of a transitional period where different types of government and societal contexts have followed each other in a short period. It is informative in describing the way political, economical and other conditions (or changes of conditions) have shaped folklore. There is also an evident need to point at the main features of contemporary humour in order to see to what extent international jokelore has filtered into the post-socialist region, e.g. how deliberate and willing is the adaption of (mainly Western) joke scripts and targets in post-socialist humour. As spheres of influence have also varied in the region (from sovietisation to globalisation, see argumentation below, cf. Kovács 2003), it is interesting to see if these new translated Anglo-American jokes fill the void of the post-1990s jokelore.

There has been substantial support from the Estonian Science Foundation for researching contemporary jokes in Estonia (the four-year project was titled “Contemporary Jokelore: Post-socialism – Internet – Cognition”). Since the beginning of the grant period in 2006, Arvo Krikmann and I have made efforts to gather a body of experts from former Soviet Republics and carry out initial research on some aspects of post-socialist humour. Up until now, the cooperation project between several Eastern European countries¹ is only in its first phase. Starting with the symposium on post-socialist humour (in January 2007), the Eastern European network of scholars has attracted new members, and the list of common themes has taken a more concrete form. We have begun to expand the scope of research to never-socialist countries (as Christie Davies names the type of society in his article, this volume, and which we have adapted to the title of the compendium), because this offers a valuable point of reference for a more substantial discussion of what has changed in Eastern European jokelore and what is unique about it. Totalitarian jokes differed

distinctively from humour in democratic societies, but post-socialist jokelore seems to share features with both of these types of society, and in addition to that, display some unique characteristics of its own. Though the current compendium of articles was designed as an outcome of the symposium, it received some informative and interesting collaboration from researchers not present at the event as well, and grew in scope and insight.

AIMS

We can define four areas that qualify as general aims sought to be met in the volume of articles.

1. The first aim of this compendium is to bring together two worlds of research that have existed separately for quite a long time: that is the entire versatile realm of humour research in Eastern Europe, and the ideas concerning the sociology and folkloristics of jokes in Western scholarship. For example, the research of humour in Russia has been much more fertile than usually perceived by the West, but much of the articles, joke collections and monographs are in Russian which makes them largely inaccessible to Anglo-American scholars (e.g. Borev 1990, 1992, 1995; Vassiliev & Slavov 1990; Slavov 1991; Sarnov 2002; Shmeleva & Shmelev 2002; Shmelev 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Razuvaev 2002; Kozintsev 2002, 2007; Dimitriev 1998; Arkhipova & Melnichenko 2007, 2008, etc.). Western scholarship has attempted to describe Soviet humour and jokes (e.g. publishing collections of Eastern European jokes during the cold war), because this offered unforeseen insights into the nature of joke-telling in general (e.g. the joke collections by Winick 1964; Kolasky 1972; Brenton & Loomes 1977; Draitser 1978; Beckman 1980; Dolgopolova 1983; Lukes & Galnoor 1985; Ruksenas 1986; Telesin 1986; Rosenbusch 1987; Harris & Rabinovich 1988; Banc & Dundes 1986/1990). Some studies provide comparative or other analysis on the subject (e.g. Davies 1998 and 2007; Rose 2001/2002; Graham 2003; Oring 2004; Adams 2005; Bryant 2006). To a great extent, the practice has been to use the few sources that are available in English, which undermines the richness of the most versatile humour tradition of the Soviet bloc. Numerous Soviet jokes that remained untranslatable or were not included in the Western collections for other reasons remained out of their reach. Though some of these researches have been excellent and thorough (e.g. Draitser 1998, who was a former humorist in the Russian satirical magazine *Crocodile*; the historical overview of political jokes in Adams 2005, etc.), the

others often present the material without sufficient cultural and other societal background, which may result in faulty reasoning and limited results (e.g. Rose 2002). This volume offers a thorough analysis of the contemporary jokes in Eastern Europe, contextually embedded in their past and present.

2. The second equally important aim of the volume is to define the kind of humour that is prevalent in Eastern Europe after the 1990s. Even if it is not possible to point out clearly delineated patterns and similarities of the diverse post-socialist countries under observation, some general processes, features and functions do emerge above others as more important and noteworthy. The authors of this compendium analysed their specific fields of interest (most of all jokes, but also anecdotes, political satire, etc.), and described the tendencies of post-socialist humour within specific genres. This future research oriented conclusion aims at generalisations and the opening of new research horizons rather than re-addressing the details. The articles give a fairly good glimpse into the possible issues that arise while dealing with the genre in post-1990 Eastern Europe. Comparing the popularity, content, modifications and other aspects of specific joke texts remains an issue for further studies, described in the final section of the conclusion.

3. The third objective is to capture the change in a decisive moment. Transitional societies are going through a process that will not last for long, as the terms used for describing the region also imply (*transition, transformation, post-*, all pointing at the temporality of the stage). This change is more intensive than any of the changes that the West has witnessed for decades. Folklore is certainly deeply influenced by it, reflecting the societal transitions and providing a commentary on the process.

4. The fourth aim is to find out common issues and points of interest among the humour researchers in Eastern Europe, and lay down targets of future research (see also Laineste 2009). A starting point of this project could be an international database of ethnic and political jokes, first and foremost covering the Eastern and Central European region, and later also reaching other interested contributors and areas. The database would be organised in a way to minimise the subjectivity of categorisation and is equipped with a meta-language that would make cross-cultural comparison possible. But some of these common issues are already evident in this volume, addressed *in corpore* in the following sections of the concluding chapter.

DEFINITIONS

Post-socialism

Post-socialism has been the subject of numerous books and articles, but economical and sociological accounts have pervaded the other, e.g. anthropological, cultural or folkloristic ones (Svašek 2005: 2). Even if the transition – or, rather, the diverse transformation process – seen in the recent history of the post-socialist countries is mostly political and economic by its nature, the axiological component or the public opinion (in part explicated through jokes and other forms of humour) is also worth studying. The term post-socialist is used here to characterise and emphasise the dialogue between the old and the new, and delineating the region under examination. The question is, whether the term is a semantic one that can encompass all the specific features that there might be in the new democracies of Eastern Europe, or should it be regarded as a purely formal term referring to a region that is going through a specific transformational stage after the downfall of the Soviet Union (or only a few years of transition during the post-1990s, as suggested by Davies, this volume). The latter would mean that there are no characteristic similarities in the jokelore, and jokes in each of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc have already developed specific features of their own. The problem with the prefix “post-” is its inability in defining the temporal limits of this period. For many scholars, it is most suitable for a short stretch of time after the change has occurred (e.g. between 1989 and 2001 in Holmes 2001; see also Kennedy 2002). This may well be true for most areas of a society (economy, politics etc.), but folklore – including jokes – is slower to change, tends to fuse, and does not disappear completely and start anew from the scratch. The authors of this compendium also challenge the term post-socialism in some articles (see Davies; Chlopicki, this volume). The focus on post-socialist in Eastern European humour describes namely the change, its implications to the past period and possible lines of development for the nearest future.

Our task here is to pinpoint the common grounds and features as well as uncover the most essential differences, in order to analyse folklore in transition and justify the overarching term of post-socialist humour. A discussion about the necessity and suitability of the term is in order. With the help of the material and results concerning post-socialist humour we will be able to adjust the terminology to the material. The immediate post-Soviet period, a transitional moment be-

tween the waning Soviet and the emerging post-Soviet cultures, presents a unique opportunity for exploring the complex relationship between jokes and their socio-cultural contexts.

