

What did the Portuguese laugh at 200 years ago?

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the existence of a laughter community in Portugal in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Based on research into the beginnings of humour in periodicals published in Portugal, a corpus consisting of newspapers published between 1797 and 1835 was analysed, from the first in which humour was used systematically as a resource (Almocreve de Petas) until the establishment of the Constitutional Monarchy. With the concept of laughter community in mind, evidence was sought that it was present in the period that covers the political, social and economic transition from the Ancien Régime to modern society, having as main players writers, editors, printers, readers and listeners, in a process of production, reception, circulation and appropriation of ideas and meanings. This process, which developed in the public sphere, also played a part in forming incipient public opinion. To detect evidence of this community, clichés, jocular expressions and comic stories conveyed by the periodicals were identified. Very often they were found to have kept the same meaning they had at the time, while some expressions have survived with slight changes, and others simply no longer make people laugh.

Keywords: humour in Portugal, periodical press, José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, O Piolho Viajante, laughter community.

1. Introduction

So little is said about Portuguese humour that there is not even a record of any entry mentioning Portugal in the *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (Attardo, 2014). What there is, apart from jokes targeting the stereotypical figure of the Portuguese emigrant (O’Sullivan, 1997), particularly in Brazil (Lustosa and Triches, 2011), is humour made in Portugal, not very different from humour made in other countries (Baptista, 2004; Pereira, 2016; Zink, 2001), and studied, so far, mainly from the point of view of language sciences (Ermida, 2002). But humour in Portugal has a history that deserves to be researched and told, and existing references should be explored (Gonzagowski, 2013).

As part of a research on humour in the Portuguese press of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was possible to single out the theme and approach it taking into account concepts such as “laughter community”, a notion imported from the linguistic studies,

whereby Wilk-Racięska (2017, pp. 109-124) analyses how a laughter community can be created within a given sociolinguistic community, even though the members of the laughter community may belong to distinct sociolinguistic communities; humoristic pact (Saliba, 2021)¹; or the ability to appreciate humour, as opposed to a sense of humour (Ruch, 1998; Warren and McGraw, 2014).

This article aims to answer the question: what did the Portuguese laugh at two hundred years ago? More precisely from 1797 to 1835. The first date marks the beginning of the publication of *Almocreve de Petas* [Fibs Pedlar], the first periodical that systematically used facetious resources as an editorial formula in Portugal. The latter is the year of the publication of *O Quinquilheiro* [The Bauble Maker], just a few months after the end of the civil war that established the Constitutional Monarchy and created a new legal framework allowing the freedom of the press. Answering the aforementioned question will contribute to a research that explores whether clichés, light-hearted expressions and comic stories may be at the origin of a Portuguese laughter community. That is the case of “fibs”, “allusions”, “idioms” and “*adágios de carregaço*” [‘loading adages’] such as “*vender gato por lebre*” [‘selling a pig in a poke’], “*gato escaldado de água fria tem medo*” [‘once bitten, twice shy’], “*para bom entendedor meia palavra basta*” [‘a word to the wise is enough’] or “*burro velho não aprende línguas*” [‘an old dog won’t learn new tricks’].

Given the political context of the period under analysis, covering the Peninsular War, the Liberal Revolution and the Civil War, another objective of the research is to assess the role of humour in the formation of a public opinion in Portugal (Alves, 201, pp. 104-105; Ferreira, 2016, pp. 153-168) during the transition from Absolutism to Constitutional Monarchy.

The sources for most of this article are presented in Section 2, and consist mainly of periodicals edited by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, starting with *Almocreve de Petas*, along with António Manuel Policarpo da Silva’s *O Piolho Viajante*. Section 3 deals with clichés and stereotypes. Section 4 is dedicated to a parody of a dictionary published in *Almocreve de Petas*. Sections 5 to 8 explore other linguistic devices with humorous effect published in the sources and compare them with similar or equivalent expressions currently in use. Section 9 analyses the political humour of the two warring factions in Portugal during the transition from Absolutism to Liberalism, epitomized in the counter-revolutionary periodicals edited by José Agostinho de Macedo and in the liberal paper *O Quinquilheiro*.

2. Sources

O Piolho Viajante [Travelling Louse], published between 1802 and 1804, is a crucial source for the study of humour in the nineteenth-century Portuguese press. The four volumes of the periodical were repeatedly republished until 1854, making the 72 chapters – christened “*carapuças*” (‘caps’ as in the expression “if the cap fits, wear it”) – that make it up famous at the time. The newspaper was published anonymously, but its author was eventually identified as António Manuel Policarpo da Silva, bookseller and publisher, who for years had a shop in Praça do Comércio [Black Horse Square], in Lisbon.

The social critique content of *O Piolho Viajante* made a decisive contribution to the formation of public opinion in Portugal and was the distinguishing mark of this newspaper in the panorama of journalism at the time, in contrast to the generally conformist criticism of manners found in its competitors, particularly those written by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, author of the pioneering *Almocreve de Petas* (1797-1800) and also of *Comboy de Mentiras* [Convoy of Lies], *O Espreitador do Mundo Novo* [The Lurker of the New World],

¹ Described as the moment when “humour detaches itself somewhat from reality and becomes produced with the intention of generating laughter or amusement” (Saliba, 2021, p. 15).

