

## Pastiche

Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat

► **To cite this version:**

| Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat. Pastiche. 2014, pp.554-557. hal-01419472

**HAL Id: hal-01419472**

**<https://hal-univ-paris3.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01419472>**

Submitted on 23 Dec 2016

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



**S. ATTARDO (ED.), SAGE *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HUMOR STUDIES* (2014)**

## **PASTICHE**

**BY YEN-MAI TRAN-GERVAT, UNIVERSITÉ SORBONNE NOUVELLE – PARIS 3, CERC-EA 172**

*Pastiche* is a French word which began to be used regularly in English in the 1880s and 1890s. In 18<sup>th</sup> century France, it meant “a work of art imitating another author’s style” (e.g., *Dictionnaire de l’Académie*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1798 : “En Peinture, on appelle Pastiches, Des tableaux où un Peintre a mêlé la manière d’un autre à la sienne, a emprunté son goût, son coloris, ses formes favorites”). The French word was itself derived from the Italian *pasticcio*, meaning (from late Latin antiquity) a kind of mixed pastry, then indicating a musical form made up of various parts imitated from other composers (in the same dictionary : “Mot emprunté des Italiens, et signifiant, dans la langue des Arts, Mélange, Composition mêlée”, then : “En Musique, on appelle Pastiche, un opéra composé de morceaux de différens Maîtres”). The English “pastiche” still shows these two influences: the “musical medley” meaning and more generally the idea of a “hodgepodge” or incongruous mixture derived directly from the Italian term; whereas the Oxford English Dictionary definition of pastiche as “an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period” comes from French. It must be noted right away that pastiche is not necessarily humorous: for example, pastiche as a way of learning good writing by imitating great authors, as teachers in 19<sup>th</sup> century French schools made their pupils practice doing, was a very serious matter. The same is true of some artistic instances of pastiche, depending on the conditions of their reception. For example, the cover illustration on Richard Dyer’s *Pastiche*

prompts the reader to interpret the 2002 film *Far From Heaven*, starring Julian Moore in a story that takes place in the 1950s, as a pastiche. In fact the film itself makes a very touching drama. However, discussing *Far From Heaven* in 2003, Peter Bradshaw, critic for *The Guardian* newspaper, described how everybody had been enjoying the first five minutes of the film, which struck Bradshaw as a rather detailed “Hi-honey-I’m-home” 1950s skit, at the previous year’s Venice Film Festival, before recounting how the giggling disappeared to be replaced by an absolute approval of every aspect of its elaboration. The “first giggling” effect and its link with the comic dimension of pastiche will be discussed below.

### **Elements of Definition**

It is complex to define what pastiche is and how to distinguish it from other forms usually associated with it. Attempting to distinguish parody from related forms such as pastiche, Margaret Rose reviews different definitions of “pastiche” in English, underlining their negative critical connotations, due to the derivative aspect in art of imitation as opposed to originality. An example is Russell Sturgis’ definition, which is general enough to extend to other art forms: “A work of art produced in deliberate imitation of another or several others, as of the works of a master taken together” (Sturgis, 1902, vol. 3, p. 73). This is close to Dyer’s “pastiche is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation” (Dyer, 2007, p. 1 ). However, the latter insists on the spectator’s or reader’s point of view, whereas the former focuses on the author’s intention. Accordingly, the definition of humorous pastiche proposed here can refer either to an entire work or to parts of that work: a deliberate imitation of a style or genre, with an amusing effect.

## Differentiating Pastiche from Parody

Pastiche is very close to parody and is regularly confused with it in the public mind, due to the complex and mixed nature of all parodic works, which are humorous remakes of linguistic or artistic performances, according to Margaret Rose. In most practical cases, the two words are used interchangeably about any work that humorously rewrites a recognizable source or style. The French novelist Marcel Proust spoke alternatively of “pastiche” and *parodie* about his own imitations of 19th century novelists; in Italian, Umberto Eco (b. 1932) does the same about his *Diario minimo (Misreadings)*. Similarly in Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyphonic theory of enunciation, pastiche and parody are effectively the same thing: the presence or imitation of another discourse in one’s own speech.