Soviet and post-Soviet in the research material

There are many aspects involved that blur the notion of post-socialist humour. The most relevant of these is the nature of the available material, which in many cases mixes the old and the new, socialist and post-socialist. The majority of the authors in the compendium are folklorists, though the list of contributors also includes linguists, sociologists etc. In folkloristic research, the centre of the studies has long been the material (pure text, or context included) – it is the material that guides the researcher. In the analyses in this volume, the material mostly consists of the jokes published in joke collections or on the Internet (though in some cases it is taken directly from oral communication, most notably in Lurie, this volume), available to the researcher directly or mediated by a database. The nature of a database forms a point where the question arises: in the interaction of oral and written, the jokes become independent of their archival and printed sources and “happen” or “are being told” constantly again, whenever somebody opens the book or web-page and reads it. In some sources (e.g. Laineste, this volume), the temporal context of the joke can be reconstructed and studied. But in other cases (e.g. static or context-free forms of joke websites, undated jokes in a joke collection; see also the explication of this categorisation in Krikmann, this volume) the only argument at the disposal of the researcher is that the joke was relevant at the point of publication, and at the time it was chosen in the online joke collection. The interactions of written and oral in contemporary joke-telling are not well studied, especially taking into account the function of the Internet in the process. That means if we study humour found on the Internet and in printed books, we assume that this material, which may live its *n*-th life cycle, is revealing of its time of (re)appearing only because it was chosen by the joke-teller to be reproduced in this form and at this point of time. There is certain inertia in the jokelore of post-socialist republics and that makes it difficult to discriminate between the socialist and post-socialist (and post-post-socialist; see Graham 2008). Being aware of all this, it is still informative to analyse how the transformation from one political system to another has affected the tradition in general, and leave the influence of the means of dissemination (oral, electronic, etc.) open for the next studies.

Globalisation

Globalisation as a process in contemporary folklore is intricately entwined into the topic of this study. Any material on the Internet must acknowledge its global reach, but also its influence on other (local) texts in terms of form and content. Whereas the generally neutral definitions of globalisation stress the rapidly developing interconnections and “balanced” mutual influence (e.g. Tomlinson 1991: 170), this has been highly contested on ideological grounds for primarily strengthening the Western hegemony (e.g. Liebes & Katz 1993; cf. Storey 2003 with a discussion of the process in terms of hybridisation which gives rise to a global melange). A massive diffusion of the global cultural and material products has always been a fusion rather than a straightforward adoption of traditions. Also in folkloric traditions, the process of adaption (versus straightforward adoption) of new plots and genres has been the rule rather than an exception. Thus cultural globalisation implies a series of compromises, including compartmentalisation alongside with, or even instead of homogenisation that would mean diffusing into one undistinguishable type of culture. In humour research, the global spread of some joke cycles (about WTC, for example: Ellis 2001; Csazsi 2003; Kuipers 2005, and others) and targets (such as Scots or Jews) offers evidence of these processes.

Already in the 1960s, Sovietisation of Estonian jokelore was evident in the massive use of Soviet jokes of mainly Russian origin. The Soviet Estonian ethnic jokes targeted the Chukchis, a faraway nation imported from the Russian jokelore, and several other targets quite irrelevant in the cultural and historical context. There was a certain preference in adapting the pan-Soviet targets, for example jokes about the (stereotypically homosexual) Armenians were very popular, whereas the Georgians did not acquire much attention as a target. Studies on the cultural inclinations of the Estonians could lighten the matter (in the vein of Davies 1998). The Soviet joke tradition may be viewed as a wave of globalisation in Estonian (and the whole Soviet Eastern European) jokelore because of the increase of new (and foreign) targets. But even then the globalisation was not hegemonic, as the preference of some targets over the others refers to.

In post-1990 Eastern Europe, globalisation is only one albeit noteworthy aspect of a general opening up. The fall of the Soviet bloc resulted in de-Sovietisation, a reactionary denouncement of the previous aims and official programmes. Both socialist and post-socialist times exhibit an acute influence of the centre on the peripheral culture

space. Jokes during Sovietisation on the one hand and in post-socialist globalisation on the other were both deliberately adapted and express the interest focuses of the periphery. There are also visible trends of de-globalisation in the post-socialist era that promise a rebirth of oppressed national / ethnic cultures (Kovács 2003) – just the opposite of the worldwide homogenisation stressed in contemporary culture studies. Inside the post-socialist cultures, one sees a large repertoire of responses to global influences, which reflect resistance, simulation, compromises in a continuum between the extremes (*ibid.* 172), some using irony or parody as its vehicle. Most of the articles in this volume deal with continuity and change as reactions to outside influences and the way the old and the new are mixed in folklore. It is exactly this intertextuality that forms the core of the “new” tradition that we could call post-socialist. The presence of the previous period is felt in either open acceptance that is seen in reciting or referring to the old jokes, or in the hidden denial expressed through a vigorous search for something simultaneously “new” **and** “own”. Citing the old jokes as well as opposing or trying to break away from / ignore them are both ways of coming to terms with the previous tradition and the history.

Humour reflects on and helps to outline the specific cultural, political, economic and other social processes, features and functions that are characteristic to the whole period or region. Some authors have supported the idea that of all the phenomena and traditions in culture, it is precisely jokes and other forms of humour that offer a unique topical prism for a boarder discussion of post-socialist culture (e.g. Mesropova 2008). This implies that there is something specific about humour in the way it informs the researcher about its environment, and it may depict the context that gave rise to it even more sharply than investigations in other areas of culture. In Soviet times, humour in general (and the joke in particular) was more than a pastime. *Anekdot* was a symbol of the Soviet way of life. It was a distinctive tradition in all Soviet countries, and the way it flourished during the period is unquestionable and often gets mentioned as the most fertile time for joke-telling (Davies this volume; Krikmann 2006). Deriving from this, one can assume that some of its previous qualities have rubbed off to the contemporary humour of the post-socialist region, and that there might be something distinctive about post-socialist humour, and it is not just a random adaption of the globalising jokelore, translated from the Anglo-American cultural space.

THREE ASPECTS OF POST-SOCIALIST HUMOUR: PROCESSES, FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

★ **Process** is, in this context, an aspect that concentrates above all on the changes that jokes have gone through, and the forces that initialise or regulate these changes. The focus of this section is the shift of interest in joke targets, the change of popularity in some more dominant themes, and other issues that describe the period in question from the view-point of longitudinal comparison. For the most part, changes in jokes are fuelled by more general trends on the global arena – questions of the suitable elements of the genre (e.g. punch line), ideas about humour or sense of humour on the whole are directed not only by the local context but more global trends. Post-socialist jokelore has moved quickly towards the adaption and straight translation of Western European (Anglo-American) jokes (see Brzozowska; Davies; Laineste, this volume). Globalisation, target choice and attitudes towards the genre, to mention just a few, are some of the societal processes worth addressing through the study of humour.

★ **Features** are understood here as the common qualities of jokes viewed at one certain point of time. Regarding the features of humour, the Eastern European example offers excellent material for analysing the question of joke categories (e.g. features of post-socialist ethnic jokes as mocking a nation *per se* and not its political inclinations), but even more the inevitable intertextualities that arise in different forms of humour, e.g. local televised comic shows. The mixing of genres and topics for comic purposes has a long history in the form of parody, but has attained a greater array of implications and also a greater significance in the contemporary world (Hutcheon 2002: 95).

