

INTRODUCTION

Parody: Intertextuality and Music

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Parody is a mode of cultural borrowing, the intentional use of a text (or form) from the common repertoire as the basis for a new composition that builds in part on attitudes towards that received text. No text, as Bakhtin and Kristeva would argue, exists in pure isolation from any other, but parody smelts heteroglossia and presents the intertextual as bluntly as it can (Bakhtin 1981; Kristeva 1986). Building on Stephen Davies's concept of thin and thick works (2001: 39), the parody implies two discrete but interrelated works: one that is temporally prior and comprising part of an assumed collective repertoire, and one that comes after it which takes many but not all of the essential properties of the former to create something new. Furthermore, the properties that have been altered or replaced in the creation of the latter would typically be seen as essential to the former's character, so that the new work is more than a performer's interpretation of the thin work of a composer, it is one that crosses the hard-to-define border between a variant and a new thing. The audience's attention is drawn towards the pairing of old and new properties and, through grasping their connotative and denotative meanings, reconciles an incongruity. Through using the frame of an item from the shared repertoire, whether vernacular, popular, or privileged culture, "conscious, reflexive awareness is provoked by the double take of recognition and estrangement we experience in parody" (Noyes 2014: 144). The double take directs circumspection to the employed frame and to the content simultaneously. It functions as a fragile simile: the parodist suggests that this thing is very much like this other thing, when the two might be quite disparate, and the juxtaposition of the two not only provides a fresh take on this new content but also on the received one as well, allowing us to see it as both a form and structure and as an assemblage of motifs and ideas.

It is the “distortion of familiar things” (Noyes 2014: 143), and the distorted familiar, as process and as result, evokes the ethnographic definitional proverb of “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Brodie 2014: 143-152).

The articles in this special issue cover parody as this intertextual process, in contexts as diverse as animated situation comedies, sports arenas in both the northernmost and southernmost countries of the world, partisan newspapers in the early independent United States, and the liturgies in colonial-era Latin America.

Parody does not have to be humorous: the folksongs of soldiers (Tujela 2012; Tuso 1971; Wallrich 1953, 1954), labour (Foner 1966; Fowke 1969; MacKinnon 2008; Narváez 2005), and to commemorate disasters (Sparling 2017; Waterman 2009) are frequently parodies that make a case for this historical moment being analogous to another, and, save the grim comedy of history repeating itself, the result is rarely humour. Derek Penslar notes the history of Haggadah parodies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that recast the divine liberation story to a more urgent secular context (2006: 21-22), and Michel Lagrée locates the grotesque parodies of ritual that accompanied the extreme brutal violence of the French Revolution (1998: 90). However, more often than not the parody *qua simile* is an instance of humour through the perception of an appropriate incongruity, that is “the perception of an appropriate interrelationship of domains that are generally regarded as incongruous in a particular frame” (Oring 1987: 277).

Fred Householder suggests that in common Attic Greek usage the term *παρωδία* — literally, *para* “alongside” *odia* “ode” — in its verb form would have meant “singing in imitation, singing with a slight change [e.g. of subject matter]” (1944: 2). From Aristotle’s discussion of the *paradoiai* of Hegemon (whom he claims to be the first to practice parody) to references in Atheneus and others, its emergence as a technical term appears to have referred to “a narrative poem of moderate length, in epic meter, using epic vocabulary, and treating a light, satirical, or mock heroic subject” (3). But the process of parody, whether it was called that at the time, was not limited to the one style: Aristophanes, it has been suggested, could not have made his comedies were they not parodies of Euripides, sometimes in part and sometimes in full, and whether they be simple stylistic parodies through metre and vocabulary or through the appropriation of entire plots (Nesselrath 1993 :192). The Russian Formalist school goes so far as to suggest that parody is the most important element in the evolution of forms and genres as it exposes their conventions and thus pushes for new forms to emerge. As a “highly transgressive rogue outlier, as far as art proper is concerned,” Chambers notes that “parody has acted in various times in history

