Dogsbody: An Overview of Transmorphic Techniques as Humour Devices and their Impact in Alberto Montt's Cartoons

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Introduction

While conventional textual narratives can access a wide range of linguistic mechanisms to enter the humoristic mode,[1] cartoons access graphic techniques to allow for the concretion of abstract ideas as well as providing visual stimulation through images. Cartoons, being graphic jokes, mainly rely on dislocation, which is often used in caricature, but also in other techniques that create incongruity. Although cartoons as we know them today first appeared in the early nineteenth century, incipient pictorial humoristic representations have existed since the pre-Christian era. From the antecedents of cartoons, we know that anamorphism in the representation of non-human and human entities has recurred in comical images throughout history. It is expected that a journey through some illustrative samples of these transfigurative representations will shed light on the evolution of shape reversal in cartoons, and offer a comparative means both to contextualise contemporary cartoons and to better understand the pragmatics of graphic humour.

This paper focuses on the imagery published in *Dosis Diarias* (www.dosisdiarias.com), an award-winning blog by Chilean cartoonist Alberto Montt.[2] Montt's consistent employment of anthropomorphism justifies interest specifically in his work. The cartoonist follows in the footsteps of Gary Larson, especially in his exploitation of animal imagery, and, in his blog, Mott admits a direct influence from the North American cartoonist.[3] In particular, Mott refers to anthropomorphism and decontextualisation as perspectives he has adopted from Larson.[4] Decontextualisation and transfiguration are very closely related concepts. In fact, anthropomorphism is a type of decontextualisation that places an animal or object in a human position. The transfigurative techniques analysed in this article include anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Anthropomorphism in cartoons is understood as the depiction of a nonhuman entity with human traits. It is illustrated by the dog character in figure 1, who shows a human expression and posture in addition to exhibiting the gift of oratory. On the other hand, zoomorphism in cartoons consists of the representation of human figures with animal features. The human character in figure 1 is wearing a flea collar, an accessory typically worn by dogs, and he is, in fact, less persuasive as a logician than his dog. In zoomorphic cartoons such as this, then, the human figure is dehumanised through such a characterisation.

This paper aims to define the scope and typology of transfiguration in visual narratives in order to explore its humoristic elements and functions, as well as to contrast its canonical uses against innovative ones. Specifically, it will discuss how, despite being diachronically remote, transfigurative representations remain surprisingly consistent in their basic function: they generate incongruity. There are, however, deviations from the genuine humoristic use of shape reversals. At the core of these deviations is the relationship between artist and reader in the current context, ruled as it is by digital exchanges, interactivity, and information overload. In particular, the latter phenomenon increasingly takes an active role in

the achievement of humour. This appears distinctly in interactive cartoons—such as in samples that require the reader to fill in a gap in a cartoon's caption—but also in any cartoon containing external references.[6] The reader's active role becomes increased relevant as there progressively more information around us requires condensation into visual anecdotes.

Yet the reader's visual literacy is also guided by their identification of hints in the narrative. Importantly, it is argued that transmorphic techniques add a positioning cue, helping the reader to interpret cartoons. Thus, anthropomorphism performs an empathic function drawing the reader nearer to an alien character. In the words of Suzanne Keen, "when an animal is drawn as if it had a human face, it may make an easier target for empathy than alien and potentially dangerous human beings."[7] In contrast, zoomorphism provokes in the reader disdain for the caricature, eliciting disagreement with the values the character stands for. Zoomorphism is particularly prevalent in political caricatures, which often portray public figures with exaggerated traits, such as by turning mouths and noses into snouts. The animalistic product in political caricature conveys a criticism or disagreement. Rather than caricaturising politicians, Montt mostly mocks situations. For example, figure 1 caricaturises the owner-pet relationship through inversion. The dog figure inspires sympathy in the reader, whereas the foolish values, represented by a degraded human figure, generate feelings of disagreement.