★ The **functions** of humour brought out in previous studies are positive social (control, relief, cohesion), negative social (resistance, exclusion), and psychological (coping). Even though humour does not have the same function to everyone, it is still one of the main questions that a research eventually leads to: why do certain types of jokes appear in certain types of societies, what causes the regularities in target choice, that is, why are some themes / targets etc. preferred over the others. This can equally be regarded as an example of societal processes as well as a functional choice, and in many cases these two aspects are difficult to tell apart. Addressing the function of jokes directly requires focusing on the performance rather than the text, that is why an analysis concentrating only on a large corpus of jokes is not directly fit for discussing the purposes of humour, though it allows for some con-

clusions when the material is representative enough. On the other hand, discussing audience responses (e.g. Kavaliauskaite, this volume) is informative and insightful regarding the different social and psychological functions that humour possesses. Ideas about the function of jokes can also be addressed through a careful analysis of all contextual aspects of a joke tradition (e.g. Stanoev about the social functions, this volume). In a more indirect way, addressing the role and status of humour throughout the Soviet and post-socialist periods through the rise and fall of the popularity of specific targets and jokes in general can be carried out. Analysing how joke-telling is evaluated in the contemporary world (a measure of that is also the intensity of sending jokes on the Internet) will show if humour has remained the same or lost (or perhaps gained) its role and status in the society. This can vary in a different context, not only between the types of society but also from one (cultural) region to another. In some cases, the difference in the status of jokes can be ascribed to perceptions about the importance of having a sense of humour. For example, for Poles, being “the funniest barrack, only in a different camp now” (Brzozowska, this volume) is obviously an identifying remark. Accordingly, there is a constant new supply of jokes in Poland, and no decrease (noted in some other post-socialist material, see e.g. Belin 2002; Davies 1998; Adams 2005).

Main issues

Discussing jokes in a comparative context points at many differences and specific trends in different post-socialist countries, but it helps to locate and frame some commonalities in the jokelore of these countries. We will approach these from the three aforementioned aspects: processes, features and functions of post-socialist jokes.

Processes

There is some change with respect to the general nature of jokes, which some observers now describe as “lame” (e.g. Gorny 2006: 314, in his analysis of a Russian joke site on the Internet). This is certainly a subjective perception, though it seems to be shared by many who are acquainted with both Soviet and contemporary jokelore in Eastern Europe (Graham 2008: 234).

A process more easily accessible through empirical studies is globalisation and its various manifestations and influences. Humour is exemplary of how globalisation operates in local culture. The changes

that for example Russian popular culture has undergone since the collapse of the Soviet Union are immense (Barker 1999: 4). During the transitional period, the region has gone from rapid Westernisation to (a simultaneous and counter-reactionary) the quest for national and local specificities. Looking for nationally relevant, 'emic' targets, joke scripts and joke modifications can be seen for example in Estonian jokelore (Laineste 2008).

The patterns of target choice is an issue that guides us to a number of important questions of post-socialist humour. We need a comprehensive model of target choice that describes and explains other examples besides the joke targets in the Western cultures. The studies on post-socialist material present a notably different pattern. For example, what is striking in Estonian ethnic jokes (from the pre-Soviet times until the present time, see Laineste 2008) was that there seem to be at least 3 different models / patterns which only partly coincide with Christie Davies's long-standing model for targets of stupidity jokes. Davies's model applies to pre-Soviet jokes of the 1900s (when the geographical and/or economic close periphery was mocked), and his alteration of the model (described in 1998) applies for Soviet times, when the target was the undeservedly powerful centre rather than the powerless periphery. But the abundance of post-socialist targets cannot be accounted for within this theory, and that is where collecting, comparing and analysing the post-socialist material can be of use.

The diversity of post-socialist traditions may be seen exactly as a result of the counter-reaction to the socialist period. Up to the point when all the Eastern European countries were still in the socialist camp, there were stunning similarities in their joke repertoires as well. The pan-Soviet targets travelled well and far, getting entrenched even in the most faraway corners of the large country and even beyond that (see Banc & Dundes 1986). This can be taken as evidence of a cultural hegemony (that was attempted besides the political and linguistic one), part of which was intentional and performed through politics and propaganda, and part of which was spontaneous, visible in adapting folklore and other phenomena of anti-socialist character. But the main reasons for this might have also been rather practical – the jokes fitted well into the lifestyle as these were the main issues of all the Soviet people. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the changes (economic, political, etc.) that each of the post-socialist republics has gone through are huge, and they vary from country to country. There are totally new problems that are tackled in jokes as well. Some of the cycles or joke targets are known in many post-socialist countries – e.g.

the New Russians (Shmeleva & Shmelev, Brzozowska, Davies, this volume). The nature of the new ethnic targets and the direction of mockery depend on the present perceptions of self and other, which is different throughout Eastern Europe. What remains the same is the history, although as Davies remarks (this volume), the ways of coming to terms with it also differ to some extent.

In some cases, it seems that the identity of the target is not as significant as assumed in most studies. In every tradition, there exist a limited number of very popular targets, and even though there are preferences in whether to assign positive (e.g. witty, clever etc.) or negative (stupid, sexually dysfunctional) characteristics to this target, these can change with time (Brzozowska on the image of the Germans in Polish jokes, this volume). The image of the “other” can also vary within a limited period (e.g. the stereotype of the canny can evoke admiration and dislike at the same time, visible for example in the jokes about the Jews). It can be because the joke script balances on the borderline between ridiculous and witty or clever and stingy remarks / behaviour (the border between ridiculous and witty being especially well represented in jokes about “Jewish logic”). But as a general rule, more productive characters tend to “draw” all kinds of joke scripts to be adapted to them, not because the script reflects on a real (e.g. political) *faux-pas* but namely because the target itself carries a comic potential contagiously ready to link to any joke, be it stupid or canny (jokes about Nasreddin are a good example of this; for political targets, see Laineste, this volume).

Therefore, there is reason to believe that economic and cultural (and at times political) statuses are not the only factors determining target choice – some characters with greater comic potential get all the “honour” of getting to be called either too stupid or canny. Furthermore, in the post-socialist situation, there is no politicised centre, yet no consensus about the “right stupid character / peripherian” has been reached. This may be because the forces of globalisation (and Internet in general) affect the tradition. There are so many different joke targets and less motivation to “translate” these in a cultural sense, e.g. replacing the target with the local numskull. In many ways, the development of each of the post-socialist countries is unique (see also the argumentation by Davies, this volume), having gone through profound transformations on all levels of the society. The only certain commonality is their past, which they are also relating to more or less directly in jokes. We can also assume that the post-socialist jokes differ from other joke traditions through their distinctively similar past

and their reactions to that past. Thus, the post-socialist model has something in common with both the socialist and never-socialist joke traditions, but there are also some unique features with respect to target choice.

The direction of mockery in jokes is another revealing topic of interest. The accounts on the direction and symmetry / asymmetry of joke relationships have been quite vague and even contradictory. Christie Davies (mostly in 1990), and others point at the asymmetry and “top-down” tendency in choosing a joke target not only on ethnic but also on a social and economical basis (more developed centre mocks the less developed periphery, socially higher positioned mock those with a lower status in the society, the better-off make fun of the worse-off etc., not the other way round). Others (e.g. Knuuttila 1992) present numerous examples that refer to the opposite direction, where the ones on the lower position mock the ones from a higher social class. In old folk jokes, the low-status and worse-off character is almost always the “winner” (see also Krikmann 2002). The social (ethno-political) tensions of the Soviet world were also directed upwards.