as an antithesis (in an Hegelian — or Marxist — dialectical sense) that has continually generated change in the arts, particularly the novel, which can be defined, more or less, in terms of its parodic metamorphoses” (2010: 220). The content of parody, as Viktor Shklovsky suggested using Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as exemplar, “becomes the perception of form” (1968 [1921]: 72). This echoes a Bergsonian theory of the comic and of imitation. For Bergson, imitation points out the individual elements that comprise what we tend to apprehend as a complete organic whole: “To imitate any one is to bring out the element of automatism he had allowed to creep into his person. And as this is the very essence of the ludicrous, it is no wonder that imitation gives rise to laughter” (1956: 81). Yuri Tynianov took this one step further and suggested that parody is the act of mechanizing: “The essence of parody lies in the mechanization of a given device. This mechanization will be felt, of course, only when the device being mechanized is known” (2019 [1919]). (For more on Bergson’s influence on the formalists, see Curtis 1976).

Vladimir Propp, another formalist who applied the methodology to folk materials, was more direct in his idea of parody with respect to its function: it went beyond inviting Bergsonian laughter at the mechanization of the thing being parodied and goes so far as to

[overshadow or negate] the inner meaning of what is being parodied.
 ... Parody attempts to show that there is emptiness behind the
 external forms that express the mental side of individuals.... Thus,
 parody is *a device for revealing an inner flaw* in the person parodied.
 (2009 [1976]: 60; emphasis in original)

Parody was social satire and, in folk cultures, a form of resistance: “Many parodies of church services, of the Catechism, and of prayers are found in Russian and world folklore” (62). It is a short line between Propp’s approach and James Scott’s identification of parody as part of the hidden transcripts of dissent within the cultural patterns of domination and submission (1990: 9). For Propp, parody was limited to a critique of the thing being parodied: when a form is directing criticism towards something other it is more properly a “travesty” (2009 [1976]: 63). While the distinction is important, it is perhaps not keeping with the way that parody is typically understood: by this logic “Weird Al” Yankovic frequently makes parody videos for songs that are themselves, almost exclusively, travesties (“Smells Like Nirvana” and “Perform This Way” being notable exceptions as their content is a comment on Nirvana and “Smells Like Teen Spirit” and Lady Gaga and “Born This Way,” respectively). We also risk entering into semantic circuitousness: *The Onion* uses print journalism’s

conventions to lampoon its banalities of content and aridness of style by framing mundane events as newsworthy (“Adrenaline Supply Intended For Lifting Car Off Loved One Called Upon To Carry 4 Grocery Bags At Once” [*The Onion* 2017]), but when it shifts attention to a real-world topic with stories like “Bolton Argues War With Iran Only Way To Avenge Americans Killed In Upcoming War With Iran” (2019), is the former parody and the latter travesty, or is the latter both parody and travesty, or is it a wholly other thing (Brodie 2018; 2019a)? Moreover, one could suggest that parody in many of its manifestations is simply a form of play, where the aim is not so much the resistance that verges on revolution as it is the testing of the found limits of the world presented to us; “[play] enables children to explore issues relating to power relationships, including the power that adults appear to exert over them, and thus we can see parodic play linked to agency” (Marsh and Bishop 2013: 197). To suggest that play is only the domain of children is to live in a very dry world indeed.

Song parody introduces a further element. In song, parody is a subset of the long-standing practice of *contrafacta*, where new words are written to an established melody in part as a short-cut to its performance. Audiences are passive tradition bearers and, in a “wisdom of crowds” sense, in the aggregate have a firm grasp on the *de facto* canon of their time. As Lindsay Ann Reid noted of the practice of “To the tune of” broadsides, “[It] is somewhat remarkable, then, to consider that the existence of this entire ballad industry was contingent upon the English public’s collective ability to aurally master and successfully re-transmit a significant number of discrete melodies” (2017: 139). Repertoires are shared, and I would have good reason to believe that by virtue of us living in the same community you would know the same texts as I, and I can make use of them accordingly for my own artistic communication. Repertoires were also narrower, not simply as a consequence of a less mediated universe but because the fetishization of discrete individuated works had yet to permeate all scales of cultural performance. Moreover, the extended hand of folk, vernacular, and popular song had not (quite) met the iron fist of intellectual property until relatively recently when, over the long 20th century, starting with sheet music and then with recordings, the proprietary rights for compositions became upheld by courts and capitalism.