Transmorphic Techniques in Visual Media

The notion of anthropomorphism, a predisposition to conceptualise and portray nonhuman characters as humanlike, has been studied widely across disciplines, and specifically in the arts.[8] Although common in the field of written literature, the stylistic feature of prosopopeia or personification, together with its counterpart, dehumanisation, can also be found in different media. Because of their multimodal nature, cartoons achieve transfiguration both

Figure 1. MAN: The vet says that we got it wrong and that I was right. YOU are supposed to wear the flea collar. I should have never paid for your speech course. DOG: I would ask for a second opinion.[5]

through image and text. Their meaning is strictly condensed into a single-frame space. Thus, the logic of discourse is very direct, but the reiteration of a certain topic or humoristic technique produces an echoing effect in the reader's mind that allows a holistic significance.[9] Indeed, a reader familiar with Montt's consistent use of anthropomorphism will more effectively process his cartoons than a reader in a first contact with one of his drawings.

As emphasised by the anthropologist John S. Allen, the pervasiveness of anthropomorphic images in current media-driven cultures reveals its potential to articulate an assortment of messages.[10] In this article, the hypernym "transmorphic" has been adopted from Peter J. Ward's study on visual narrative in order to incorporate a number of transfigurative processes in the humoristic message

beyond the phenomenon of humanlike convergence. The label transmorphic has been chosen since it is an umbrella term that incorporates anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and transformational (a combination of human with magical or mythological beings), drawing together these three techniques, which are employed by cartoonists to convey incongruity.[11] Out of these subgroups, the transformational will not be considered in this paper, as it is understood to be a subcategory of anthropomorphism (see figure 7).

Within the transmorphic category, zoomorphism (also known as dehumanisation) can be identified as the mechanism that nourishes caricature in political cartoons through "the attribution of animal traits to human beings, deities, or inanimate objects."[12] The exaggeration of defects usually leads to an animalistic depiction of the individual. As foreshadowed in the introduction, Montt is an author of situational caricatures, including social and folk caricatures. Unlike political caricature, situational cartooning focuses on the circumstances of a specific situation, rather than on the specific character of the protagonist. As such, it tends to employ anthropomorphism rather than dehumanisation.[13]

It is unsurprising that anthropomorphism, or "the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities," is a constant in Montt's work given the undeniable influence of Gary Larson on his style.[14] In fact, Charles D. Minahen coined the term humanimal to describe "a hybrid humanised animal/animals with something extra" and anihuman to name "humans with something missing" in reference to Gary Larson's cartoon series *The Far Side*. [15] Both Mott's and Larson's approaches imply a standard of explicit role reversal between animals and humans.[16] Yet Montt proceeds a step further than Larson by applying anthropomorphism to trees, fruit, and other objects, and by materialising humans in a process generally described as reification. A common place to find the latter process is in Mott's couple cartoons, where a man and a woman may be portrayed as having heads comprising everyday objects, such as clocks (see figure 2).

Both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism may also occur within a single cartoon. Nineteenth-century cartoons that depict Charles Darwin and his evolutionary theory are good examples of this, and a cartoon entitled "Prof. Darwin" constitutes an especially representative text.[17] On the one hand, Darwin is depicted in an ape-like manner: his body is completely animal, his mouth is deformed in imitation of a monkey, and, in the context of the cartoon, he shows his reflection in a mirror to a monkey. On the other hand, the monkey that stands next to Darwin adopts a humanlike expression of surprise, exuding an elegant and sophisticated attitude in his erect, upright posture. Each of these techniques provides a divergent positioning cue: anthropomorphism gives the reader an alien perspective, disorienting them, while zoomorphism degrades the human's character, thus giving the reader a sense of superiority.

Despite the advantages of starting from a detailed taxonomy of the transmorphic practice, a degree of overlap can occur between the techniques I have described as anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. A cartoon, for instance, may indeed pose a legitimate question of whether the cartoonist aimed to mock humanity or to mock a specific individual. When the caricature merges the human and the animal components in equal measure, it is hard to ascertain what inspired the cartoonist in the first instance. Perceptions in those contexts can vary so that while one reader may see a deformed human, another sees a humanised animal. Still, for the purposes of humoristic discourse, what is interesting lies in the way these two interpretations modulate the response of the text's comic message. In political caricature, if a reader perceives the cartoon as dehumanising, it then translates into a text that ridicules a public figure. An alternative is that the reader may be so focused on the animal imagery that they remain incapable of recognising the individual who the cartoonist sought to target. In that case, the reader may be missing an external reference that may be necessary to interpret the joke.