It is possible to make conclusions about the direction of joking from the articles of Shmeleva & Shmelev, Stanoev, Krikmann, Davies, and Brzozowska (this volume). Estonian (including Soviet-era) jokes show that Davies’s postulates stating the direction of joking relationships may work for some ethnic, social and political configurations (Anglo-American culture, for example) but in other situations (like authoritarian socialist regimes) they cease to be universal (see also Laineste 2005). Stanoev addresses the Soviet (ethno-) political targets to find that it was those in power (both local and Soviet leaders) whose stupidity is laughed at. Both Shmeleva & Shmelev and Krikmann (this volume) describe the targets in contemporary Russian jokes, showing that the Estonian (often confused with other “Pribalts”, and mainly derived from earlier jokes about the Finns) is one of the preferred newcomers. Here, the direction of mockery targets an economically rather well-developed neighbour, accused of slowness and a bad command of Russian. Brzozowska names some more popular Polish targets from the post-socialist period and shows that as the neighbouring Germans (and Russians) as well as the local minority (the Jews) are becoming less colourful characters of jokes, other targets (and usually those not perceived as inferior to the Polish – e.g. the American, the Frenchman, the Dutchman) are successfully taking their place. Davies’s review on the general post-socialist targets addresses primarily the most popular of them in many countries, the image of the oppor-

tunist *arriviste* (New Russian, Wessi) better-off than the joke-teller. It is significant to note that this type of bottom-up joking arises in a period sharp societal changes and economic insecurity. The inherent injustice dictates an alteration of both the totalitarian (bottom-up, political) as well as the democratic (top-down, ethnic) model of target choice. Both directions presume the “normality” of the joke-teller and at the same time assume the “abnormality” and subsequent lower status of the “other”. Anything different is perceived as “wrong” or even dangerous for the in-group (for general overview, see Yzerbyt, Judd & Corneille 2003). For the joke-teller, the justification holds, but when we look at the claim from the viewpoint of the target (who by no doubt considers himself as normal and has his own “other” who is targeted in the jokes), each targeted group should have its own target, who in turn has another target, and so on. Thus, the only solution to this could be the recognition of the subjective and constantly changing quality of the category of the “worse off” (and also those who are too well off). This makes the distinctions between “top” and “bottom” seem quite conventional. It changes depending on the viewpoint and the perspective (including the aspect of whether the present situation was deserved or not) of the parties involved.

The merging of ethnic and political qualities in Soviet jokes is an issue pointed out in the research project (ETF grant No. 6759), but clarifying the relationships of the mentioned categories and comparing countries with different socio-political backgrounds to map the phenomena as a process is incomplete so far. The fact that socialist jokelore mainly exhibited one category of jokes, the notorious and diversionist category critical of the society and regime, has inspired many studies about humour in hindsight (Graham 2008; Draitser 2004 and elsewhere; Brooks 2000; Milne 2004, etc.). The political-ethnic category (or political-vocational, or -sexual or -absurd, or combined with any other sub-theme) shows that the social aspects were often entwined in jokes, as politics penetrated every walk of life. The tendency is followed in the analysis or examples in Raskin 1985 and Draitser 1998, but is also visible in the global motive of the “Big Brother” in the jokelore of socialist countries (see Banc and Dundes (1986/1990); Laineste (2005) etc.). This compendium refers to the changes in the content of the contemporary political jokes in different post-socialist countries. Specific patterns of change account for different targets, as it is not only the social and political background of the joke-teller that matters, but the history and current perceptions of international relationships. That is to say, in the case of some specific

target, the ethno-political joke may still be used (and in many cases, ethnic degradation is combined with sexual scripts, etc.) – if the relationship between the two countries is unsettling, if it involves a perceived threat on the nation (Russia, e.g. in some examples in Chlopicki, this volume) or if the liberties taken by the target are perceived to be unjustified or too ambitious (USA, see also Brzozowska, this volume). Consequently, in some cases, the primarily socialist feature of the intertwined character of ethnic and political joke categories can still be seen. That in turn leads us to conclude that it is not the socialist regime *per se* that elicited that feature. Instead, there are some essentially similar social conditions involved that may depend on the political regime, but also may not – this is not their defining attribute. The more important quality seems to be the unjustified / undeservedly acquired nature of power the target nation (but in earlier layers of folk jokes, also stereotypic representatives of a social class, e.g. mansion owners) imposes over the joke-tellers, the feeling of being switched into a large system alienated from the instances of power (Stanoev, this volume), and seeing the other as the source of the decreasing quality of life, economical crises, or more global unrest.

Another aspect concerning global influences into the post-socialist jokes is the attitude towards (ethnic and political) jokes and the issues of censorship. The pendulum has swung from censorship to an extensive freedom of expression to another style of censorship once again, this time termed as “political correctness”. The censorship in the two political contexts applies mostly to the use of the jokes: who uses them, under what conditions and in what purpose the text is allowed to be used. In Soviet times, the existence of the jokes was an uncontested reality, but a joke-teller needed to be sure his audience and the occasion was right or else he might end up similarly to the heroes of numerous jokes about Soviet leaders who collected joke(-teller)s. It required an intimate group of people and even functioned as a social adhesive, creating close ties based on mutual trust (Stanoev, this volume). Commentary on the censorship of Soviet leaders is brought to absurdity in jokes about over-reacting to seemingly innocent things (e.g. children’s poems, see Neklyudov, this volume). At the same time, a meta-level is addressed in these jokes when pointing at some poets’ willingness to cooperate with the ones in power. It also shows how censoring was strong on some minor issues (repressing literature and other expressive freedom on the public arena), deliberately overlooking more substantial confrontations. Censorship in post-socialism (but also in democracy) attempts to control a wider area than just the pub-

lic space, while trying to define any kind of dissemination of potentially harmful jokes as a violation of social and ethical norms. That is, the responsibility of telling politically incorrect jokes is vested on the citizen, on the individual conscience, as there is no general law against telling jokes. The absence of a common enemy also attenuates the motivation for telling a racist or other politically incorrect joke. Censorship has been a particularly controversial point for the post-socialist societies as the freedom of speech there is regarded as something fought for and gained together with independence. The idea of censoring thoughts or speech evokes unpleasant memories from the Soviet past. The ethnic focus, and sometimes the political focus as well, are beginning to be banned from public display, bringing forth arguments about the need for political correctness. This is especially foregrounded since the beginning of the “European Union era” in many post-socialist countries, as multiculturalism and friendly co-existence is among its primary issues. However, jokes on post-socialism have remained uncensored (though Brzozowska, this volume, describes an increasing neutrality in some ethnic jokes – which is counterbalanced by the more straightforward and even aggressive depiction of other themes, e.g. in gallows humour about children or the elderly), which provides another good reason to study them before political correctness steps in.

Among others, the articles by Arkhipova and Neklyudov (this volume) point at the intricate interconnection of joke content and the surrounding social reality. Certain themes are valid at particular periods, and do not work well outside of it (e.g. Arkhipova on the continuity and change of a single joke plot from Peter the Great to Putin). They absorb their contemporary political and social details, as is exemplary in jokes where Soviet leaders comment on a children’s poem (Neklyudov, this volume). Jokes adapt to different social, economical, cultural and other contexts. Jokes display motivated transformations of content and form, dealing with the most salient and prevalent issue of their contemporary everyday life (e.g. in the way ethnic jokes dealt with political issues during Soviet times, choosing respective targets).