Today, the practice of *contrafacta* seems limited to three principal areas: translations of a song from one language to another (such as when Charles Trenet’s “La Mer” had English lyrics written by Jack Lawrence as “Beyond the Sea,” or Diane Warren’s English lyrics to Umberto Tozzi’s “Ti Amo” for Laura Branigan); interlingual *contrafacta*, where lyrics bear no semantic relation to the original version (like Paul Anka’s “My Way” to “Comme d’habitude” by Claude

François, Jacques Revaux, and Gilles Thibaut, or how Gilles Vigneault's Quebec nationalist paean "Mon Pays" became the disco song "From New York to L.A." with new lyrics by Gene Williams); and parody. The issue is not so much with what is allowable under the law — as permissions still need to be sought and rights attained, even within a fair use doctrine — but more so about what sits with the modern ear. Popular song, commonly understood, typically comprises a one-to-one correlated set of a distinct melody and a distinct text, a thin work (Davies 2001: 39) further thickened by the early interpretation of a particular studio construction (Kania 2006: 403) that becomes an enduring entity to such a point that subsequent interpretations are forever rendered as "covers."

Shklovsky's reference to *Tristram Shandy* as a "Пародийный роман" ("parodying novel" or "novel as parody," depending on the translator) should also give us pause: Sterne is not parodying a specific novel but the form of the novel at the time of its writing. This is not Harvard Lampoon's *Bored of the Rings* (Beard and Kenney 1969). When we consider musical parody, we can perhaps broaden our scope and consider the practice of pastiche, denoting "the self-conscious emulation on the part of [a composer] of an earlier one or an earlier style" (Hoesterey 2001: 8). Fredric Jameson reduced pastiche to "blank parody" (1983: 114).¹ Using examples like *American Graffiti*, "nostalgia films" are imitations of the form without commentary on the form, so that their value is in the recognition but without the dissonance of parody. But when employed by the parodist the juxtaposition of a style, if not a specific text, is equally in play as it directs attention towards how a genre is describable by its particular conventions: "[Unless] it is possible to cite a genre out of context (as in, for example, parody or pastiche), such a genre cannot otherwise be legible in situations in which texts are not perceived as quotations" (Brackett 2016: 12). A rich future vein of research would be a consideration of what might now be half-heartedly called "ironic covers," Brackett's genres out of context, such as Pat Boone's album of heavy metal songs (*In a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy*), The Bird and the Bee's album of Van Halen songs (*Interpreting The Masters Volume 2: A Tribute to Van Halen*), or the respective oeuvres of Dread Zeppelin, Richard Cheese, and Me First and the Gimme Gimmes.

There is value in a parody having a semantic integrity independent of its borrowings: even within the already established Kristevan provisos that all texts are intertextual, if the interpretation of a parody depends on explicitly knowing the thing parodied then it can only ever be a derivative work as it does not contain within itself all the elements essential to its character. But, that said, knowing the original "rewards" the audience: "The audience is, in effect, transformed into the site of critical commentary; they are judged worthy by the text and subsequently themselves if they possess sufficient cultural knowledge

to recognize the popular references” (Ott and Walter 2000: 436). When folk groups take the received texts and parody them with a specific content, like all esoteric artistic creations they often function as markers of insider status.

