

ADRIAN STRIKES BACK WITH STYLE AND HUMOUR

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Abstract

More than half of Adrian's diary entries (by Sue Townsend, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1999) encompass two decades of the protagonist's maturing process and existence, in a working class setting. These cover different periods of the British History and socio-political events: from Margaret Thatcher's takeover to Tony Blair's government. Indeed, Adrian finds it difficult to conform to a way of life which he holds up as trivial. Besides, "Englishness" has acquired, in his unexpected conservative stance, a multicultural dimension for much of Adrian's disenchantment. Therefore, he is fiercely committed to preserve the all-British standards, evidenced in his behaviour and discursive practices, by means of a witty dialogue, irony, hyperbole, and parody.

The aim of this paper is to bring to the fore some of the protagonist's socio-cultural references and stylistic choices which challenge readers with humorously "unusual and unexpected events to the 'maps of meaning' (Hall et al., 1978: 54-55), that already form the basis of their cultural knowledge" of everyday language. Readers identify strings of continuity, on the one hand, and of rupture between the scheming of the old empires and the new goals of global capitalism, on the other. Perhaps Townsend's premise against life's "alogical" course of events led her to create a fictional character for whom humour may be suggestive of "a certain ideal image of the world" (Critchley 2002: 87-90).

Key words: Carnivalisation; Defamiliarisation; Uncrowning; Style; Satire.

"'A little Englander,' scoffed my mother, who rarely crossed the boundary of Leicestershire."

Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years, Sue Townsend
(1999: 16)

I. Introduction

Scorn, mockery, related to comic, on the one hand, and irony with its many manifestations, on the other, unite and divide the gamut of characters populating more than half of Adrian's diary entries, ingeniously conceived by Townsend (1982, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1999). Adrian, the protagonist in the saga, challenges readers with (Hall et al. 1978: 54-55)¹ "unusual and unexpected events

¹ As cited by P. Enciso (1997: 23) in his paper "Negotiating the Meaning of Difference: Talking back to Multicultural Literature", edited in *Reading across cultures: Teaching literature in a*

to the “maps of meaning”, which already form the basis of their cultural knowledge” [author’s emphasis] of everyday language. His entries not only encompass two decades of his maturing process and existence, in a working class setting, pinpointed by inevitable but terribly funny mismatches from teenager to adult life, but also cover different periods of the British History and socio-political events, in a creative and humorous way: from Margaret Thatcher’s takeover to Tony Blair’s government. Unlike many other characters in the diegetic world, who are direct, sometimes vulgar and use licence language, also referring to taboo issues, Adrian strikes readers with rather atypical and unexpected turn-takings or confessions, very much in the so-called traditional British style, though contrasting with his own status, age, and social class. In so doing, Townsend’s diary novels constitute a change in the dominant literary representation, considering that they are both addressed to a large readership (also involving minority groups) and challenge readers with different perspectives, by confronting narratives and focalisations: insider’s vs. outsider’s perspective. In the process readers are involved with an emotional cline leading to laughter or a simple smiling response.

This paper aims, therefore, to highlight some of the linguistic and discursive features conveying most of the mismatches of contemporary society brought to the fore in the protagonist’s socio-cultural references indebted to the values passed on by generations of real British thinkers, now at loss in a supposedly broad-minded permissive environment. As the protagonist acknowledges, in his usual style and sense of humour (*TCAM*: 60), “I think it is very important for us intellectuals to keep in touch with popular culture. We cannot live in ivory towers, unless, of course the ivory towers have a television aerial on the roof.”

Having shortly introduced the topic, its relevance, and the aims of this paper, I shall refer to Adrian’s peculiar way of interweaving creativity and political satire by means of discursive and stylistic choices underlying, as Simpson puts it (2003), “satirical-oriented humour”.