All in all, the way that jokes change shows changes in the society, the way targets are chosen shows relations in a society, and the way jokes are directed at different social / ethnic groups at different times shows the constant adaptation of folklore to their surrounding social reality (or, even more, to the relative perception of it).

Features

Contemporary jokes represent certain features that the postmodern society is known for: intertextuality, pastiche, and parody (Francesse 1997). The turn of aesthetic preferences towards the fondness of ludic formats as such is not specific to Eastern Europe, though the tendencies to mix genres / topics from different eras in order to amuse is also notably frequent in post-socialism. The 'postmodernist discourse' pervades: the remaining clichés of socialist realism still exist, and the playful context in which they are re-inscribed, as well as the ironic-wistful distantiating from the past (Kondakov 1997, cited by Kelly & Shepherd 1998: 396). The availability of references from quite different periods, both in societal and folkloric aspects, creates a possibility for an even greater network of citations, allusions and metaphors in, for example, the comic discourse evaluating its contemporary politicians.

Humour is an important part of the "infotainment" that the Internet is out to provide. Recent studies maintain that over a third of Internet users in the United Kingdom use the medium to find jokes, cartoons and other humorous material (Dutton et al., 2005), although regional and social differences in Internet use exist (Chen, Boase & Wellmann 2002: 23, Tables 4 and 5). Humour is involved in various manifestations of online citizen participation, for example a study analysing the U.S. 2004 presidential elections showed that sending and receiving jokes was the prevalent online political activity (Coleman, 2005).² Humour studies should recognise that the Internet is becoming the leading media for producing, sharing and consuming humour. Collecting jokes on the Internet is becoming more usual and even unavoidable, because much of the oral joke-telling has carried over to that media.

The Internet in turn has had a profound influence on the genre. The renewed nature of jokes (short, electronically distributed in addition to oral circulation, specific jokes created only for electronic media – for example, lists and video / picture jokes (see Ellis 2001) etc.) requires renewed methods for collecting and processing the data, and by now the researchers are also becoming more aware of that need. As accessibility to the Internet is becoming easier or in some countries taken for granted (e.g. those introducing e-services for its citizens), concerns about the representativeness of Internet users are now largely neglected as irrelevant. A few scholars have started to focus on the subject of Internet jokes, drawing our attention to the fact that if Internet-based humour is studied, it usually focuses on specific topics

or cases and does not attempt to provide an overview of valid methodologies, not to mention formulating unified methodological principles for future studies (Shifman 2007: 188). Humour is often used in the most active contemporary media, the Internet, but the dominant features of it have changed alongside with its context. Whole texts, citations and fragments of jokes appear in different discourses, both serious and comic.

Citations of jokes are sometimes used in non-ludic discourse in order to clarify a point or illustrate journalistic articles. The issue is addressed in Brzozowska (this volume), describing the productivity of “winged words” in the Polish press. The preference of a light and humorous style in journalism followed the fall of communism very quickly, which can be seen as an adjustment to a globally spread journalistic tendency towards exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering and sensationalism. This includes using jokes and puns also in non-ludic contexts, which downplays the seriousness of the issue in question, but at the same time creates more vivid allusions to the text (and the event itself). Jokes are attractive and enable the condensation of the message. The same tendency is brought to its extreme in the comic TV-news shows e.g. in Poland and Lithuania (analysed in Chlopicki; Kavaliauskaite, this volume), where the use of humour combined with (mock) journalism is the end in itself and not just the means. Citing old jokes and using known stereotypes is relevant here, but they are all in the service of something else: to ridicule the vain and the visible of the society.

Humour tends to reveal the emptiness of its contemporary slogans. Jokes have long ridiculed the meta-narratives and attacked the sacred texts or actions. Another way of doing it is through parody, and this is cleverly fulfilled in the format of TV comedy shows that imitate different discourses. This makes a point above the obvious: it is no longer only about mocking the target, but also about laughing at the (serious) discourse itself. Combining different and at times contradicting genres reveals the inherent pretensions and highlights the absurd. In the article describing the viewership of Lithuanian spoof news (Kavaliauskaite, this volume), the genre is described as playing with both the content and the form of the show for an innovational approach to social satire. There is no straightforward definition about the seriousness / funniness of the show. In a serious form (the news, interviews, etc.), it makes fun of the public figures and simultaneously mocks journalism on the whole. It also warns the viewer to take everything in the mass media with a grain of salt. Similarly, it does not prioritise

any issues and thus results in an implosion of themes and an inherent generic ambivalence which further stresses the idea of playing with norms, rules and narratives. At the same time, this laughter is not only destructive. Stanoev (this volume) stresses that the idea that carnivalisation is a universal strategy that at once criticises / reorganises the existing power relations but also helps to maintain them. Also in the (mostly Soviet-era) examples of poem parodies (Lurie, this volume) there was a need to treat the object of parody with a certain respect, retaining its metrical and syntactic structure and altering only a few though crucial words. This is a technique that subverts the authority from the inside and still acknowledges its reputation by choosing to address it in the first place.

The previous lines of argument may well give support to the idea that post-socialist humour has developed much in the lines of the global tendencies, producing hybrid genres and topics. It is appropriate to account for the more unique features that are mentioned in the articles of this volume. When comparing the socialist and post-socialist periods, Chlopicki finds that the same techniques (mocking irony and reduction to the absurd) are prevalent in both the pre- and post-1990s. The style of humour has remained the same, although the topics and focuses have changed. At the same time, Brzozowska notices a decrease of “Polishness” in the contemporary jokes. The question remains whether the post-socialist quality is evident in a specific humorous discourse, or is it a solely formal characteristic to remember or use the old Soviet jokes (or fragments of these) without much emotional involvement in this type of humour. A specific feature of Russian post-socialist jokelore is certainly the existence of popular characters with their specific speech characteristics. The popularity of these targets even seems to depend on whether it has been established in the tradition as someone with a peculiar accent or use of vocabulary. Arkhipova (in her article on jokes about Putin) describes the speech of the Russian Federation’s former president Putin as a combination of formal and colloquial registers which gives a possibility to use a wide range of creative puns in jokes about Putin. Krikmann, but also Shmeleva & Shmelev (this volume) investigate the character of the Estonian (or more general, the image of the “Pribalt”) in Russian jokes and describe the slowness of their speech as one of the identifying features. Slowness in turn indicates the dullness of the mind and other negative stereotypes, but the main attraction seems to lie in the possibility to play with the speech of the joke character. Shmeleva & Shmelev address the issue directly and come to an ambiguous conclusion that in

many cases, the joke targets about whom certain agreed stereotypes and speech characteristics exist, can become popular (Chubais, Zhirinovskii, Boris, Moisseev), and there are also those that still have not acquired a ready conventional character or portait (e.g. Gryzlov and Fradkov), but appear in numerous jokes. In other post-socialist regions, the few existing speech characteristics are not stressed, which may point at the tendency that playing with accents and styles is not so common in the rest of Eastern Europe – an issue which will need further attention.

A specifically post-socialist characteristic of humour is the above-mentioned intertextuality created by the availability of different frames of reference – though the old Soviet jokes are not topically relevant, allusion to them may make a subtle point about contemporary politics or other issues. For example, radio Yerevan jokes about omitting or silencing the truth get recycled in the new context to convey the essence of the contemporary propaganda language (Brzozowska, this volume). In the case of old and widely known joke cycles or types there is even no need to remind the listener about the whole text of the joke, and an economic use of only the punch-line already conveys the whole rich field of associations. Jokes are seen as being recycled into a new context, resulting in a wider variety of interpretations, as also seen in a Polish TV-show (Chlopicki, this volume) or Estonian political jokes (Laineste, this volume).