Clear landmarks for differentiating pastiche from parody are nevertheless given by French critic Gérard Genette, who attempts to distinguish various categories of “hypertextuality,” the word he proposed for “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.” (Genette, 1997, p. 5) This structuralist approach is not devoid of humor itself, and Genette was aware that it could be unsatisfactory for the analysis of “general parody”; but it is a useful basis for defining pastiche. Setting aside the subtleties of Genette’s six hypertextual categories (he himself admits they are bound to dissolve when applied to any complex work), two kinds of “relations” between texts emerge, transformation and imitation. In fact these are the principal differences between parody and pastiche. Parody is predominantly a transformative technique (Linda Hutcheon terms it “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” [Hutcheon, 1985: 6]). Pastiche however is an imitative technique, characterized by marking similarities rather than differences.

A good illustration of this distinction is provided by Martin Rowson's graphic novel (cartoon) version of Laurence Sterne's early novel, *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67; 1996). Adapting Sterne's own playful rewriting of various books, the cartoonist uses parody and pastiche as two clearly different forms. His "plates" illustrating the story of Slawkenbergius (adapting Book IV of *Tristram Shandy*, a tale about a long-nosed traveler) are respectful parodies of well-known pictures—successively Albrecht Dürer's *Knight, Death and the Devil* (1513), William Hogarth's *Southwark Fair* (1733/4) and Aubrey Beardsley (1876-98)'s *The Eyes of Herod*—whose comic meaning relies on slight changes of content arising from the story being told. This is parody. Later on, to access the transposed version of Book V, when "some dangerous nerd" has downloaded the entire text of *Tristram Shandy*, the "reader" inside Rowson's graphic novel has to hack into this digitalized text in order to "find out what happens next." But this operation sets off a huge "bug" which generates alternative versions of Sterne's story, each in the style of a 20<sup>th</sup> century novelist or movement and each illustrated with a caricature of the author and a pastiched speech bubble. Martin Amis, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, South American magical realism, D. H. Lawrence, and T. S. Eliot are all imitated. Although each stylized story-bit still contains elements linking it with *Tristram Shandy* (e.g. characters' names), its comic effect derives from pastiche since it relies on its resemblance to its "hypotext" rather than on transformation of content or context.

### **Pastiche and Caricature in the Past**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, pastiche of the mock-heroic variety was more highly regarded than caricature (also called burlesque travesty), because its principle was to preserve the dignity of the noble genre and high style being imitated, even though applied to a trifling incident. The

canonical example of such a heroicomic poem is Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712).

Another noted exponent was novelist Henry Fielding, whose writing included what he called "burlesque in diction" (preface to *Joseph Andrews*, 1742) purely for entertainment, for example in heroic descriptions of battles involving dogs or drunkards. Nowadays this would be called "mock heroic pastiche" and its mainly imitative principle bears out Fielding's conception of the novel as a "comic epic in prose." However Fielding condemned *caricatura* and its exaggerated satiric deformation as contradicting his aim of drawing comic characters from nature.

During periods of intense renewal of forms and genres such as occurred during the Romantic period (late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), pastiche was a very useful, hence widespread form of writing. Paul Aaron demonstrates how the French Romantics used pastiche to explore all kinds of ironic or eccentric forms to condemn ancient literary forms and compromise new ones. For the authors of the revolutionary generation that discovered the notion of personal originality in art, criticizing outworn classical forms by imitating them was a way of experimenting with what a century later was theorized by the Russian formalists as the "laying bare" of mechanical devices.

### **Pastiche and Satire**

Besides parody, satire is commonly associated with pastiche. Although the imitation in pastiche must be recognizable (or else it could not be identified as pastiche), satirical exaggeration of the model's typical traits may tend toward caricature. Then, satire is aimed at the hypotext itself, whose "saturation" (Gérard Genette's term) with these traits is mocked by copying and

exhibiting them to the reader. The difference between pastiche and caricature here is a matter of degree: pastiche is more neutral and less satirical in purpose. In the Rowson example above, Martin Amis is pastiched: his stylistic habits are playfully summed up in one speech bubble. But on the next page, T. S. Eliot is the object of a caricature: his style is ridiculed into being nothing more than meaningless mumbles. Martin Rowson publicly declared his irritation with Eliot and also adapted *The Waste Land* as a satirical graphic transposition. In *Far From Heaven*, the film mentioned earlier, the critic's first five minutes of "giggles" result from the same mechanism: at first sight, Todd Haynes' reconstruction of a 1950s aesthetic passes for a caricature of past narrative forms saturated with easily recognizable traits. But then, Dyer points out, the story reveals the re-creation to be meaningful and touching—a serious pastiche.