In a review of the key elements of humour—superiority, relief, and incongruity—it may be noted that all of these elements feature in the transmorphic techniques so far described.[18] Indeed, there is a sense of superiority, held by both the reader and cartoonist, in the deformation or satirisation of an individual by means of animalisation.[19] This is even present in the attribution of stupidity, vices, or fears to animals. By targeting somebody through a transmutational metaphor, the cartoonist positions him- or herself above the one who is mocked. Often, the subjectivity of the artist is transferred to a fictional animal conscience. Minahen's analysis of Gary Larson's cartooning identifies this phenomenon when it compares Larson's cartoons to the poetic resources used by surrealist poet Francis Ponge, who he argues "takes the side of a thing by lending it his own subjectivity, in order to reveal something about substance or essence."[20] The relief constituent can also be recognised in the hidden criticism that transmorphic characters convey within the spatial limitations of the single-panel cartoon. Finally, incongruity is probably the most salient feature of humour in transmorphic depictions. The inconsistencies that emerge from any transposed ordinary scene produce both an unexpected shift in perspective and what Arthur Koestler named "bisociation."[21] In the context of cartoons, bisociation is the simultaneous mental association of an element within the graphic anecdote with two fields that are usually not related to one another. In figure 1, the concept of the flea is associated with both its metaphoric and literal meanings. The Spanish expression "tener malas pulgas" (to have bad fleas) implies that, in metaphorical terms, the owner is bad-tempered and, in literal terms, that he would accordingly require an actual flea collar.

Every graphic joke will determine its unique function through the contents of the cartoon and the linguistic mechanisms it uses. For example, political cartoons are predominantly subversive, confronting, or transcendent, and, in the extreme instances of the cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, political cartoons

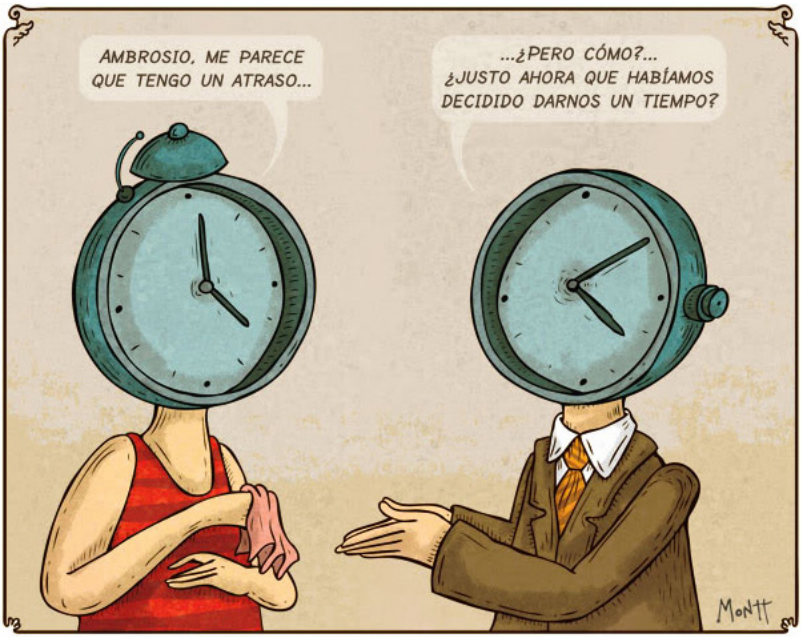

Figure 2. LEFT: Ambrosio, I think I am late... RIGHT: But haven't we just decided to give ourselves a bit more time?

can create a diplomatic crisis.[22] Humoristic cartoons by Montt, on the other hand, are usually devoid of any such serious intention, their only function being to amuse the reader.[23] There is, nonetheless, an empathic intent in Montt's social criticism of urban tribes, stereotypical gender roles, hypocrisy, and superstition, even as this criticism also undoubtedly entails a degree of critical or correctional motivation on Montt's part. In his applied analysis of animals in fiction, Peter J. Ward alludes to the exclusive and important way in which representations of animals are able to mirror human concerns:

> Animals can reflect human concerns in a way that the inanimate cannot, whether that be as transmorphic characters or the employment of animals as imagery.[24]

However, Montt also employs objects in his transmorphic processes. His most frequently adopted resource is the use of household appli-

Figure 3. Ducks? No, no, no... This one I use to hunt priests.

ances and their lexicon to reflect relationship concerns. For instance, figure 2 depicts clock-headed characters, and plays with the temporal lexicon of a late menstrual period in order to imply the possibility of the woman's pregnancy. The female character expresses her worry that her menstrual date has passed, and the male character pleads a timeout in relation to the situation, conveying an implicit allusion to bad timing.