Functions

The function of jokes is not addressed directly in most of the articles of this volume. From a more general perspective, most of the studies suggest that jokes are a purposeful means of communication. The most obvious regularity in joke patterns that refers to a functional choice is the way jokes comment on the social reality, providing a relevant ironic commentary to it (Arkhipova; Shmeleva & Shmelev; Neklyudov; Laineste, this volume), but also approaching playfully to the information in the daily news (Laineste; Kavaliauskaite, this volume). The role of the jokes is revealed through their status and popularity in the society. Jokes often target a group that is of some relevance to the (ethnic or other) group telling it, reflecting ethnic, economic, cultural, etc. tensions between those groups. Jokes may be used for the nations' self-asserting behaviour, e.g. defining their "other" and hence feeling superior, better and stronger as a nation.

Jokes can function as texts that enable self-identification and, simultaneously, the identification of the "other". Ethnic jokes are often

banned or sneered on because of their alleged hostility, a theme also mentioned above in the section concerning the changing notion of censorship in Eastern Europe. Bringing them to the international arena in the global society where every action can potentially gain international voice and impact is risky indeed. But the existence of the global audience has become inevitable due to the means of electronic communication, the Internet. People have to get used to, and learn how to cope with international slurs or different national styles of humour (Ziv 1988: xii; Kuipers 2008). This dialogue is attainable if society is informed and aware of the potential of ethnic, political and other jokes, and if there is a felt need to deal with the differences in taste. The main obstacle is the political discourse which evokes fear of “the other” and implicitly fosters opposition between ethnic groups. In the recent years, the politicians in the post-socialist region tend to stress community values, insider-attitudes, and thus support nationalist feelings (cf. Lokk 2003). That is visible especially in Eastern Europe, where nationalism has historically acquired an almost mythical and definitely positive value among its native inhabitants.

Stanoy Stanoev gets the closest of the current authors in describing the function of jokes. He states that when looking at the specificity of jokes in post-socialism, we must first start with Soviet jokes as the most complicated example of the functional interaction of jokes and the society. Not completely denying the most widely held belief that Soviet humour was a “safety valve” or a diversionist act against the regime, Stanoev stresses the communality factor of humour (see also Arkhipova on jokes about Putin, this volume). Jokes also contribute to (political and other) self-identification. People tell jokes to regain power, especially in the context of greater alienation from the political authority. Jokelore of the post-socialist period cannot be described without taking into account the previous, socialist joke tradition because practices as well as their functions seem to merge and create a unique fusion. The joke traditions from the two periods are in many aspects very different (target choice, categories, politicised versus de-politicised content, etc.; see also Laineste, this volume), but the way they combine is specific only to the countries that have experienced both of these periods.

The early post-Soviet years witnessed a renaissance of Soviet political humor, in which the uses and meanings of *politicheskie anekdoty* changed, as it became a part of the past, a victorious rejoicing over the present freedom, and a bit later, an expression of nostalgia. In addition to that, there were translated / created jokes that invaded

new areas, and laughed at things not possible in the Soviet era. Jokes that flourished in the immediate post-Soviet context were a popular attempt to reflect on the meaning of the Soviet experience (Krylova 1999: 247). Jokes also changed in the way of expression: no longer did they have to be whispered, they were heard on big stages and publications. Dima Verner (cited in Gorny 2002: 304, Table 3), the founder of the immensely popular joke site *anekdot.ru*, also notices the huge popularity of all jokes, including the “bearded political jokes” being sent to that web page during the first decade of its existence, which was followed by a decline (and being replaced with something Gorny terms as “personal stories” of comic quality, not political in essence, *ibid.* 305). The articles here mention the more easy-going and entertaining atmosphere that accompanies the contemporary jokes and draws them closer to the joke tradition from democratic countries. Davies (this volume) even states that the similarities between post-socialist countries are smaller than the differences, and their jokelore bears an overall resemblance to that of democratic countries.

The abundance of jokes on the Internet shows that there must be certain functionality in using the particular environment for sharing humour – it is a tool for processing information, for discussing issues, for expressing the otherwise inexpressible or unpermitted, etc. It is also useful to point at what are the other things that jokes can inform us about (e.g. forwarding jokes in e-mail as a form of bonding, Shifman 2007; Aro 2003; Salo, Zimmerbauer & Suutari 2005). Humour is also a frequent “visitor” in other discourses to draw the interest of the audience. Advertising for example uses humour to make the product more appealing, evoking positive emotions of the potential consumer. This does not usually mean the exploitation of an entire joke text but instead puns, humorous metaphors, fragments from known joke texts, or other humorous syntactic or semantic features (see also Sutherland & Silvester 2000: 168–177).

The post-socialist jokelore is, together with tightened rules for political correctness, approaching the democratic model of jokes in terms of being an entertainment (be it on the Internet or elsewhere), as seen in the analysis of humour on television (Chlopicki, this volume). Nevertheless, the analysis of viewership by Kavaliauskaite (this volume) suggests that to some extent, humour also carries an empowering, informative and bonding role in contemporary comic broadcasting as well.



In order to bring together the previous paragraphs, the main lines of development for Eastern European humour in terms of process, feature and function are broadly the following:

★ Processes

1. The variety and amount of different joke targets / ethnic characters has widened. It is also more globalised and in that way more similar to the rest of the world. Though Chukchi jokes are still remembered, their popularity was at its peak decades ago, and there is no reason for it to be restored. The direction of joking (top-down, bottom-up) is an issue that still needs to be studied, though it seems that mocking the better-off pervades in this region, sometimes still intertwining the ethnic and political dimensions in one joke.

2. As a parallel trend, there is an increase in the popularity of some ethnic targets which usually are social / ethnic / other groups from the same country (New Russians) or close neighbours (Estonians for Russians). This may well be taken as an example of de-globalisation in folklore: jokes get translated literally, but almost as often as that they are also translated culturally, by adjusting the plot to a locally known target.

3. In the socialist context, just one dominant feature governed all walks of life. The political control infused everything from work to home, and this caused the jokes to primarily target the system through pointing at its daily appearances in everything people got involved with. This provided an endless supply of jokes. As a contrast, the post-socialist societies display a diversity of equally important themes or dominants instead of one – as a way of finding their uniqueness, specificity, and identity as a nation and as a country. Jokes have changed too, as there is great variation in targets and themes. Both old Soviet (be it in the form of citations or other) and new (translated etc.) jokes are present in post-socialist jokelore. This provides a description of how jokes correspond to the society that tells them. Folklore reflects not only its immediate social reality but may also refer to the general mentality / atmosphere. We might even assume that the post-socialist jokelore can be characterised by a greater diversity of content than jokes in democratic societies where a certain balance and focal points have been achieved.

4. Jokes in post-socialism still remain largely uncensored, and there is a severe public opposition to censorship. Exercising censorship on jokes can have controversial results, especially in post-socialism, because most still remember the fierce control over speech and thought

from the Soviet period. The public arena for criticism was non-existent and that fuelled jokes even more (see also Stanoev; Davies; Brzozowska, this volume). Consequently, post-socialism is extremely sensitive to all kinds of threats on nationality, independence, and personal freedom.