Barco da Carreira dos Tolos [Ship of the Fools' Line], *Hospital do Mundo* [World Hospital] and *Câmara Óptica* [Magic Lantern].

José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, a real life go-getter, was one of the most prolific authors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Portugal. Self-taught, resentful of never having been accepted as an equal in the literary circles he frequented – notably the New Arcadia group –, ridiculed by Bocage, he took revenge by authoring pamphlets in popular taste that brought him fame and profit. Poet, playwright, writer and editor of periodicals, humourist with a certain wit, he proved to be a successful businessman. He personally sold his pamphlets in cafés, in bars, in the theatre and even on the streets, not shying away from trying to push them on whoever happened to sit next to him. Thanks to his conformity in the face of power, he managed to fall into the good graces of a magistrate, brother of the *Intendente da Polícia* (Police Commissioner), Pina Manique. This powerful protector got him positions in the public administration and even in the military force (he became a major in the Queen's Legion). In exchange, José Daniel made people laugh, but always showing respect for the political, religious and social establishment.

3. Clichés and stereotypes

Clichés were an indispensable didactic resource especially in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, collected in books that played an important role in the culture and structuring of mental frameworks throughout Western Europe. The cliché books went into decline in the seventeenth century, but they continued to circulate widely and to mark the mentalities of the following centuries through the reproduction of rhetorical elements and stereotypical values (Moss, 1996). A sign of this is the place occupied by the clichés in the humorous periodicals of José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa and in the “allusions” of *O Piolho Viajante* [The Travelling Louse].

They often appear in a context of agreement; they summarize the moral of the episode narrated (quite often with conformist intentions, as Billig has shown). They play a pedagogical role, even by their easy memorization, in the denunciation of the vices selected by the author, in the exposition of what is laughable in them and in their punishment through laughter (Billig, 2005, p. 235). To investigate the origin of these phrases is, for Rodrigues da Costa, to make a “benefit to posterity”.

Reading the periodicals from the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, we can see that many of the clichés in vogue then still make sense in today's Portuguese language, still with the same meaning and raising a chuckle (or at least a smile) more than two hundred years later. These include expressions like “*vender gato por lebre*” ‘selling a pig in a poke’, “*gato escaldado de água fria tem medo*” ‘once bitten, twice shy’, “*para bom entendedor meia palavra basta*” ‘a word to the wise is enough’ or “*burro velho não aprende línguas*” ‘an old dog won't learn new tricks’.

It is also significant to discover that clichés widely used today have had a bumpy evolution, with different versions and changes to the original words or meaning, such as the amusing “*contei-lhe das bogas*” ‘I told him about the bogas [bream]’ for example. Others, however, have fallen into disuse and, like some dated jokes, do not elicit any reaction today, an example being the enigmatic “*ó paizinho compra o melro?*” ‘dad, buy the blackbird’ (see Section 6).

Susceptible to comparison with the current reality is the phenomenon of the “loading adages”, as the author calls the idioms that, then as now, arrive, become popular... and disappear. “*Está bom José põe lá*” ‘It's alright, José, put it there’, “*ó carinhas vamos às barraquinhas*” ‘hey, pretty face, let's go to the sheds’, “*tenha dó que faz a criança em pó*”

‘pity the child or you will turn it to dust’ and “*pois sim mata-te bem que a macaca logo vem*” ‘kill yourself well and the monkey will come soon’. For readers and audiences at public or family readings, these expressions played a comic function akin to the punchlines in the popular “*teatro de revista*”, the Portuguese equivalent to *vaudeville*, with a great deal of criticism of manners and a touch of social satire.

Linguistic catchphrases are likened to vices and made ridiculous in the periodicals of Rodrigues da Costa. If today there are still those who persist in telling everything “*tintim por tintim*” ‘point by point’, “*vai senão quando*” ‘he goes suddenly’ and “*vamos ao que importa*” ‘let’s get down to business’ – and in Brazil the stereotype of the Portuguese beginning all sentences with “*ora pois*” ‘right then’ is maintained, one no longer hears so insistently “*tal sim senhor e coisa que o valha*” ‘yes, sir and something like that’ or “*faça v. m. de conta*” ‘just pretend’.

Those words and sentences have been replaced in the role of “crutches” by the still resilient “*prontos*” ‘ready’ and “*portanto*” ‘therefore’, or the epidemic “*sendo que*” ‘being that’ and “*é o que há*” ‘it is what there is’ which presently proliferate in Portuguese newspapers and television. “Apegadilhos enjoativos” ‘Nauseating attachments’, the editor of *Almocreve de Petas* called them before 1800. And he added: “*Quem precisar, fique sem eles*” ‘Whoever needs them, do without them’, an ironic allusion that seems to come from Jankélévitch’s definition (1964, p. 181).

4. A mock dictionary

Among Rodrigues da Costa’s *Almocreve* ‘fibs’ it is worth mentioning the parody of a dictionary presented with the alleged aim of facilitating understanding between the Portuguese and the foreigners who, at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, visited Lisbon from around the world:

Dictionary

English

Airerusá [How are you, Sir?]