II. Satire and discourse strategies

Townsend’s saga fosters readers’ critical literacy while offering multiple insights into the dyad language/culture (Carter 1999) and into emotionally-charged satirical language inasmuch as in very many discursive practices. Equally interesting, as far as the slippery notion of genre is considered, in a linguistic approach, as well as for the assumptions underlying creativity in text, come along Simpson’s contentions on satirical humour (2002, 2003). The scholar, thus, advances that satire “is a *discursive practice* insofar as it is situated at a higher level of discourse organisation than systemic-functional concepts like *genre* or *register*, and certainly higher than what literary-critics traditionally mean by the term *genre*” [scholar’s

emphasis]. It is conveyed through the instantiation of a *discoursal prime*, defined as, goes on Simpson (2002),

an “echoic” utterance, in the sense that it is often predicated on someone else’s discourse, but over which ironic distance is placed through the repositioning of the ostensible speaking source of the text. The constitution of the prime is one of a number of potential *ironic phases* in satire. The prime is supplemented with a device that operates internal to the satirical text, a *text-internal dialectic*, conceptualised as an abstract principle, which induces a collision of ideas or appeals to a line of reasoning that falls outside the straightforward. [author’s italics]

Accordingly, the readers develop an (*Op. cit.*) “interpretative framework for satire” via a series of contextual associations in the attempt to grasp the diarist’s (*Op. cit.*) “prime and dialectic elements in satirical instances”, to make use of Simpson’s own terminology. These are (*Op. cit.*) “expounded by specific and palpable discourse strategies” namely: “saturation, negation, attenuated focalisation, interdiscursive merging and the inversion of discourse domains”, to be highlighted in the citations further on. Moreover, coming to grips with the diarist’s satirical statements depends both on interplay and tension involving sincerity, appropriateness and truth (universal conditions in Habermas’s tenets, 1995) in the process of readers’ interpretation of texts. Several discursive premises concur to their involvement with satire possibly highlighted as follows:

i) Saturation

I make a few demands on them. All I require is a jar of multi-vitamins once a week plus clean linen and courtesy. However I wouldn’t like you to switch off thinking that I’m not fond of my parents. In my own way I’m very close to them. It’s hard not to be. We live in a small house.

(TCAM: 60)

ii) Attenuated focalisation (They – You / I / Us / We)

Why do you think so many mothers are on tranquillisers? In the early evening I make a point of watching a soap opera or two. I think it is very important for us intellectuals to keep in the touch with popular culture. We cannot live in ivory towers, unless, of course the ivory towers have a television aerial on the roof.

(TCAM: 60)

iii) Negation

My parents are trying to save their marriage by playing badminton together on alternative Wednesdays... I honestly can’t understand how they can bear each other’s company. Their conversation consists of moaning about money and whining about wages - the wages they haven’t got.

(TCAM: 60)

iv) Interdiscursive merging (from narrative, descriptive to argumentative discourse)

On my way home I call in to see Pandora who is usually sitting under the angle poise lamp bent over ‘A’ level homework. On the wall above her desk are two notices written in pink neon marker pen. One says, “GET TO OXFORD OR DIE” the other says “GO TO CAMBRIDGE AND LIVE”.

[diarist's emphasis]
(TCAM: 60)

v) Inversion of discourse domains

"While you may have been idly chatting with my mother I have been formulating important ideas. I have decided that I am going to have a party." Pandora said, "A fancy dress party?" "No", I shouted, "I'm forming a *political* party, well more of a Movement, really. It will be called the Mole Movement and membership will be £2 a year." Pandora asked what she would get for £2 a year. I replied, "Arresting conversation and stimulation and stuff".

[diarist's emphasis]
(TCAM: 38)

III. Irony, puns and repetition

Humour, with various contours of Alexander Pope's singular effect (*The Rape of the Lock*, 1712), is at the core of Adrian's diaries to foster a unique response upon (Crawford 1992) readers' revolving the canon. His comments, for instance, on Jane Austen's so-called (SDAM: 17) "old-fashioned style", albeit much in the contemporary readers' taste fostered by film adaptation of her novels, contrast with his reception to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (SDAM: 17, 35) or even Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (SDAM: 17, 19). He gives readers a model of story understanding based on "text and affect", most likely to enhance readers' autonomy and critical literacy (consequently the aesthetic value of the literary text is thus "constructed"), undermined by his peculiar irony, for example in (AMCY: 33): "I looked around the HQ. It was the real world all right". This may be related to the defining entry offered in Wales's *Dictionary of Stylistics*, because (1997: 263) "the words actually used appear to mean quite the opposite of the sense actually required in the context and presumably intended by the speaker".