★ Features

1. Post-socialist jokelore displays intertextuality both in terms of form and content. Humorous discourse cites (parts of) old Soviet jokes, these may also be used in journalism or comic TV-shows; at the same time, new (translated or recycled / updated) jokes are also popular. Punch-lined jokes are used side by side with other formats, e.g. humorous news programmes. Generic ambiguity in the service of the comic effect is perhaps not specific to post-socialism as a period, but this (in addition to mixing old and new lore, or extending the frames of reference by citing punch-lines of old jokes) may be assumed to be more visible in contemporary Eastern Europe as there is a fast-developing acceptance of post-modern comic practices, but also the reminiscence of a rich socialist joke tradition.
2. Through the same device, jokes fulfil their continuous role in deconstructing the meta-narratives considered sacred or sincere, which is a common feature in all humour.
3. In some cases the punch-lines are not meant to be funny but instead illustrative. In this case, the original context of the joke matters, but the citation aims not to remind the joke itself, but the more serious frame of reference where the joke stems from. This mainly applies to the (re-)use of old Soviet jokes. Fragments of jokes become frequently used expressions (figurative speech) and continue their lives detached from their original context.
4. On the basis of the articles, the most prevalent common feature of Russian jokelore is the practice of using specific speech characteristics, which in turn guarantee the popularity of these jokes. Using irony and reduction to the absurd may be a unique aspect, displaying continuity between Soviet and post-Soviet humour.

★ Functions

1. The most general and obvious function of the joke is that it reacts to its context in the most relevant way, searching out the themes that are of most concern. The primary function of a joke seems to reflect the attitudes of those who tell the jokes, perhaps in an attempt to point at the shortcomings and in a way discuss these with others who share the same worries. It allows a common language and creates

close ties, especially in a society of high alienation from politics (like the Soviet society was) where the distinction between “us” and “them” divides the same society by their access to power.

2. Jokes from different (political) contexts differ. This leads us in turn to their function: democracy is a relatively mild and easy environment for jokes and as a result, the entertaining function of the joke starts to dominate the scene. On the other hand, a totalitarian society (but also other contexts where the conditions were severe and dominated by fear and / or hatred) have bred and continue to breed jokes that were not primarily entertaining, but carried multiple other functions (e.g. criticism; described by Stanoev, this volume). The post-socialist jokelore is, together with tightened rules for political correctness, approaching the democratic model of jokes in terms of being an entertainment.

3. The cognitive function of jokes is the implicit element in many of the studies in this volume, stating that jokes carry a role of coming to terms with everyday reality, for example with troubling events in politics or information overload from different media (e.g. the Internet), and change according to the needs of their contemporary environment. They are a comment on the events and guide the members of the society to a more playful understanding of the issues. Post-socialist humour also carries a strong entertainment quality and is used in different contexts to draw the attention of the audience.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Observing continuities and change in post-socialist jokelore is operational for describing several societal phenomena. Some of these have eclectically been addressed in the articles of this volume, and the primary direction for further research is thus to create a better designed and integrated research project that would give more substantial results. This in turn will allow us to take the next step and compare not only post-socialist societies, but include insight into other cultural and political regions.

Our most important concern is that humour researchers are still missing a comprehensive database of contemporary jokes, which would contribute to validating the results of previous studies, give an impulse for further studies, offer material for an international overview of developments and tendencies in post-socialist jokelore, etc. Thus the primary task is to constitute a cross-cultural database that should at first include the relevant publications, archive and Internet

material from those post-socialist countries that by now have shown their interest in the project (e.g. Russia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania and Bulgaria). The international database of jokes should include brief English summaries or abstracts of joke content as well as local cultural-historical information related to the joke in order to conduct an informed comparison. This contextual data is divided into two: 1) the immediate context (in the chatroom or other environment) that gave rise to the joke, and 2) more general information (the cultural data) that surrounds the joke on the societal level, e.g. the topical news that explains its content etc. We must take into account that, first of all, too rigid content-based categorisations are often quite unhelpful or can even obstruct the query. Recent theories on humour categorisation (e.g. GTVH, General Theory of Verbal Humour; Attardo & Raskin 1991, Attardo 1994) are too preliminary to be of much use. However, some levels of joke attributes could be taken from the GTVH, e.g. object of the joke (target, TA), genre or text type (narrative strategy, NS). Upper level dimensions of joke texts (script opposition, SO and logical mechanism, LM) are still to a great extent poorly defined and remain objects of scholarly discussions and empirical studies (see Davies 2004 and other contributions to the special issue of *Humor* 2004, No. 4). And secondly, folkloric material poses implicit temptations to treat the similarities of texts as a quality situated above linguistic differences (and to analyse the redactions of a certain plot unit, to trace the etymology and diachronic paths of the dissemination of joke texts, or to differentiate between prototypical and marginal versions, etc.). Nevertheless, we find it necessary to discriminate the material first of all on the basis of language / country and only secondly on the level of distinct plots. Our previous experience with this kind of material shows that according to the “Zipf rule” (cf. Krikmann 1997), there are only a small number of very frequent / productive plots, and a large number of infrequent / “weak” ones. With respect to database development, we should first specify the state of the sources (printed and online). Then, a body of material with special attention on plot items that are known in at least two languages will be collected. This step will involve the digitalisation of printed sources and creating a password-protected database management interface for individual partners which allows for adding and editing the material. A proto-database that establishes the unified requirements and a list of attributes for joke texts as well as a preliminary list of plot items can be formed on the basis of the existing Estonian database, which still lacks the English summaries for major plots. The database is both

semantically and formally organised, using multiple relational tagging in order to simplify both categorisation and retrieval later on. Both the structure and the scope of the database must allow constant updating. The database must be connected to a web site that provides the description of the project, its purposes and background, user-friendly environment for sending jokes to the database, and an open forum moderated by project participants for discussions on related topics of humour and jokes, e.g. interethnic relations. For project members, a newsgroup option will be designed, in addition to a medium for online meetings and conferences. The portal could also provide a means for contacting and getting feedback from the tradition-bearers directly, if any gaps should appear in the database.

Deriving from the fact that there is no such cross-cultural source for comparative research to date, we have an inconsistent overview of the social and psychological functions of humour in different contexts. The three basic topics of jokes (political, ethnic and sexual, as already mentioned in Winick 1976) need to be analysed in socialism and post-socialism (and later, also in Western democratic societies for comparison).

The search for local characteristics of jokelore and subculturalisation of jokes is happening simultaneously with the move towards globalisation. This synchronic and two-directional movement is a universal trend that also needs closer examination in the context of the increasingly multicultural Europe. This raises questions about the status, content and main categories of jokes in post-socialism. Belin (2002) and many others describe the diminishing tendency of telling jokes compared to Soviet times. Jokes seem to merge into other cultural phenomena (televised comedy shows rarely use the genre of jokes, as was shown by Chlopicki, this volume), including advertising. We can assume that there is a constant increasing drive towards individual creativity (as opposed to anonymous collective creativity), a move also referred to by the semiotician Yu. Lotman in his theorising on the change in aesthetics (culture of synthesis versus culture of opposition, Lotman 1964: 172 and onwards). Research on jokes has shown that post-socialism has allowed an influx of innumerable translations and loans into local jokelore (Laineste 2005; Brzozowska 2007). But at the same time, jokes about distinct groups of people (e.g. youth subcultures) are becoming more culture-specific, using citations, untranslatable puns etc. in their electronic (presumably also face-to-face) communication (Lurie 2007; Shmelev & Shmeleva 2007). An analysis of these trends can be done through analysing the Internet jokelore of

specific subcultures (e.g. jokes of right-wing neo-Nazi movements, religious groups etc.), finding out the degree of globalisation (global joke types and specific and/or untranslatable joke types) present in their humorous online communication. The same steps can also be applied to the database in order to find out the share of globally less (and locally more) frequent and thus more characteristic scripts of individual post-socialist countries.