Veregutesá [Very good, Sir]

Verilitil [Very little]

Ópiveriuel [Hope you're very well]

English adjectives

Veruel are broad beans - Verigute are beans.

Portuguese

Arroz do Sá [Sá’s rice]

Verdades do Sá [Truths of the Sá]

Bomleite [Good milk]

Ao pé do tonel [At the foot of the barrel]

Italian

Pio caro

Altro giorno

Mia roba

Sono bellissimo

The adjectives of this most excellent language are composed of such gentleness that they melt in the mouth like lumps of sugar.

Portuguese

Os pintos vão caros [Chicks go expensive]

Ainda está morno [It’s still warm]

Meia arroba [Half an arroba (about 7.5 kg)]

O Sr. Veríssimo [Mr Veríssimo]

Turkish

Allah, Allah

Amoina, amoina

Salémalé [Salaam Aleikum]

Portuguese

Podem alar [You may enlarge]

Os que andam à moina [Those who like to party]

Ainda não é maré [It’s not tide yet]

The adjectives of this ragged language are tragic, because they make even the nationals choke.

(Costa, 1819a, 113, pp. 7-8)

5. “Idioms”

Almocreve de Petas has researched the origin of some idioms [*idiotismos*] then in vogue.

Every language has its own particular idioms and words that are introduced which, at the end of the centuries are confused because their derivation is ignored: we will do posterity a favour if we remember the origin of some phrases and words that we have in our language.

(Costa, 1819a, 53, p. 5)²

Some of these expressions continue to be used nowadays (such as “*esta é de cabo de esquadra*” ‘this is a chief constable’), despite the changes they have undergone over the last two centuries, particularly through corruption, as in the case of *deu com tudo em pantana* (today *pantanas* ‘marshes’) and *disse das bogas* [‘bogus’, bream] (today *das boas*).

We call the lagoons *marshes*; and because according to pagans the Avernus was cut off from rivers and lakes, they called it the Pantan Kingdom, hence there came, a *corrupt vocabulum*, the Tartarus, or Hell, in the poetic sense. And because nothing ever comes from there again when someone fritters away their possessions, they say: *they gave everything away to Pantana* ‘*deram com tudo em Pantana*’, which is just like saying they have lost them forever.

A chief constable ‘*cabo de esquadra*’ went to find out where his father lived, and wanted to speak to him and get satisfaction [ask him] why he died and left him nothing. And since this blunder was remarkable, that is why when we hear a big one, we say: *that's a chief constable's one* ‘*essa é de cabo de esquadra*’.

A cook was frying some *bogas* [bream], got hungry and ate a few. The lady of the house asked about them, and the girl blamed the cat. A parrot which had seen everything revealed the secret; the girl took revenge by throwing boiling water over his head, so that his skin peeled. The parrot got better, and being at the window one day he saw a bald man coming. Then, remembering his case, he cried out: *O bald man, did you also talk about the bogas?* ‘*Ó calvo, também tu disseste das bogas?*’ And this is where the saying comes from.

(Costa, 1819a, 53, pp. 5-6)

In the following issue of the periodical, Costa proposes an explanation of the origin of *velho gaitero* “old bagpiper” and of *andar em papos de aranhas* “walking on spider’s palps” [feelers]:

All the old men used to learn to play the harmonica, but because of their distractions they were never really good until they were old, and then, as their playing was no longer wearisome, they played continuously. As this was almost general, on seeing an old man (*velho*), they called him a bagpiper (*gaitero*).

The spider, a bisexual insect, forms little sacs or pouches full of spermatic humour when it propagates. After a while, lots of spiders are born from these sacs. However, they first form a web and dangle from it, but when they sweep the house, the maids sweep them away, and when they come to sweep the palps with the web and everything. And that’s why, when someone goes stumbling about or does anything in a hurry, they’re told: everything's going in spiders’ palps ‘*anda tudo em papos de aranhas*’.

(Costa, 1819a, 54, pp. 5-6)

Almocreve explains the origin of aphorisms generally used in the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century that are still current nowadays, such as “an old dog won’t learn new tricks” ‘*burro velho não aprende línguas*’, “once bitten, twice shy” ‘*gato escaldado de água fria tem medo*’ and “a word to the wise is enough” ‘*a bom entendedor meia palavra basta*’:

² The author is responsible for all the translations.

[...] in the age of decadence, the blood cools, the brain becomes cloudy and the powers of the soul become weak, and from these first signs we see that *old dogs do not learn new tricks* [*burro velho não aprende línguas*].

(Costa, 1819a, 110, pp. 4-5)

[...] all the animals [...] have more or less recollection, seeking the good and fearing or fleeing from evil; for which reason it is proved that *once bitten, anything is afraid of being bitten a second time* [*gato escaldado de água fria tem medo*].

(Costa 1819a, 112, p. 4)

[...] the intelligent man combines, and deduces from the first fruits the conclusion of things, it follows, that *a word to the wise is enough* [*a bom entendedor meia palavra lhe basta*].