In terms of humoristic tone, the anthropomorphic and the zoomorphic could be part of a satirical or even black-humour style, especially in political cartoons. However, inoffensive animals facilitate the creation of innocent humour, given their ability to attract sympathetic regards. As previously mentioned, Montt designs trivial jokes in a benevolent style, such as in the linguistic puns in figure 2. Yet, black humour can also be found in his viewpoints about religious and political hypocrisy. An illustration

of black humour in Montt's work appears in figure 3 (above), which represents a duck hunter and a priest hunter. The former is carrying a duck-shaped whistle to attract his target, while the latter is using an altar-boy-shaped whistle, in what become multiple layers of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. All the same, when talking about the transmorphic component in his cartoons, absurd humour is inescapable. Indeed, these kinds of cartoons incorporate an incongruity among images (or images and text) that cannot be logically resolved, as seen in figure 2.[25]

According to Robert Mankoff's taxonomy of cartoons, a graphic joke can belong to one of four different categories—real, unreal, surreal, and a "slice of life"—depending on the combination of the variables of real and unreal to image and text.[26] That is, the author designates the different types of cartoons with a focus on the allocation of the incongruity trigger. Unreal and surreal cartoons often include anthropomorphism, whereas caricatural zoomorphism tends to appear in "real" and "slice of life" cartoons. As stated in my introduction, Montt's work is characterised by a consistent use of anthropomorphism. This observation is reinforced by Mankoff's remarks on the predominance of the unreal category over the rest in cartooning: "Most gags," he writes, "consist of an unreal image with a rather ordinary caption."[27]

In the creative process of transfiguration, image selection criteria are based on either the physical or metaphorical (when the process seeks to symbolise an abstract quality) similarities that an image has to the idea or notion that the cartoonist intends to present. Just like any other inductive process, transmorphic cartoons produce inferences that are based on scripts that serve to fill in an intended communicative gap. Mental scripts activate expectations about topic recognition, communicative intention, and the internal structure of cartoons.[28] In figure 2 the information gap lies in the simultaneous analogies and contrasts that pertain to time, and which are featured in the cartoon. Analogies can be drawn among

a number of graphic and textual elements referring to the theme of time, whereas a contrast is established between "late" and "a bit more time." In this context, scripts enable the reader the mental space to compare the concepts of time and relationships, assisting the interpretation process. The relevance of similarity in the selection criteria is perhaps best represented by figure 2, which establishes a comparison between humans and clocks, suggesting their comparable dependence on time, and implying the human 'biological clock.' While calendar-headed characters would still create an effective stimulus and, in conveying the same signification, be akin to these clock-headed characters, the choice of shapes unrelated to time objects, such as window-headed characters, would lack the precondition in which the human-time analogy can be made.

The persuasive role of humour has been widely studied in advertising and education.[29] Like humour, anthropomorphism plays an influential role in conveying meaning to the reader. This specific type of depiction predisposes readers to particular emotions, even before they access the text. Animals depicted with human facial expressions and postures, for instance, comprise a more immediate object of identification than nonhuman beings, resulting in what Suzanne Keen labels an "effective ambassadorial narrative empathizing."[30] In order to resolve the incongruity in transfigurative cartoons, the reader either empathises with the nonhuman figure, because of the presence of anthropomorphism, or adopts a position of superiority in relation to the nonhuman figure, which is based on zoomorphism. In the following section, my overview of transfiguration in different stages of art will serve as an illustration of transfiguration's significance according to a number of variables, providing a comparative ground for Montt's work.

Evolution of Transmorphic Techniques in Cartoons

Despite the existence of sporadic instances of zoomorphism dated from the Upper Palaeolithic period, these examples of zoomorphism

bear no apparent relation either to cartooning or to a humoristic intention on the part of the artist.[31] Hence, precisely how these zoomorphic images should be interpreted remains a mystery. However, the discovery of certain archaeological remains in Egyptian tombs has revealed the presence of caricatures in the pre-Christian era. The first acknowledged caricature-like representation, for instance, is a drawing that depicts Senenmut, Hatshepsut's Egyptian steward in the eighteenth dynasty, highlighting the wrinkles on Senenmut's face.[32] If it is interpreted as a purposeful distortion of reality, then this portrait may be acknowledged as the first caricature in history.

