



LAUGHTER AS A CULTURAL AND NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN
FOLKTALES AND WRITTEN TEXTS

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Abstract: *This article deals with the issues based on analyzing the laughter as a multifunctional narrative tool in folktales and written literature. By analyzing its cultural significance and literary function, the paper illustrates how laughter is used to challenge authority, convey moral lessons, and reinforce community values. Through selected examples, the study highlights the enduring role of humor in shaping narratives and maintaining social cohesion.*

Keywords: *Laughter, folklore, narrative strategy, humor, culture, oral tradition, written texts, social function*

Annotatsiya: *mazkur maqolada xalq og'zaki ijodi va yozma adabiyotda kulguning madaniy hamda badiiy vosita sifatida tutgan o'rni tahlil qilinadi. Misollar orqali kulgi vositasida ijtimoiy me'yorlarga baho berish, jamiyatdagi ziddiyatlarni yumor orqali yoritish va xalq ongida axloqiy qadriyatlarni mustahkamlash jarayonlari ko'rsatiladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *kulgi, xalq og'zaki ijodi, badiiy uslub, madaniyat, yumor, hikoya qilish strategiyasi, ijtimoiy tanqid, axloqiy qadriyatlar.*

Introduction

Laughter is a universal human expression, yet its forms and functions vary significantly across cultures and historical contexts. In both oral and written traditions, laughter transcends mere amusement and becomes a powerful communicative tool, rich in cultural meaning and narrative intent. Folktales, in particular, serve as fertile ground for examining how laughter is utilized not only for entertainment but also for transmitting social norms, critiquing authority, and affirming collective identities.

In oral cultures, where folktales function as repositories of communal wisdom and moral instruction, humor and laughter play a vital role. Trickster tales, jester narratives, and satirical folklore frequently feature characters who defy conventional norms through wit and playfulness. These characters often mirror the social anxieties, aspirations, and contradictions of the communities that created them. The laughter they generate is thus not trivial; it reflects a society's mechanism for coping with injustice, resolving tension, and reasserting values.

In written literature, particularly in genres influenced by oral traditions, the function of laughter evolves but retains its roots in cultural critique and emotional engagement. Writers often adopt folkloric patterns or humorous motifs to construct layered narratives that speak to broader societal concerns. Through parody, irony, and absurdity, they challenge



established ideologies and encourage reflection, while preserving an emotional connection with the reader.

Moreover, laughter in narrative form creates a shared space between storyteller and audience. It fosters intimacy, softens critical commentary, and invites participation in meaning-making. In this way, laughter acts as both a bridge and a shield—connecting people through shared cultural references while protecting dissenting voices through veiled criticism.

Literature Review

Scholars have long recognized the complexity of laughter and humor in narrative traditions. The foundational work of Henri Bergson in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) laid the groundwork for understanding humor as a mechanism of social correction. Bergson posits that laughter serves to realign individuals with collective norms by punishing rigid or antisocial behavior through ridicule. Mikhail Bakhtin expanded the scope of laughter studies in his seminal work on the *carnavalesque*, particularly in *Rabelais and His World* (1984). He viewed laughter as a liberating force capable of undermining official discourse and social hierarchies. For Bakhtin, folk humor—rooted in the medieval carnival tradition—embodies a spirit of resistance, renewal, and collective empowerment.

Anthropological studies including those by Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz have looked at how cultural performance combines comedy with ritual and storytelling. Turner stresses the "liminal" aspect of laughter, in which standards are flipped and society limits are suspended. Laughing becomes both a critique and a relief in this brief environment, therefore facilitating cultural reflection and change. Literary thinkers have also greatly advanced knowledge of laughing as a narrative tactic. For example, Linda Hutcheon investigates how intertextual play generates laughter by showing how parody both honors and criticizes. Scholars like Alan Dundes and Vladimir Propp have examined in folklore the structural function of comedic characters like the trickster, who negotiates conflicts in society values by funny transgression. Modern psychology and cognitive linguistics have looked at how humor frames, defamiliarizes, and engages emotionally. Humor is an active process of interpretation since it depends on understanding of incongruity. In narrative, this deepens emotional resonance as well as encourages mental involvement. These multidisciplinary points of view taken together demonstrate that laughing is not just decorative but also fundamental for meaning-making in oral and written forms. It runs on several levels: as an instrument of instruction, a critique tool, and a method of narrative involvement. Knowing these levels helps one to appreciate the part comedy plays in preserving and negotiating cultural standards.

In folktales and literature, laughter fulfills a variety of purposes and frequently reflects the ideals and fears of the civilizations from which the works come. One well-known example is the Middle Eastern and Central Asian folkloric figure Nasreddin Hodja. Nasreddin, a smart fool, exposes the hypocrisy of religious authorities, avaricious traders, and ostentatious leaders by means of apparently ridiculous logic and sharp humor. His





stories inspire critical thinking about social justice, power, and wisdom as well as fun. The trickster Anansi the Spider shows up in African oral traditions in stories combining survival techniques with comedy. Anansi uses cunning and skill to often fool bigger, more strong animals. These stories provide moral guidance hidden under humor, therefore affirming the intelligence and tenacity of underprivileged groups.

Additionally abound in Western literature are instances of laughter as a cultural and literary device. Through bawdy humor, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*—which parodies social pretensions and romantic idealism—have tales like "The Miller's Tale." Here, the laughing acts as a critique of society expectations about religion, sexuality, and socioeconomic level.

In Russian literature, Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose* and *The Overcoat* feature grotesque, absurd situations that ridicule bureaucratic inefficiency and social superficiality. Gogol's use of surreal humor transforms mundane experiences into biting social commentary, illustrating the alienation and absurdity of life under rigid institutions. Chinua Achebe's *The Voter* employs sarcastic humor in modern fiction to question the postcolonial Africa's democratic process manipulation. The protagonist of the narrative, Rufus, finds himself caught between two political parties; his final "double vote" offers a funny but sad analysis of the collapse of electoral honesty.

Conclusion

Laughter is far more than a narrative embellishment—it is a cultural and strategic device central to the storytelling process. In both folktales and literary texts, it serves to critique authority, reinforce shared values, and engage audiences through humor and irony. Whether in the oral traditions of Africa or the literary canon of Europe, laughter performs critical cultural work. It invites reflection, encourages empathy, and disrupts normative assumptions. By understanding laughter's dual function as a cultural code and narrative technique, we gain deeper insight into its enduring significance in human communication and literary expression.

References:

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