(Costa 1819a, 115, p. 5)

The adage that begins with *of women and sardines* is nowadays better known as the variant *the smallest is most desired* ‘*quer-se da mais pequenina*’ and not as the original:

[...] the true spirit of a person of average stature enclosed in a small body is very oppressed, and wants to burst out everywhere. This is why little people always have their heart close to their mouth. Now, since these arguments are valid for both sexes, and equally for animals, which are also endowed with an irrational soul, but which operates analogously to our own, it is clearly proven that the wise men do not err when they say that *of the woman and of the sardine, neither the largest nor the smallest* ‘*da mulher e da sardinha, nem da maior nem da mais pequenina*’.

(Costa, 1819a, 114, pp. 5-6)

In *Comboy de Mentiras* [Convoy of Lies], a periodical launched in 1801 by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa to succeed *Almocreve de Petas*, there is an interesting proposal about the origin of the threatening expression *ir ao canastro* [*go for the canast(r)a*], included on a map about diverse types of games, including card games. In Portuguese, besides the name of the card game, *canasta* means a sort of basket (in the variant *canastra*) and also “human body” (slang), so the expression may mean both “I am going to play canasta” and “I am going to the bottom of the basket”, but also the menacing “I am going to get you”.

Canasta. This game was invented by the apprentice basket-makers of Caselas [a suburb of Lisbon] in the 4th year of the false witnesses, in which their masters because of this game have often made them see the bottom of the basket; and from this very game the political term was taken, that everyone says in the midst of their anger: *look, I'm going to the canasta* ‘*olha que te vou ao canastro*’.

(Costa, 1801, 15, p. 10)

Other curious aphorisms, some still used today with the same meaning, appear in *Almocreve de Petas*, such as *morra Marta, morra farta* “die Marta, die full”:

They didn't want to feed me, but I got up, and went to the *almário* [*armário* ‘cupboard’], and said *morra Marta, morra farta* ‘die Marta, die full’, and I hit the spade on the stomach with half an *arratli* [*arrátel*, a weight measure weighing 460 grams] of sugar quite raw, that I stole; but I'm still here.

(Costa, 1819a, 16, p. 4)

Also *foi buscar lã e veio tosquiado* “go for wool and come shorn”:

The wretched man, who didn't have a *real* [silver coin, former currency], had no choice but to leave the silver buckles from his shoes, and the same thing happened to him as happened to Amado, who *went to fetch wool and came back shorn* '*foi buscar lã e veio tosquiado*' [note the rhyme Amado-tosquiado].

(Costa, 1819a, 16, p. 3)

Or again, though truncated, *quem espera por sapatos de defuntos more descalço* "he who waits for dead men's shoes dies barefoot":

The poor man is said to have gone home barefoot to wait for the poor to whom he gave alms, like *one who waits for dead men's shoes*.

(Costa, 1819a, 28, pp. 1-2)³

And also *encontrar uma agulha num palheiro*, "finding a needle in a haystack":

Vitorina Teresa de Biscaia lost a sewing needle [...] going to fetch a basket of straw from a hayloft to put a chicken in; and because the needle is very much needed for her sewing [...], she promises a good reward to whoever delivers it to her, because she knows that there are people in this town who are capable of finding a needle in a haystack '*achar uma agulha em um palheiro*'.

(Costa, 1819a, 53, p. 8)

In *Comboy de Mentiras*, one should note the reference to the expression "wait the hit" '*esperem-lhe a pancada*', nowadays more commonly used in the variant "wait for the hit" '*espera pela pancada*', in a list of the "various qualities to which men are prone", as an attribute of the "disguised": "and here it refers to each of us to see if we are included in it [...]. The disguised – *Wait for the hit 'Esperem-lhe a pancada'*" (Costa, 1801, 14, p. 8).

Four years later, in *Hospital do Mundo*, the author uses, inverting the usual order of the sentence, a proverb still in vogue today: *o segredo é a alma do negócio* "secrecy is the soul of business", ending with a direct appeal to buy his printed material:

I am spending more and more time on these pamphlets, because they amuse and I apply myself to them; and as we all have the duty not to be idle, I would rather it is said of me: this man has done a lot of work! than it be asked: what does this man spend his time on? In these terms, help me, and you will see how I get inspired by enterprise; *a alma do negócio é o segredo* [the soul of the business is the secret], the grace of the pot is the salt, the joy of the world is the sun, and the Authors' Electrical Machine is the cost of their works.

(Costa, 1805, 6, pp. 21-23)

In the same periodical there is also the adage *dá Deus nozes a quem não tem dentes*, "God gives nuts to those who have no teeth", in an unexpected context that makes it comic, with a note of black humour in the final "recipe":

The nurse said to the doctor – Here, Doctor, is this man who wants to pull out all the teeth in his mouth, none hurts and there's not a single rotten one. [...] When I heard this, I was even more of a fool than he was; and wanting to find the origin of a similar vice, he replied that he owned a farm that was full of walnut trees, which, as soon as he bought the farm, brought him a profit. However, the walnut trees have not given him a single nut for two years now. And as he had always heard people say: *God gives nuts to those who have no teeth* [*dá Deus nozes a quem não tem dentes*], this is why he wanted to pull out his own, to see if the walnut trees would produce them for him, remembering the lesser of two evils, it is better to have no teeth than to die of hunger.