Adrian's nostalgia for Great English Literature, an ever-coming issue in his diary-entries, has left an undeniable influence not only on his writing style but also on his genre preferences distinctly marked from those for public consumption, even though most of his texts did not even reach the stage of getting published for much of his desolation and rebellion. Indeed, he has submitted numerous poems and essays to the BBC from his early teens. Classic novels like *Animal Farm* and *Wuthering Heights* have apparently led him into the writing venture in terms of poetry and novel writing. So reads Adrian's line of thought (SDAM: 35): "Started reading *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell. I think I might like to be a vet when I grow up."

Simpson's insights (2003) on interpreting irony in *Animal Farm* (1945) might be identified in the previous utterance, particularly owing to the fact that many readers are supposed to have understood the text as a fable, not as a critical stance on the clashing Marxist views at Trotsky's time. The attentive reader might, however, interpret Adrian's remark as a down-to-earth response to the text *Animal*

Farm, bearing in mind the diarist's young age then (in *Secret Diary of Adrian Mole 13 ¾*). The writer's aim is seemingly undermining Adrian's utterance, owing to his creative and contextualised allusion to George Orwell's text, yet, perceived from a young adolescent's perspective.

With Adrian readers might learn to question the ethics of power relations in society, whilst he exerts his power of thinking autonomously be it in the political scenario, welfare, social, economic or even cultural sphere and his struggle focuses on, to borrow from Usher & Edwards (1996: 27), "practices of everyday life ... rather than in terms of an appeal to a transcendent and invariant set of values" [authors' italics]. While inserting a sudden satirical twist in his speech he has all the freedom to pass judgment on, for example, the advertising profile of Daily Telegraph readers, likely to be illustrated in this passage, singled out by his style as wry (*AMCY*: 300):

He said that it has huge cult potential, especially since the beef-on-the-bone ban. 'We should pick up some right wing, beef-eating Telegraph types', he said, 'which will broaden the advertising potential enormously.' He listed the advertising profile of Daily telegraph readers. Apparently they go in for: garden sheds, incontinence pants, secateurs, erotic underwear, liquid manure, Egyptian cruises, pergolas, cutlery sets, denture fixatives and anything to do with dogs.

In his quest for authenticity, social justice, individuality, Adrian invites readers, at the level of discourse (Simpson 2002), to problematise a whole historical period - from Thatcherism to Blairism - a culture, the ruling institutional power and the public unconscious whim of his time. This is ironically conveyed in Adrian's saying, marked by repetition, (*TCAM*: 35): "a general feeling of ennui (ennui is French for bored out of your skull by the way). Yes, ennui hangs around the house like stale fag smoke."

Adrian's fondness for Pandora overshadows his real political ideals and conservative struggle in such a manner that any individual's commonest drives, love and sexual attraction, abominable in his struggle for personal identity and coherence, whatever its domain in public and private life, leads him to admit (*AMCY*, 12) "against the youth and radiance and intellectual brilliance of Dr. Pandora Braithwaite he stands no chance at all". Besides, the description with which readers are granted reinforces marketing images of public figures at campaign times on every ordinary citizen's appreciation of political candidates. Once again the latter reiterate the authorial voice against life's "allogical"² course of events. Actually, Adrian's conservative candidate is offered a paradoxical and satirical description, particularly foregrounded in his own Tory obsession (*AMCY*: 258):

² These are some of Sue Townsend's own comments in an interview 'A Vida Secreta de Sue Townsend', issued in *Livros - O Independente* (Lisbon: Ministério da Cultura, Instituto Português do Livro e das Bibliotecas, 8/April 2000: 24-29).

Occasionally, the grotesque porcine features of her conservative rival, Sir Arnold Tufton, were to be seen on posters in the windows of the larger houses. Were he to enter for the Best Pig Class in the Leicester Agricultural Show, he would stand a good chance of winning a rosette.

She led me into the front room where two shaven-headed little boys were sitting on a sofa, watching a video. The TV screen showed a maniac with a hedge-trimmer pursuing a girl with large breasts down the steps of a dark cellar. The smallest boy picked up a cushion and hid his face behind it.