But in spite of the broad consensus that identifies this work as inaugurating the birth of caricature, there is only enough evidence to determine that the portrait represents a degree of divergence from the idealistic representations of such figures—a departure from the mode that had been typical of Egyptian frescoes and sculpture—and a turn to a more *realistic* form of representation. Furthermore, caricatures in general have a humoristic aim, and are not commonly associated with burial monuments. However, archaeologist Patrick F. Houlihan claims that a sense of humour was a common quality in Ancient Egypt, despite that this civilisation is often associated with rigidness.[33] Thus our interpretation and recognition of cartoons take place in time with the disclosure of their respective creators' cultural customs. In particular, the Egyptologist Thomas Garnet Henry James emphasises a tradition of funerary art in Egypt that serves to mock the deceased's afterlife aspirations.[34] While the typically idealistic representation of those who have died in Ancient Egypt would seek to hide any of their imperfections, caricatures are defined exactly by their exaggeration of these defects, including those in the physical appearance of the depicted characters. Therefore, even if Senenmut's sketch was meant to be realistic, portraying the blemishes of his ageing skin, such a mode of representation also converges with the concept of caricature.

Deformity, on the other hand, leads to the transformation of the character depicted into the grotesque, which often implies a transition from a human appearance to a bestial one. In this sense, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism coincide. A caricature of an identifiable individual shown as an animal creates zoomorphism, while a drawing where the target of humour is not recognisable would involve anthropomorphism. This raises the question of the boundary between the two concepts and how any overlapping between them may be articulated within the creative process.

In the case of Senenmut's depiction, the drawing can be said to be the embryo of caricature. Although there is no trace of zoomorphism in it, the drawing contains the essence of a cartoon through its caricaturisation of Senenmut's wrinkles, which constitutes an initial step towards anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. A closer approach to the deployment of personification can be found in the Satirical Papyrus, a document that shows animals performing common and everyday human tasks.[35] By means of the anthropomorphisation of animals in various situations—an antelope and a lion playing senet, a cat herding geese—the author parodies artistic representations of the kind that the Pharaohs had commissioned for their tombs. A latent incongruence can be identified in this portrayal of animals with abilities clearly not possessed by the beasts, as well as in the artist's burlesque intention, clearly referencing the professions of their human equivalents, and thus honouring the Pharaoh's on whose tombs they appear as solemn funerary sketches.[36] Parallels can be drawn with Montt's work. In figure 4 (below), a cat plays cards with a mouse, stating "Okay, one more round, but this is the last one. If my mum sees me playing with my food she will kill me!"[37] In this instance and in that of the funerary sketch, personification enables the reader to adopt the animals' perspective, providing an empathising agent. In Montt's example the reader can picture the cat's 'killer instinct' from a sympathetic perspective, which allows us to joke about the nature of predation.

Figure 4. CAT: Okay, one more round, but this is the last one. If my mum sees me playing with my food she will kill me!

As noted by ancient Greek literature scholar Richard Buxton, the subject of transformation was a common element in Greek mythology, constituting a source of inspiration, especially for Roman and Renaissance arts.[38] The Roman poet Ovid based his book of transformation, *Metamorphoses* (first published in 8 AD) on such Greek myths.[39] At the intersection of the epic and didactic genres, *Metamorphoses* anticipates the moral tone of Aesop's original fables, but offers a transforming process that is absent from Aesop's work. Both Ovid's and Aesop's works have thoroughly influenced Western literature and the arts since their appearance. Whereas fables combine didacticism with a humoristic tone, metamorphosis myths generally do not. Metamorphic myths focus on transfiguration as a form of punishment, while fables offer praise to wit and intelligence in lighthearted, humorous stories. Implying an anthropomorphic element, fables narrate interactions among animals as well as provide the