³ Recalling the title of the film *Quem espera por sapatos de defunto morre descalço* [He who waits for dead man's shoes dies barefoot], by director João César Monteiro (1971).

(Costa, 1805, 7, pp. 9-10)

When criticizing one of his favorite targets – old people who deviate from the prevailing social norm, adopting behaviours considered to be the exclusive preserve of the young – the conformist Costa, observing the maxim “Never counterfeit nature” ‘*Nunca contrafaça a Natureza*’ (1805, 7, p.17), quotes a proverb that is little used today but has been current at least since the sixteenth century – *enfeitai o cepo, parecer-vos-á mancebo* “adorn the tree stump, it will look like a youth”:

Do you want a list of fashions, perhaps remembering the adage *enfeitai o cepo, parecer-vos-á mancebo* [adorn the stump, it’ll look like a youth]. What does it matter if the houses have new façades if the interior timbering crumbles! An old organ with some keys missing, everything is out of tune. And no matter that it’s painted on the outside, that doesn’t change its tone. A list of fashions used by a man of sixty-nine has as much effect on him as a lighted candle placed in the midday light.

(Costa, 1805, 9, p. 20)

In addition to these, he points out other expressions, now fallen into disuse. This is the case of *vá encostar-se ao que comeu hoje*, “go and rest on what you’ve eaten today”:

[...] every man, in order to continue to live, needs to eat, which for this very reason it is not without foundation that we say: go and rest on what you’ve eaten today ‘*vá encostar-se ao que comeu hoje*’.

(Costa, 1819a, 113, p. 6)

This is also the case with “don't ask me for change” ‘*não me peça demasias*’ and “dear [expensive] garlic, my friend” ‘*caros alhos compadre*’, the latter winking at the naughty tongue twister – in Portuguese, *caros alhos* (‘expensive garlic’) is phonetically similar to a slang word for penis.

A man who knew that his friend was going to the fair gave him a piece, because he had no other change, to buy him two knives for half a penny, a stick of linen cloth for twelve shillings, three sticks of black ribbon for three shillings, and four strings of garlic. When the friend came back, he brought him all the orders, but did not give him too much; the other, leaving aside the greetings, asked him for the rest, to which his friend replied: *não me peça demasias* [don’task me for change], because two razors at 50 réis make 100, with 240 for cloth make seventeen, with three sticks of ribbon at 60 réis make 520, and the rest was what the four garlic strings cost that you did not stipulate a price for. The other answered immediately: *caros alhos, compadre* [dear garlic, my friend]. And because this was a public affair, the two sayings came from here.

(Costa 1819a, 54, pp. 5-6)

6. “Everyday sayings”

Another kind of cliché are “everyday sayings”, as José Daniel calls them – phrases that “catch on” and become fashionable, invading the discourse until they fall into disuse, sometimes disappearing as quickly as they arrived. *Almocreve* lists some of them:

Increasing more and more, and further enriching our Portuguese language with everyday sayings, some that come in the convoys, in the mouths of the ships' crews, others composed by the local vagrants here, that grace Santos Beach and the taverns of Lisbon so much: what entourage did not

have *Está bom José põe lá* ['It's alright, José, put it there']? What praise has not been paid to *ó carinhas vamos às Barraquinhas* ['hey, pretty face, let's go to the sheds']? And how many times was it not repeated to the brave: *tenha dó que faz a criança em pó* ['pity the child, you will turn it to dust']? For what mouths did he not say: *pois sim mata-te bem que a macaca logo vem* ['kill yourself well and the monkey will come soon']? Where is the memory of *Isabel Beata* with her *treliquetim, treliquetim, treliquitó* [no known meaning, just for the sake of the sound]? Where is: *Põe a mesa Louricá* ['Lay the table, Blondie'] with her *ZigueZágue* ['Zigzag']?

(Costa, 1819a, 108, p. 1)

One phrase is of particular interest to the editor: *Ó paizinho compra o melro* 'Dad, buy the blackbird'. At the time it would have been recent – “a new saying” – and in widespread use. José Daniel provides a thorough “explanation” of it:

[...] why don't we find out the origin of a new saying that dominates every street today: *Ó paizinho compra o melro* 'Dad, buy the blackbird'? The trumpets, the fiddles, the drums, the horns, the castanets, and the marimbas [...] the shouting [...] that accompanied all the instruments showed us that it was a party for black folks: a master shoemaker, sensing that the revelry was moving forward, joined the flow [until ...] he sneezed. Here they all formed a single file, noticed the intruder and said: What does this *Merro* [*melro*, blackbird] want here? The little master replied: “This blackbird is for sale, and if anyone has any money to buy it, it will cost them dear.” Some people from Algarve who were at sea in a boat came in shouting *Ó paizinho compra o melro* 'Dad, buy the blackbird'. The shoemaker became angry, and slapped one of the blacks, they threw bottles at him, they called the round [the police], the partygoers ran away, and the poor master went to the Limoeiro [one of Lisbon's prisons for common offences]. And this is why when you say to a black person *Dad, buy the blackbird*? He very proudly replies: has he got a *gaiora* [*gaiola*, cage]? Which is the same as saying he wants *cadeia à hora da ceia* ['jail at suppertime': in Portuguese, this particular choice of words makes a rhyme].