In Katarzyna Herd and Jakob Löfgren’s “Mocking Others, Parodying Ourselves: Chants and Songs Used in Swedish Football,” we encounter parody in one of its most immediate forms, in the small group ephemerality of the soccer stadium where, in joyful *communitas*, songs are employed to show disdain towards an opposing team and their fans or, when deemed appropriate, for their own team and its management. In the ludic but highly passionate sphere of fandom, the common repertoire is creatively distorted for these immediate purposes: whether it continues to make sense outside of this performance context is wholly irrelevant. In this aural sparring what is relevant — to the performers — is that the audience, comprising a fairly strict binary of supporters and opponents, and no one else, makes the connection between the intertextual and specific references.

Albeit in a drastically different context, Laura Lohman’s article “More *Truth* than Poetry: Parody and Intertextuality in Early American Political Song” makes a similar argument. In the early 19th century, American newspapers were filled with verse written in support of the two major factions, Federalists and Republicans, and parody was a prized technique. The sides were so dichotomous that binaries were part of the *lingua franca* of political discourse, and the parodist could substitute a term’s opposite to turn their opponent’s verse into their own partisan rhetorical device: the Federalist’s valued “order” was balanced with the Republican’s valued “freedom”; the Federalist’s accusation of Republican “anarchy” was opposed with the counter-riposte “monarchy.” The articles by Lohman and by Herd and Löfgren remind us that folk performance does not occur in silos: even within group dynamics as informed by their opposition to the other as they are to a shared identity extrinsic of the other — William Hugh Jansen’s “esoteric-exoteric factor” writ large (1959: 207-208) — they are exposed to the performances of the other and (typically) understand that their performances are directed as much to the other as they are to the self. Parody provides one of the key illustrations of the complexities between a group and its expressions, including how that correlation is an over-simplification.

With “The Iberian *Villancico de Negro*: Between Parody, Cooptation, and Agency,” Melodie Michel engages in precisely this form of analysis. If Propp and Jameson suggest parody as a form of resistance, a critique by the folk of the institutional, the *villancico de negro* — a burlesque in the vernacular employing caricatures of the Indigenous and subaltern populations that ostensibly functioned to communicate the liturgical mass to those same populations — is its opposite, a transcript of dominance. Who was the audience for the songs?

Inasmuch as they might have seemed like invitations for new members to be drawn into the community, privileged members could recognize the ironic juxtaposition of the texts and performances, which typically retold episodes from scripture (particularly the Nativity) as if the biblical characters were of the subaltern group. The villancico as a metagenre of intertextual mimicry loses the sheen of play and the carnivalesque when viewed through the perspective of colonialism.

Although pastiches in general are not covered in this special issue, in “Cut Every Corner: Intertextuality and Parody in the Music of *The Simpsons*” Durrell Bowman touches briefly on a form of parody and pastiche in the multi-stylistic renderings of that show’s theme song frequently instantiated over its end-titles, when Danny Elfman’s original melody is either performed by a musical guest with a distinct and recognizable style (such as Tito Puente, Sonic Youth, Los Lobos) or composer Alf Clausen rearranges it in the style of, inter alia, Australian aboriginal music, mock-Renaissance, or previous television shows like *The Addams Family* and *Hill Street Blues*. But *The Simpsons*’ use of parody is not limited to pastiche: it demonstrates through both direct and distorted citation a deep participation in music from a range of sources, adding to the textual and visual assemblage that makes it one of the most profoundly heteroglossic texts of the last hundred years.

Finally, Michael S. O’Brien traces the history of one particular “sonic meme,” the internet’s collective and granular repurposing of a politically charged melody in a variety of genres increasingly removed from its origins as a soccer chant (in turn adopted from a patriotic pop song) in his “From Soccer Chant to Sonic Meme: Sound Politics and Parody in Argentina’s ‘Hit of the Summer.’” The original song from the 1970s, its soccer chant parody, and its 2017 repurposing all continue to resonate in the melody, so the melody itself can be infinitely recontextualized and yet retain its metonymic qualities.

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Notes

1. In full: “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor” (Jameson 1983: 114).

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