Puns, or play on words (very much in the line of the restoration language), and pleonasm are paradoxically meant to make the common citizen feel ridiculous, which is particularly striking in his talks for “Pirate Radio Four?” on “Art Culture and Politics” (TCAAM: 34):

You never hear them mention Van Gogh or Rembrandt or Bacon (by Bacon, I’m talking about Francis Bacon the infamous artist, **I don’t mean** streaky bacon or Danish bacon ... the sort you eat). No, such names mean nothing to cultureless people, they will never pilgrimage to the Louvre Museum to see Michaelangelo’s Mona Lisa. Nor will they thrill to a Brahms Opera. They will fill their empty days with frivolous frivolity, and eventually die never having tasted the sweet ambrosia of culture.

[emphasis Mine]

A rather meaningful allusion to the blurring notion of intentionality/unintentionality stands out in the previous lexical pun, underlying the resource to verbal puns, as explained by Simpson (2003: 20). Punning entails a “word play in which some feature of linguistic structure simultaneously combines two unrelated meanings”. Most times Adrian keeps a serious wry tone, but ends up being funny because of the sort of lexical, semantic and syntactic associations he draws.

Minor details of every day life are made meaningfully humorous in his register, illustrated, for example, in this passage (AMCY: 272):

I took this to be an ominous portent. *The New Dog* never barks. (It cost me £26 at the vets in April to have its vocal cords checked.)

The New Dog obviously sensed, with its canine intelligence, that the letter the postman was holding out to me contained bad news. I scrawled my name on the postman’s clipboard and wished him a merry Christmas, then went upstairs to my bedroom. I locked the door and opened the letter.

[diarist’s emphasis]

Adrian’s struggle for standards of “lasting validity, universal truths and rules of writing”, in Alexander Pope’s manner (*The Rape of the Lock*, 1712), to quote McRae et al. (1994: 189), have hardly granted him the accomplishments for which he has hopelessly longed, except for publishing single texts, *i.e.*, a poem and an essay. His determination towards language accuracy and high standards in written discourse are worthy of notice in his diary entries, mostly in the form of interior

monologues (AMCY: 236), “There is something about the last sentence that is not quite right. The syntax? The grammar? After spending an hour staring down at it, I went to bed, exhausted”. And the diarist goes on his plight for inspiration, inventiveness and language mastery despite his mother’s disappointment and disapproval. The whole passage underneath entails, following Hutcheon’s (1995) tenets, an ironic instance stranded by a satirical stance to be unearthed by readers (AMCY: 262-263):

When I got home my mother reported gleefully that Arthur Stoa had rung, demanding the name and telephone number of my ghost-writer. She said, “I don’t understand why you can’t write the bloody thing yourself. It’s only a few recipes. It wouldn’t take you more than a week if you got stuck in.” I said, “You non-writers don’t *understand*. There’s the question of *tone* and tense and clarity. And which word to put in front of another, and when to use a semicolon and how to know when only a *colon* will do!”
[diarist’s italics]

IV. Comedy and Satire

Adrian offers readers (Simpson 2003) “a humorous and entertaining text” pinpointed by a witty dialogue. Traces of comedy may be unveiled in Adrian’s imitation of people’s traits and actions by resorting rather frequently to hyperbole and oxymoron. As such, readers become aware of the distinction between fact and fantasy. Actually, Adrian’s comic stances may be perceived, in the manner of Philip Sydney (1986, 39 [1595]), not as “scornful matters as stir laughter only, but mixed with it, that delightful teaching” which is particularly afforded in comedy, likely to be evidenced in this statement (AMCY: 287): “This would be tantamount to having Charles Manson give the Pope’s Easter Blessing”.