(Costa 1819a,108, pp. 1-2)

This “fib” is interesting because it has several levels of humour. Note that, while it parodies the Angolan pronunciation of the Lisbon black people – the replacement of the l with the r in *gaiola/gaiora* [cage] –, it is nonetheless the same black person who gets the better of it, since the intruding and assaulting white shoemaker ended up in jail. And so he can, “proudly”, top it off with “it is the same as saying he wants jail at suppertime”. The third level of humour is the rhyme in the last sentence: “*cadeia à hora da ceia*”. There is a racial element in this ‘fib’ that needs to be reckoned with and put into context. Although the first step toward the abolition of slavery in Portugal was taken in 1761 by the future Marquis of Pombal, under King Dom José I, the process was to last more than a century. Pombal decreed that all enslaved persons disembarked in the realm, that is, in continental Portugal, would henceforth be “forros” (freed). In 1763 he also enacted the “Free Womb Law” (*Lei do Ventre Livre*), stating that all the children born from enslaved women were declared free. However, slaves who were already living in the country were not automatically freed. Slavery and the slave trade continued in the colonies until its complete abolition in the Portuguese empire in 1869 (Marques, 2006). By the time *Almocreve de Petas* was published, the majority of the black population of Lisbon were free persons, but the older ones were most certainly “*cativos*” (‘slaves’).

7. “Nauseating” catchphrases

These are different from aphorisms and proverbs and then, just as today, linguistic catchphrases, used especially in spoken communication to make discourse more fluent. The critical attention that José Daniel devotes to them, listing them as a warning to readers, always with a note of irony, is a sign of the importance attributed to the spoken word; the pamphlets were largely intended to be read out loud, before an audience (Chartier, 1989, pp. 7-8). In a society with an overwhelming majority of illiterate people, their success lay in the attraction they exerted not only on readers but, above all, on listeners.

Warnings. Pimentel Torrado da Costa warns the public that, given the great falsification of slogans that are sold today for instruments, he has a large number of them, which are true and good, because as soon as he starts to talk, he says more than a hundred times: it was him [*foi ele*] – indeed [*com efeito*] – it is if not when [*vai se não quando*] – no doubt [*não tem dúvida*]; besides others that he has gathered from various people, such as – let’s get to the point [*vamos ao que importa*] – now then [*ora pois*] – I mean [*quero dizer*] – yes, sir, and such like [*tal sim senhor, e coisa que o valha*] – however [*todavia*] – I’d like to say [*deixe-me assim dizer*] – for example [*por exemplo*] – just pretend [*faça vossa mercê de conta*], etc. Anyone who needs them will be left without them [*Quem precisar, fique sem eles*], if they do not want them.

(Costa, 1819a, 114, p. 8)

Another list of slogans, qualified as “rubbish” [*asneira*]:

It is made known by the distribution of those who are fishing for candelabra, concerning the ones who talk rubbish to the letter in society, and then go and say what we mustn’t – you’ll have to eat a handful of salt to do that, because these friends, driven by curiosity they promise to give up all direct control over some salt ponds on the other bank of the river [Tagus], if by any chance any of the gentlemen, or ladies, while they live, will eat a portion of this kind.

(Costa, 1819a, 125, p. 8)

A book has been published entitled *Compendio de apegadilhos* [Collection of attachments] in many conversations, such as, for instance, – on this occasion [*neste cumenos*] – undoubtedly [*à certa confita*] – it will be but when [*vai senão quando*] – should be done [*havera de fazer*] – down to the smallest detail [*tintim por tintim*] – I don’t want to say such a thing [*nanja que eu tal diga*] – my lost creed [*o meu creto perdido*] – I’ve found my way here [wrongly spelt: *eu truve para aqui*] – I’ve heard [wrongly spelt: *ouvisto dizer*] – bad quarrels [*má ochas*] – I’ll go in search of him [*hei de ir em cata dele*] – you just pretend [*ora faça v. m. de conta*] – that’s enough [*bonda isto*] – not in that place [*salva tal lugar*] – and many others of this nature, filling these conversations with more than three hundred and then, and then, and then [*e daí, e daí, e daí*]; whoever wants to learn this language should buy the book, and me from him, that the most is to throw your money down the street.