It is equally important to validate and explicate the alleged social, political, and most of all ethnic intolerance in jokes. A recent change of attitudes towards ethnic humour as being politically incorrect makes this a highly relevant issue in humour studies, social psychology, politics etc. Existing literature has viewed ethnic humour as an aggression / mirth / indicator of mutual (cultural) awareness and contact. Western European press has implicitly viewed ethnic humour as undesirable and inappropriate (Lewis 1997; 2008). Russian press (as described in the research summarised at http://www.hro.org/editions/h_speech/) publishes ethnic humour, pejorative ethnonyms and the like with almost no reservations. Obviously what we are dealing with here is a wide scale of texts, each positioned somewhere between intolerance / hate and tolerance / mirth. We are still lacking (cognitive, social psychological) instruments to assess the intensity of the hate component that is dependent on a cultural-political context, demographic and personal features of the joke-teller and the audience, content of the humour, etc. It will be possible to analyse the compiled database, giving a quantitative multi-dimensional overview of post-socialist jokelore in all the relevant countries involved in the project regarding the social (ethnic, gender, etc.) and political incentives to jokes, topicality of jokes, changes in jokes (comparing socialist and post-socialist period), proportion and characteristics of translations and loans between the jokes from the socialist and post-socialist periods (incl. proportion of Soviet jokes in the material, new incentives and subjects of jokes), and the intersections and overlaps of oral and Internet joke traditions. All in all, after going through the initial phase of inserting a representative amount of data in the pan-post-socialist database, the primary outcome would be substantial scholarly research on Soviet and post-socialist jokes in Eastern Europe (1950s – 2009). In addition to semantic and ontological issues in post-socialist jokelore (e.g. waves of popularity of different plots etc.), the problems of measuring the intolerance of joke texts and other methodological questions concerning the assessment of jokes, as well as the creation and maintenance of a folkloristic database with international users, its advantages and bot-

tlenecks should be addressed in front of an international academic audience.

The future research attempts a step towards fulfilling the gaps in research on the issues mentioned above (no comprehensive register of contemporary jokelore from different countries which would attract interdisciplinary research, and messy relations between public opinion, jokes and hate speech) through the following tasks:

1. Create an international Internet portal of contemporary jokelore, compiled by professional humour scholars, which will:
 - a) Include as many post-socialist countries as possible. The political and ethnic categories of the jokes will be covered during the first phase of this comprehensive database.
 - b) Provide an online platform for a dialogue, concerning the issues of ethnicity, identity, multiculturalism, diversity, conflicts springing from that etc. Interested public, interdisciplinary scholars, school-children interested in jokes, etc., could be the primary participants in the forum.
2. Analyse the compiled database, giving a quantitative multi-dimensional overview covering the following factors:
 - a) Ethnicity (of the targets), geography (general geographical distribution of individual plots);
 - b) Political context and timeline (socialist versus post-socialist (versus, in time, never-socialist countries);
 - c) Source of the material (archive / publication / the Internet);
 - d) Text parameters (using the elements from the General Theory of Verbal Humour and established archiving principles): genre, target of the joke, other characters, situation, context, demographic data of the joke-teller (if available).

Through these measures, the following questions can be addressed:

- a) Has the popularity of joking (either oral joke-telling or spreading through other means) increased or diminished, and what are the respective situations in different countries?
- b) If such tendencies can be identified, does the popularity tend to be medium-specific, e.g. jokes are being “told” more likely in the Internet and are disappearing from oral use (Internet-based joke-telling should be analysed through questionnaires and interviews with different age and social groups)? What is the situation in other countries / contexts?
- c) How has the transition from socialism to post-socialism affected the categories of ethnic and political jokes in general and in each country? Are ethnic jokes a diminishing genre?

- d) How has the transition from socialism to post-socialism affected the power relations of different ethnic and political joke targets? (We might propose that there is a clear difference between Russian and other jokelore – the old Soviet jokes of Eastern Europe combined and merged ethnic and political implications while Russian Soviet jokes retained a difference between ethnic and political scripts in jokes, and this has changed only in other countries and not in Russia). Has the situation altered in post-socialist Eastern Europe so that ethnic and political aspects are becoming more differentiated? What are the new political and ethnic targets of these countries and in Russia? Are some post-socialist countries more inclined to remember and recycle the old Soviet plots and how is it connected with their contemporary political condition?
- e) Russians now enjoy the jokes depicting New Russians, but what are the relevant traditions and cycles in other post-socialist countries? Who are the targets and what does it say about the conflicts or imbalances of the society?

3. Point at interconnections and dependencies between tradition and its cultural, political, demographical, and economic contexts, which will help to give substantial explanations to processes in tradition and cultural practices, e.g. the changes that jokelore has gone through during the transition from socialism to post-socialism. The following questions should be addressed: What is the distribution and scope of different joke scripts and has this changed alongside societal transformations? What are the proportions of loans, translations and untranslatable (punning) jokes and is it connected to specific subcultures or languages / cultural spaces (e.g. Russia)? What can we say about the globalisation of traditions in this context? What are the tendencies towards searching local specificity?

4. Get a more valid overview of jokes as an expression of hate, intolerance or racism. Methods for assessing the possible hostility in humorous material must be found, e.g. by using cognitive linguistic tools, axiological analysis, psychological measures based on interviews and tests, controlling the demographic variables (ethnicity, age, sex) in the evaluation of humour.

Through the international database, made usable to international researchers with the help of the English plot summaries, cross-cultural (psychological, sociological, folkloristic, etc.) humour studies will get an invaluable comprehensive and comparative material that allows for making generalisations on jokes and the attached value systems,

stereotypes and other factors that are reflected in jokelore. Ethnic and political jokes mark only the start of the database and delineate its primary structure as the final aim is to incorporate all themes and categories of jokes in the region. The research will cast light on the social function of jokes that has by now only remained an issue of emotional and largely subjective dispute.

We can predict that some “centroids” of similar development can be detected in a more substantial and extensive study of the post-socialist region. If we focus on only certain material (e.g. political jokes) and analyse all the available countries from the perspective of that subcategory, while standardising the questions asked from each contributor, the chances are high that we can see patterns of a different kind in different parts of the region (Baltic countries, Russia, Central and South-Eastern European countries etc.).

In considering how this body of work can be generalised to give an overview of the present state of post-socialist research and most of all the phenomena of post-socialist humour, we are only tentative. Especially concerning the general characteristics of the phenomena under observation, the preliminary results are too varied and touch upon too many different aspects to say anything substantial about the tradition as a whole. But this being the first attempt on characterising the respective region in terms of jokelore, we believe that the compendium does give a noteworthy picture about the current trends in jokes (and humour research in general) in Eastern Europe. This result should not be underestimated, as such cross-cultural research in post-socialist humour is among the pioneers in the field (for research in Russian post-socialist humour, see Graham & Mesropova 2008, and the forthcoming special issue of the *Russian Journal of Communication*, summer 2009).

Notes

1. Russia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia.
2. Other studies state that the role of the Internet in promoting active and informed citizenship is minimal. In fact, those who use the Internet frequently for entertainment purposes are less likely to feel efficacious about their potential role in the democratic process (Kenski & Stroud 2006).

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