Plautus’s resquises of comedy, standing out in one of the major themes in Adrian’s entries, notably “cuckoldry” (a main feature in Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*, too, and later in restoration drama, for instance, in William Wicherley’s *The Country Wife*, 1675), are conveyed, in his narratives, in paratactic style, in a seemingly objective tone, resorting to dynamic finites and straightforward reporting instances. These undermine his several occasions of criticism and satire on adultery, to be unveiled, for example, in the ensuing entries:

My father came in the front door and Mr Lucas went out of the back door.
My father said he had been looking forward to the black forest cake all day.
There was none left. My mother gave him grape-pip cheese on Ry-king for his supper.
(SDAM: 37 [e.g., negation])

A reporter, called Gracie, rapped on the front door today and asked for an interview with ‘Pauline and Ivan’. I chatted at the door with her for a while about writing in general. I mentioned that I had written a novel, *Birdwatching*. She said she would like to see it. When I came down, she had

insinuated herself into the house and was talking to my mother and Ivan at the kitchen table. The ancient lovers were holding hands and confessing their shared guilt to Gracie.

(AMCY: 180 [e.g., interdiscursive merging])

Furthermore, the creative reference to the exchange of partners among relations, including his and Pandora's parents, highly contrastive to his ideal pattern of male/female relationships, does not leave Pandora out of the license scenery for much of his disappointment, possibly evidenced in these entries:

He had a little trouble with the 'horns' made of painted carrots, but the cloven hooves that my father had fashioned from four empty Flora tubs were a triumph. Pauline'n'Ivan and George'n'Tania ignored each other and also the printed notices left on our seats.

(AMCY, 276)

Don't you *dare* call me sweetie, Pandora,' I said. 'I've known you since you were thirteen and three-quarters. I lived in your boxroom when you were in a *ménage à trois* with a gay husband and a dyslexic bodybuilder. I know your *secretes*.

[diarist's italics]

(AMCY, 33)

Equally striking appears the parody of romance with an eloquent style, already used in the dramatic monologue, and formerly in Shakespeare's works (Elizabethan literature), for example in "O happiness enjoy'd but of a few!" (in *The Rape of Lucrece*, ll. 22-27): "Oh joy! ... Oh rapture! ... At last I have made my mark on the world of literature. My essay entitled 'A Day in the Life of an Air Stewardess' has won second prize in the British Airways Creative Writing Competition" (TCAAM: 63).

There are very many passages exploring the various rhetorical uses of humour in Townsend's fictional autobiography some of which might be associated with the comic of situation, and working class characters such as (AMCY: 33):

My mother was holding a clipboard, and having a red rosette pinned to her jacket by Ivan Braithwaite. The back of his hairy hand brushed her left breast, and he apologized. She stretched her lipsticked lips and dipped her head to one side, in a submissive gesture I'd last seen on an animal-behaviour documentary (gorillas) on television. I'd seen that head-tilt gesture before, and it usually spelled trouble.

The diarist's sarcastic view on ideology, while resorting to parody on religion and politics in his description of situations, people and places, may be said to "work on a similar principle", and borrowing from McCracken's observations (1988, 160), as "Sue Townsend's comic novel *The Queen and I*, which reached number one in the British paperback bestseller list in October 1993". Extending the line of the diarist's writing technique, and with respect to the plot level, Townsend intertwines various humorous instances with the presentation of action likely to be

theoretically grounded on Shklovsky's claims (in Olson 1965) as follows: "the forms of art are explainable by the laws of art; they are not justified by their realism. Slowing the action of a novel is not simply *transposing* parts. In so doing the artist makes us aware of the aesthetic laws, which underlie both the transposition and the slowing down of the action."

In fact, slowing the action with humorous stances is fully perceived in various satirical excerpts in the diarist's digressions also echoing Henry Fielding's style in *Joseph Andrews*, as stated in his "Preface" ([1742] 1977: 26): "And perhaps, there is one reason, why a comic writer should of all others be the least excused from deviating from nature, since it may not be always so easy for a serious poet to meet with the great and the admirable; but life every where furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous".

In a similar fashion, read some of Adrian's humorous flights of creative writing, in which the formalist technique of deautomatising³ reading is singled out, apart from presenting *accumulatio* and *mimesis*, reinforced at the level of discourse through codeswitching and (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) "image schemas", from metaphors (also illustrated by creatively funny characters' names), synaesthesia to parody, along with different forms of rendering speech and thought. The following stances might point to some of this creative uses of language (AMCY: 34):

She walked with sticks.