(Costa, 1819a, 121, pp. 7-8)

Comboy de Mentiras [Convoy of Lies] also carried “warnings”. One of them announced: “It has just been published *The art of speaking Portuguese for a period of two hours without understanding a word*, according to pretentious modernism: the rest is for show [*o mais fica para a vista*]” (Costa, 1801, 21, p. 16). And in the following issue of the paper he returned to the topic of slogans, stressing that their use was “nauseating”:

Here appeared a very gallant man in his conversation by the catchphrase he puts in everything he tells, for just as he starts a story he introduces the next slogan in the middle of it: It has for the sea, it has for the land, at full speed, tide of roses, let’s stop hunting the ferret, what’s close at hand has

to come, we're done, everything else together, all the same luck, nothing at all, that's right, and something like that [*Tem para o mar, tem para a terra, vento em popa, maré de rosas, deixemos caçar a foroa, o que é nosso à mão nos há de vir, estamos despachados, tudo mais juntamente, da mesma sorte, coisa nenhuma, nem nada, tal sim senhor, e cousa que o valha*]. And he is so nauseating in this that when he begins to repeat it, his friends wander away in the middle of the story until he finishes the catchphrase.

(Costa, 1801, 22, p. 15)

8. “The donkey is saddled at the will of its owner” and the swapped wigs

In *O Piolho Viajante* [The Travelling Louse], the greedy doctor is the target of a long allusion (chapter LXV), aiming in particular at the doctrine he was keen to teach his disciples: “The doctor is like the executioner [...] he is absolved, he has done his job” (Silva, 1804, p. 172). Corollary to this peculiar logic was the instruction on what to do in case he was called to treat a rich family man:

If a father is rich and has a son, it is immediately obvious in his face if he wishes that the father should die; if that is so, *the donkey is saddled as the owner wishes* [*albarda-se o burro à vontade de seu dono*]: get him in the grave and great convenience is drawn from this.

(Silva, 1804, p. 173)

O Piolho Viajante has an irresistible moment of laughter when it describes a disagreement between two backgammon players, which culminates in a scene whose comic effect has stood the test of time, with proven effectiveness in the burlesque comedies of silent movies and in the films of the Oliver Hardy and Stanley Laurel pairing, the famous Fat One and Skinny One:

[...] they were both hairy: one of them, the shorter one, had a head the size of a watermelon from Abrantes, one of those that costs a new *cruzado*; and the other, taller, had a head the size of a ten *réis* watermelon [...]. They insulted each other, exchanged hands, slapped each other, and in these clashes both their wigs went [to the ground]. When they had made peace, each went to get his own wig, but unfortunately they swapped them, because the rage of the match had not yet properly faded. They put their wigs on their heads and became gentlemen: the one with the big head had a small wig perched on top of his head; and the one with the small head had a wig covering his ears and part of his face. And so they began to play, without any one finding fault or excess. The whole world was standing still for the two old men, but they were so irritated that they said goodbye in the evening, and went home with each other's wigs and did not notice it.

(Silva, 1804, pp. 114-117)

9. Absolutists and liberals: “Wipe your hand on the wall” and “turncoats”

In 1823, the *Vilafrancada* counter-revolutionary coup put an end to the first Constitutional experiment in Portugal, which followed the 1820 Liberal revolution in Oporto. Taking advantage of the new correlation of forces, José Agostinho de Macedo – writer, preacher, poet, polemicist and ideologue of Absolutism – launched another of his periodicals that “under the cover of a joke” (Macedo, 1829, 2, p. 1) made polemics and violently attacked his opponents: “Should I, with another weapon, if not that of ridicule, combat so much nonsense, infamy and even atrocities? This will be the weapon, the People will understand what they're told (Macedo, 1828, 5, p. 13). The insistence – “I fight with the weapons of ridicule” (Macedo, 1831, p. 3) – shows the determination to use laughter not only as a mere expression of disapproval, but above all as a true “discipline of embarrassment” (Billig, 2005).

The periodical in question is *A TripaVirada* [The Turned Tripe], whose circulation was banned by the Absolutist government after three issues. The last edition has as *leitmotif* a kind of mantra: “*Alimpem a mão à parede*” [‘Wipe your hand on the wall’] (Macedo, 1823a, 29, pp. 1-29), directed as a weapon against liberal political opponents, namely at members of freemasonry. This insulting interpellation makes use of an expression that is still used today to reproach an act considered deeply wrong or a measure that can be condemned (for instance: “the government increased taxes, they can wipe their hands on the wall”), with the same meaning. The association of scatological and obscene ideas to which that expression refers reappears in *Tripa por Huma Vez* [Tripe for once], the only issue of which was published after the previous title was banned. There Macedo states, in an outburst at having been a victim of censorship: “If someone who messes with boys wakes up in a mess, how could I get really clean by messing with *Tripes!*” (1823b, p. 3).

The victory of the liberals in the civil war in 1834 brought, with the definitive establishment of the Constitutional regime, freedom of the press, despite the tight restrictions imposed by law. In 1835, a humorous newspaper like *O Quinquilheiro* [The Bauble Maker] could report and issue critical opinions on the political debates that were unsettling the country. This was the case with the loan taken out with the banker Rothschild in London on 1 April of that year by the Minister of Finance, Silva Carvalho, to deal with the financial crisis. The loan was guaranteed by national assets (property formerly belonging to the Crown and, more especially, to the Church), whose sale by auction was regulated by the Legal Charter of 15 April 1835 and due to begin shortly afterwards. The periodical devoted a short but incisive dialogue to it:

Some friends gathered at a café and one of them, who had just arrived from Brazil, said: Can you tell me when the sale of National Assets starts? I don't know about National Assets, answered one of the volunteers; but that of the Nation began a long time ago!