### **Is Pastiche “Blank Parody”?**

The relative neutrality of pastiche, compared to both parody (in the transforming relationship) and caricature (in the imitative relationship), led postmodernist scholar Frederic Jameson to regard pastiche as “blank parody.” Showing how the concept of a norm in postmodern art and literature is replaced by “private styles and mannerisms,” Jameson pessimistically regards pastiche as similarly replacing value-laden parody. He calls it “blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs” (1991:17). It may, he concedes, involve some humor, being “at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers’ appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudoevents.” In other words, post-modern pastiche is an empty form because it is the perpetual reflection of a self-centered consumer society which has lost its sense of history.

Nevertheless, today pastiche often remains one of the conditions for a satiric parody to be

fully effective, serving as the background against which the parody takes place. For instance, when the Reduced Shakespeare Company (the name parodies the Royal Shakespeare Company) gave an abridged version of *Titus Andronicus* in the form of a culinary TV program, that type of show was pastiched without any evident critical intent, while Shakespeare's play was very funnily parodied. Satire here was not aimed at cooking programs but at the accumulation of violent deaths in the Bard's first tragedy. The parodic RSC imitated a popular form to remind their public joyfully about Shakespearian (or Jacobean) aesthetics of cruelty. In this case, pastiche actually helps maintain historical and cultural heritage.

Playful rather than satirical tone underlying humorous pastiche is also exemplified by American Bill Watterson's comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985-1995). Here the reader is invited to share the viewpoint of a little boy named Calvin (after John Calvin, 16th century French Reformation theologian and paired with a stuffed tiger named after Thomas Hobbes, 17th century English political philosopher). When Calvin's mother tries to make him eat his dinner, for example, what we see through the boy's eyes is a monstrous alien from science fiction comics or TV shows. This is graphical pastiche and its humorous effect relies on reusing visual codes associated with another genre (sci-fi) to depict a small boy's fantasies. Through pastiched images that are part of each generation's common cultural background, the adult reader is put back in touch with his or her own former childlike imaginings. The young reader may also recognize his or her own fantasies and perhaps, by identifying the imitation as such, may apprehend them differently with humorous distance (distancing) and a knowing amusement.

### **Humorous Pastiche as Imitation**

Since pastiche is based on the imitative principle, a final question is whether imitation itself

provokes laughter or smiling, independent of the transformations common to pastiche and parody. Gérard Genette believed it did and French philosopher Henri Bergson saw laughter as generally arising from “something mechanical encrusted upon the living” He cited imitation as one instance of this “law” of the comic: “gestures, at which we never dreamt of laughing, become laughable when imitated by another individual. [ . . . ] To imitate any one is to bring out the element of automatism he has allowed to creep into his person.” (Bergson [1905] 2008 p. 22) Moreover, for Bergson, this was “the very essence of the ludicrous”: a “deflection of life towards the mechanical” that he believed was the real cause of laughter.

*See also* Bergson's Theory of Humor; Burlesque; Caricature; Cartoons; Comic Books; Comic Strips; Exaggeration; Genres and Styles of Comedy; History of Humor, Early Modern Europe; History of Humor, Modern and Contemporary Europe; History Of Humor, Nineteenth Century Europe; Lampoon; Mock Epic; Parody; Satire; Spoofing; Travesty

#### **FURTHER READINGS**

Aaron, P. (2008). *Histoire du pastiche. Le Pastiche littéraire français de la Renaissance à nos jours* [History of Pastiche. Literary French pastiche from Renaissance to our times]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Bergson, H. [1905] (2008). *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Transl. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Roswell. Orig. ed., *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, Paris: Felix Alcan, 1900. Rockville MD: Arc Manor.

Bradshaw, P. (2003). "Criticism of *Far From Heaven*," *The Guardian*, 7 March 2003. At: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/mar/07/artsfeatures2>

Dyer, R. (2007). *Pastiche: Knowing Imitation*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Eco, U. (1993). *Misreadings*. Transl. William Weaver. Orig. ed., *Diario minimo*, Milano, Mondadori, 1963. San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Transl. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinski. Orig. ed., *Palimpsestes ou la littérature au second degré*, Paris: Seuil, 1982. Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Hutcheon, L. (2000). *A theory of parody: The teachings of twentieth-century art forms* (Vol. 874). University of Illinois Press.

Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Rose, M. (1993). *Parody: Ancient, Modern, Postmodern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (esp. pp. 72-77).

Rowson, M. (1996). *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador.

Sturgis, R. (1902). *Dictionary of Architecture and Building*, vol. 3. London and New York: Macmillan.