...

She told me that Tony Blair was going to give her two new hips. Our second pick-up was Mabel d'Arcy, whose great-great-grandad was a surviving officer on the *Titanic*; she bragged to my mother about the fact until Ida Peacock said, "He shoulda gone down with his ship like a gent." They didn't speak to each other again.

The last quote rightly depicts the overall purpose in Sue Townsend's Adrian's saga: subverting the conservative and monarchic struggles to keep up with a trustworthy status though fiercely defended by Adrian, also evidenced in these utterances,

Bought an *Independent* today. Pandora's photograph was on the front. If you look very carefully you can just make out the tip of my nose in the background. I've decided to delay deciding about decision-making until I feel decidedly better. My mental state is fragile.

(AMCY: 146)

How dare Braithwaite advise my mother on suitable footwear! The man is a sartorial disaster area. He is the *Pompeii of men's wear* in his hideous Rohan outdoor trousers and his Birkenstock sandals/white socks combo.

[diarist's italics]

(AMCY: 44)

³ Alderson (2000), in his turn, accounts for the relevance of the de-automatisation effect to improve higher levels of reading skills, as long as readers have to reflect upon language usage and use not only in fictional but also in non-fictional texts.

Similarly, Adrian's imagery illustrates Bakhtin's "carnivalisation" of (McCracken 1998, 160) "the social hierarchy by transcoding it on to bodily images", which is a recurrent device in pulp fiction. In addition, posits the author, there are some theoretical foundations in relation to Bakhtin's "uncrowning" insofar as, claims the former (McCracken, *Ibidem*), "Bakhtin traces a tradition of the popular grotesque which works through comic images of the body, sex and death, and exists in contradistinction to canonical literature".

Another type of satire concentrates on character types and their hilarious characterisation. Amidst the very many types singles out the utterly creative metaphoric name given to Roger Patience, who is paradoxically described in the diarist's soliloquy as "a deeply neurotic person" (*AMCY*: 313),

Patience took a bottle of Prozac out of his desk drawer, opened it with difficulty (a childproof cap) and slipped a capsule under his tongue before saying, "Patience here". After he had completed a grovelling phone call through and instructed his secretary to ask if "Ms Flood is free".

As a matter of fact, both Ms Flood and Patience allegedly stand for the current educational system, falling apart in the diegetic world, deprecatingly remarked in Adrian's soliloquies (*AMCY*: 313):

Patience is more obsessed with tables than a Premier League football manager. I asked him why his school is near the bottom of the league. He blamed "the catchment area, the riff-raff from the estates". He blamed the teachers. "They won't stay." He blamed the caretaker. "He undermines my authority." He blamed "Glenn Bott", whom he said was a "borderline remedial".

Creative use of language, equally within his humorous stances, like the above-mentioned sarcastic utterances by Mr. Patience as "the catchment area, the riff-raff from the estates" (*AMCY*, 313), proliferates in Adrian's diaries from his early teens up to his thirties. Another illustration of his supposedly unbiased narrative discourse undermined by a comic tone might entail the one in which the modifiers "pyjama'd, unshaven", defined as (Kress 1997: 383) "synaesthetic" adjectives, trigger readers' immediate "seeing"/ visioning (Watson 1998: vii) of ridiculously unique characters and settings in the diegetic world (*AMCY*: 175): "Ivan strode, in his smart casuals, up to my pyjama'd, unshaven father and said, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, George, but I'm in love with your wife".

In addition, and by means of self-life-writing, Sue Townsend depicts the struggles for masculine types (broadcast in Western film and television), namely the cults of masculinity (McLean 1997) contrasting with Adrian's own masculine ideals of home rule, to confront the western domesticity and extend it to the mono-parental family paradigm along with work, commodification and urbanisation. All these point at times to strings of continuity, other times to rupture between the scheming of the old empires and the new goals of global capitalism, to pursue Said's argument about "images and empires" (1994, 1995). Moreover, and to

borrow from McCracken (1998: 76), European imperialism and family standards, extended from Victorian age, seem to be at the core of this narrative in that a re-evaluation of “women in the context of a male-dominated society” is undertaken while upturning the tendency to universalise to the detriment of historical and cultural specificities. This might be inferred in the passage underneath (*AMCY*: 16):

“There’s a PS,” said my mother. She read the postscript with relish. “PS. Did you see the A. A. Gill review of Hoi Polloi in the Sunday Times?” I have to hide it from my family.