(*O Quinquilheiro*, 4, p. 5)

Corruption, a hallmark of the political personnel that alternated in government during the first phase of the post-Civil War constitutional regime and which would become known as *devorismo* [‘devour-ism’, embezzlement (of public funds)], was a theme commented on with special ironic effect in *O Quinquilheiro*: “As two ladies passed by Rossio, one said: Look, sister, they are now cleaning the Treasury on the outside! So they are, said the other; but what’s worse is that they’ve also cleaned it from the inside!” (*O Quinquilheiro*, 2, pp. 2-3).

O Quinquilheiro was at the service of a strategy: the support of the “radicals” – also known then as “irrationals” – who wanted to assert themselves as a power alternative to the conservative right wing in government. It therefore tried to win over public opinion and guide it, whether through a direct appeal to voters – voting was limited to those who could pay a poll tax – or by resorting to humour. The latter could be quite naïve, to emphasize the assertiveness of the answer:

A father seeing his son getting used to doing with his left hand all the things he used to do with his right, said to him, bored, “Do you want to be left-handed?” “Yes, sir, I do”, replied his son. ‘And why?’ ‘Because I see that the left hand works much better than the right one’ [*a esquerda obra muito melhor que a direita*].

(*O Quinquilheiro*, 3, p. 6)

Undated, like the former, but whose editorial content allows us to estimate that it was published after the supplementary elections and the military pronouncement of November 1835 and the subsequent inauguration of the government presided over by Colonel José Jorge

Loureiro, is the use of the expression “turning coats” [*voltar casacas*], which today continues to be used in the same sense, with a slight alteration: “turncoats” [*vira-casacas*]:

A certain *Taful* [dandy] went to his tailor’s to have some trousers made as soon as possible, but the Master replied: This is impossible at present, because all my staff are busy turning coats since the Ministry has changed.

(*O Quinquilheiro*, 6, p. 5)

10. Conclusion

The satire of Portuguese society in the transition from Absolutism to Constitutional Monarchy, from the highest to the lowest strata, does not obscure a social thought in which, especially in *O Piolho Viajante*, the criticism of those considered ‘above’ stands out, always bearing in mind that “poor with rich does not make a good alliance” [*pobre com rico não faz boa liga*] (Silva, 1803b, p. 53). Even in the politically and socially conformist *Almocreve de Petas*, it is possible to detect this revenge from those below:

A Gentleman asked a farmer in a village what was the time of year that made him happiest, and the farmer replied that it was the time of the chestnut, because at night they roasted them on the cooker, and then they went to bed. The Gentleman said to him, You are just like pigs that go to bed after they’re fully fed; the farmer turned to him: now, Sir, if I deserve so much from you, you must also tell me what is the time that gives you most pleasure: the Gentleman said to him, people like us are very fond of Spring, especially the month of May, because it is very pleasant hearing the birds sing, and seeing the fields in flower, and we are very happy with that: the farmer then replied: so, Sir, you are just like my donkey, who in the month of May, too, is filled with the greatest joy, and brays a lot.

(Costa, 1819a, 139, pp. 6-7)

Subject to time – “it is time that does things [...] we go as it wants, since it does not want what I want” (Silva, 1803b, pp. 209-212) – the laughter that comes from the “bite” of the *Piolho* [‘louse’] reveals, after all, its effectiveness. Sometimes it even reveals itself ahead of its time, foreshadowing a type of humour that is remarkably modern, less immediate, but more lasting in the liberating potential of the paradoxical ambiguity of the absurd (Noonan, 2014): the card player had a “dog, which they called Norway because it came from America” (Silva, 1803a, pp. 11-12).

These were the jokes and the stories that the Portuguese laughed at two hundred years ago. Coarsely corresponding to the sociolinguistic community, it is possible to recognize in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Portugal a community that understands, appreciates and enjoys humour (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2019), satire, sarcasm and irony (Dynel, 2014) contained in the jocular expressions analysed here, taken from the periodicals printed in the country and circulated there and in Brazil (Abreu, 2008). All of this bears out the existence of a laughter community that was active in the public sphere (Habermas, 1992) of the time, and saw itself as committed to the same humorous pact. It participated in the formation of an embryonic public opinion (Alves, 2015; Ferreira, 2016) and cut across political rivalries, as seen, on the one hand, in the liberticidal laughter of José Agostinho de Macedo and, on the other hand, in the sarcasm – sometimes tempered with irony – of *O Quinquilheiro*, close to the radical left of post-Civil War Liberalism. Heir to the medieval mockery and *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer* [derision and curse songs], to the satirical poetry of the sixteenth-century *Cancioneiro Geral* [‘General Collection’], to the theatre of Gil Vicente or to the humour of Fernão Mendes Pinto, perhaps this community of laughter, recognizable in the ‘fibs’ of *Almocreve de Petas* and the other pamphlets by José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, in the ‘caps’

of *O Piolho Viajante* or in the politically biased periodicals of Macedo and his liberal counterparts has an even more remote origin. But that is a matter for future research.

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