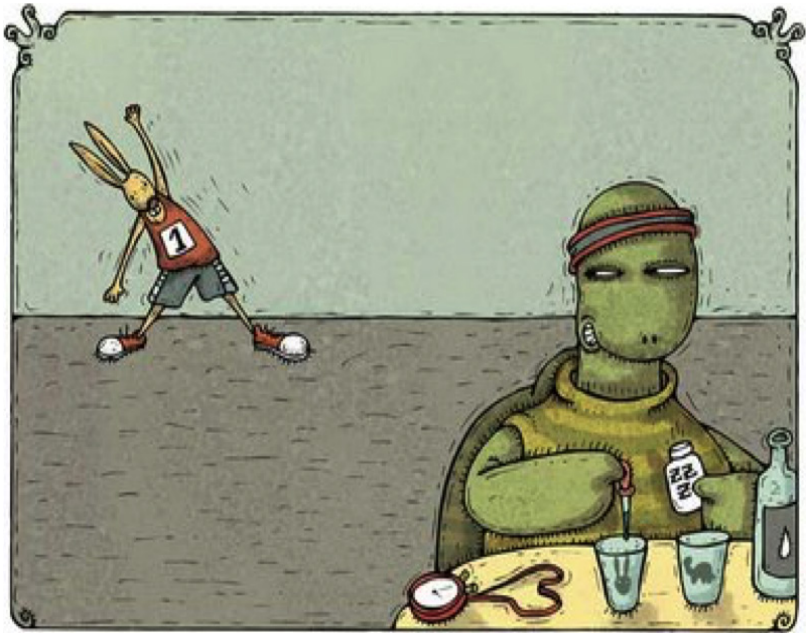

Figure 5. Aesopian myths in Montt's cartoons

reader a lesson to be learned. Despite their anthropomorphic imagery, illustrations of fables did not appear until the nineteenth century, when Jean Grandville's *The Tortoise and the Hare* was published (a story in which the tortoise is depicted, in a humanising attempt, running on two legs). Montt recreates his personal version of this fable by depicting a sharp-witted, behind-the-scenes appropriation of this narrative. In a reference to Aesop's fable (figure 5), the tortoise is depicted dropping sleeping medicine into the hare's glass, thereby subverting the original fable and altering the reader's ability to maintain an empathetic response in respect of each character.

In addition to myths and fables of Greece, Pompeii and Herculaneum show caricatures in their graffiti, conveying a humoristic message. Of particular note is the use of zoomorphism to ridicule Christian cults, as in the Alexamenos graffiti, sometimes known as "Crucified Ass." Found in Domus Gelotiana in 3 AD, the work is

Figure 6. If you wanted to get a woman pregnant, you should have sent a dove, just like I told you. You can't complain now if everyone says that your son is the son of a woodpecker ['carpenter'].

an inscription that depicts a crucified donkey and bears the caption "Alexamenos worships God."[40] This is a representation that entails a further step in the development of cartoons during the progression to their present-day form. The sarcastic aim of the graffito is evident in its critical allusion to Christianity. Furthermore, the image is accompanied by a caption, as is customary in modern cartoons. In view of these circumstances it is actually possible to associate this work with one of Mankoff's categories: it is an example of what Mankoff describes as an "unreal" cartoons, which combines an impossible or extravagant image with a quotidian caption or text. It is also worth noting that, like this grafitto, Montt's work is also often characterised precisely by this kind of religious mockery, both of gods and specific doctrinal beliefs.[41] For instance, one of his most irreverent cartoons, in figure 6 (above), plays with the polysemy of

the term "carpintero" in Spanish, which can mean both the bird or a 'carpenter,' in order to suggest that Jesus Christ's father was not the symbolic holy dove, but a woodpecker.

Montt's work routinely personifies stereotypical representations of the Christian God and Satan, imbuing them with simplistic, dichotomous views in order to portray them as a feuding humanlike couple. And while the reader can easily relate to the divine in Montt's cartoons, they can relate even more readily to the irreverent, and this is all achieved by means of personification. In figure 6 (above), the spiritual characters of God and Satan are humanised, enabling the reader to adopt an empathic approach.