So even in Lagos, Nigeria, they are sneering at my culinary skills! I should never have allowed Savage to persuade me to put bangers and mash on the menu.

Adrian’s referred marriage to an African descent, Jo Jo, is curiously disclosed in Adrian’s mother sardonic move towards both his deliberately omitted forthcoming divorce and his male-chauvinist self-centred personality. So runs his mother’s disapproval: “Fancy letting a beautiful wife like Jo Jo slip through your fingers,” she said. “You must be bloody mad. You’ll never get another woman in the same league as her. She had everything, beauty, brains, money, talent”. The reference to Jo Jo is intentionally rendered in direct speech, since the reader is confided that “she is Jo Jo’s biggest fan” not his (*AMCY*: 16). Actually, Jo Jo has inverted home rules and patterns of decolonisation, whilst willingly going back to her country, and temporarily leaving their son under Adrian’s mother custody.

Townsend’s diaries might be equally understood as a dissimilar but attention-grabbing way of women (Foucault 1994) talking about gender-based issues on women’s views about themselves and their ways of representing themselves, rendered funnily and light-heartedly enough through a male character’s stance, nevertheless as much traditional as possible from birth: English blood, colour and morals, “scientific” opinions, intellect and prejudice. A suitable illustration might be already found at the height of Adrian’s teens, given his singular critical tone (*TCAM*: 38):

I went back to my room to find Pandora and my mother have one of those sickening talks that women have nowadays. It was full of words like “unfulfilled”, “potential”, and “identity”. Pandora kept chipping in with “environment” and socio-economic” and “chauvinistic attitude”. I got my pyjamas out of my drawer, signalling that I wished their conversation to desist, but neither of them took the hint so I was forced to change in the bathroom. When I came back the air was full of French cigarette smoke, and they were gassing about the Common Market and the relevance of something called “milk quotas”.

Conclusions

Townsend's semantics lays the grounds for readers' igniting mind, cognition and emotion releasing finely tuned emotional states and, simultaneously, keeping readers' engagement with her texts by depicting everyday situations with familiar language. *Parodic-travestying* forms in the novel, to use the Bakhtinian concept (1998: 60), have allowed for a

new mode for working creatively with language: the creating artists began to look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from the point of view of a potentially different language and style. It is, after all, precisely in the light of another language or style that a given straightforward style is parodied, travestied, ridiculed.

In so doing, Adrian reminds readers of the use of idioms and clichés broadly known as (Watson 1998: 9) "dead wood of language", yielding "a reflection of a kind of collective crassness", to draw on Watson's metaphoric observation. This is likely to be perceived in Adrian's reporting stance (AMCY: 209), "He said the ratings for *Offally Good!* Were rising *like fish in a bucket*", in which he clearly defines the boundaries between his speech and his interlocutor's words, graphologically marked by italics. Nonetheless, idioms may be (Watson 1998, 9) "given a new life in present circumstances" considering their creative use, or even as comic relief depending on the situational context. This is evidenced, for example, when coupled by an interjection, depicting an inflection in the speaker's tone, once again marked by the diarist's intentional use of punctuation so as to introduce the sender's own words. The latter marks a shift in intonation and sets forth a basis for meaningful comprehension of metaphoric language (AMCY: 321): "When the last box had been lugged out of the van and dumped on the front-room floor, Nigel said, "The rolling stone gathers no moss, eh, Moley?"

Townsend recreates an array of characters, from mythology, to those likely to be found in everyday life, as well as borrowing from stereotypes of the British common citizen, who interact in both familiar and unusual contexts in the diegetic world. In the process, and seemingly unintentionally, Adrian ends up offering readers (Simpson 2002) "a humorous and entertaining text". After all, states Williams (1993: 33), "the growth of the "literary market" as the type of a writer's relations to his readers has been responsible for many fundamental changes in attitude" [author's emphasis], interestingly focused in Adrian's satirical entry (AMCY: 287): "Zippo is liaising with Stoa Books. Publication date is February the 14th, which according to Zippo, is a dead time in publishing. "Nobody publishes then," he said." Thus, readers become involved with Adrian's contextualised references and insights to other authors and types of reading material.

Once again Said's contention on (1984: xxiv) "culture and the aesthetic forms it contains", owing to writers' "historical experience", comes to the fore in Townsend's writing in that the centre formerly having attracted marginalised characters has seemingly now lost its centripetal force, and consequently lost its

uniqueness in the battleground of intellectual property. In this sense it is worth borrowing from Said's contention that (*Op. cit.*, *Ibidem*) "authors are very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience". Images rendered unleash new homologies, intertextual links and a set of connections in the worldwide scenario. In so doing, in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* ([1775] 1984: 56), Samuel Johnson might have offered some inspiration to Townsend's diaries though issues of period, lexis, and dialect are distinctly perceived at the level of discourse, in the current saga.

Most of the aforementioned mismatches, some of which arising from the unbalanced encounter between the individual and the "other" (Foucault 1994), seem to have attracted diverse communities of readers, because they are familiar with this paradoxical reality but are invited to perceive it from a different perspective, creatively touched upon by the young diarist himself, or the gamut of characters within his family circle, neighbourhood, political circle and the outer world. It is, thus, created, on several occasions, a hilarious effect by means of defamiliarisation⁴.

Indeed, Adrian finds it difficult to conform to a way of life which he holds up as trivial and that "Englishness" has acquired, in his unexpected conservative stance, a multicultural dimension, for much of his regret. Therefore, he is fiercely committed to preserve the so-called all-British standards, evidenced in his behaviour and discursive practices conveyed by a witty dialogue.

While inserting a sudden satirical twist in his speech, Adrian is given all the freedom to pass judgment on several issues, such as, religion, race, family, domestic life, education, professional success or personal fulfilment. Traces of comedy may be unveiled in Adrian's imitation of people's traits and actions by resorting rather frequently to irony, hyperbole, oxymoron, verbal and visual puns and repetition. In fact, slowing the action with humorous stances is fully perceived in various satirical excerpts in the diarist's digressions. Meanwhile, the protagonist's contextualised references and insights to other authors and types of reading material encourage readers to look for their hero's source of inspiration. Hence, visual humour is strongly connected to word play and unusual depictions of working class characters (with a focus on Bakhtin's "carnivalisation" and "uncrowning").

After all, Adrian Mole's satirical-oriented humour (Simpson 2003) provides an array of meaningful patterns and stylistic underpinnings that, with current perspectives, readers are not led to expect so frequently either "in popular fiction", or the so-called "best-sellers", or even in juvenile literature. The former

⁴ Consequently, the reader is challenged "to explore new kinds of identity and forms of relationship" or, assert Montgomery *et al.* (1995: 121), "to see the world from unfamiliar and revealing angles... by subverting the commonsense bonds between utterances and their situations of use". This argument briefly explains an effect, coined in Russian formalist criticism⁴ and the Prague School (*e.g.*, Shklovsky 1921, Propp 1928), as "defamiliarisation".

are most times undervalued, yet they constitute⁵ (Bell 1979: xiii) “literary achievements... [not only] having the same accurate beauty of writing but also an immediacy such as one finds only in diaries”. Hence, satirical and comic stances are meant to question cultural and historical issues, as well as foster a point of view through humour which is a universal issue in covert but effective persuasion. In addition, these narratives present a lively though idiosyncratic worldly insight of English-speaking cultures (Bassnett 1997) of their own of which Adrian’s diary saga entails an accomplished example.

Abbreviations

AMCY – *Adrian Mole Cappucino Years* (Sue Townsend)

TCAAM – *True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole, Margaret Hilda Roberts and Susan Lilian Townsend* (Sue Townsend)

SDAM – *Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* (Sue Townsend)

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⁵ This comment by Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf’s own nephew, biographer and historian, has been enclosed in the introductory note to *The Diary of Virginia Woolf - Volume 1: 1915-19*, issued in 1979 by Penguin.

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