In the Middle Ages, the cartoon medium diversified into manuscripts, marginalia, tapestry, stained glass, and sculptural caricature. Animal allegory appeared in tapestry, on church windows, and on walls, supplying a humorously illustrated vehicle to instruct those who were illiterate. Nevertheless, the most relevant medieval contribution to transmorphic representation was the bestiaries.[42] These were structured compilations of images from the animal kingdom with an autonomous meaning. Bestiaries differ from caricature in both their fantastic origins and their cohesive significance.[43] *Physiologus*, a text often dated to have appeared between the second and fourth century AD, was followed by the medieval treaty *De humana physiognomia* (1586), and later *Physiognomy* (1775–1778), each of which contributed to the subgenre of caricature by developing animalistic imagery.[44] Due to their allegoric nature, bestiaries are charged with significant symbolism. Montt, like one of his contemporary cartoonists, Fernando Krahn, surpasses traditional symbolism, however, creating imagery that arises from the reader's empathy.[45] This approach relates to the concept of mental scripts, which I introduced earlier. The active role that is played by the reader is promoted by anthropomorphism, among other mechanisms. By creating empathy between the reader and the characters, Montt gains the reader's complicity in his humour.

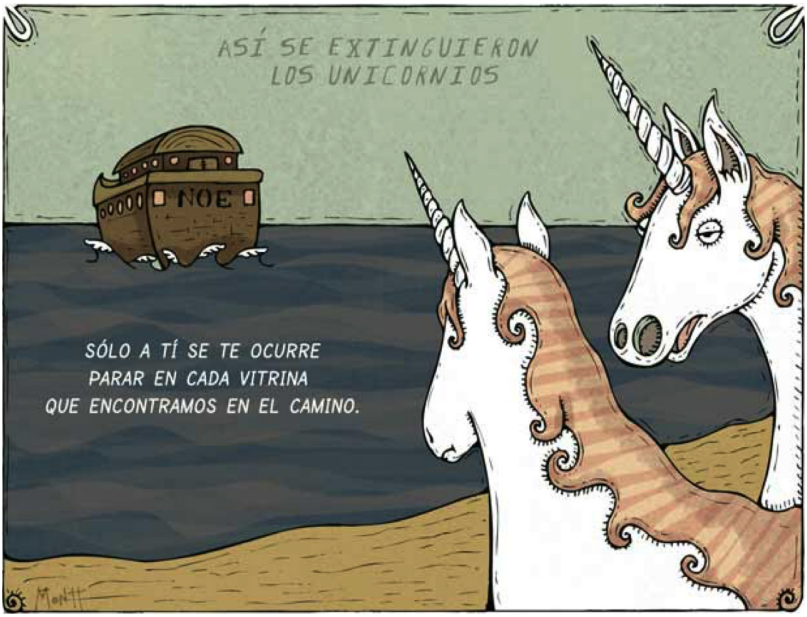

Figure 7. THIS IS HOW UNICORNS BECAME EXTINCT. UNICORN: It's just like you to stop at every shop window along the way.

The Renaissance movement promoted a highly artistic development of caricature. Leonardo Da Vinci chose to depict people with deformities in what were dehumanised models of human life that reinforced the viewer's emotive or affective perceptions of beauty, albeit in a way that was not humoristic. As for the representation of personification, Hieronymus Bosch's grotesque allegories contain creatures endowed with human features. And although the interpretation of Bosch's painting *The Garden of Unearthly Delights* (1490–1510) is controversial, an ironic viewpoint is achieved by means of the anthropomorphic elements as well as anachronisms that Bosch renders in his triptych.[46] Likewise, Montt combines humanisation and decontextualisations with a similar purpose. A good example of this appears in his graphic anecdote of a unicorn pair missing Noah's ark (see figure 7, above), with one of them complaining about the other having spent too much time window-shopping. Rein-

forced by an anachronism, anthropomorphism here provides an empathising effect not simply with an animal, but with a mythical, and ultimately distant creature.

The nineteenth century marks the transition from cartoon as work of art to cartoon as mass media device. In the twenty-first century context of mass literacy and information overload, the original artistic and the subsequent political meanings of cartoons have not been lost so much as relegated to secondary functions, at least in their typical forms. The body of popular references that are now often condensed in cartoons targets a reader with a background in art history and other fields. But before the appearance of mass media, cartoons appeared in Francisco Goya's *Los Caprichos* (1797–1799), a collection of critical prints that militate against irrationality and superstition embodied by, among others, anthropomorphic donkeys.[47] Charles Philipon pursues a similar transforming portrayal in *La Métamorphose du roi Louis-Philippe en poire* ["The Metamorphosis of King Louis-Philippe into a Pear"] (1831): a model for the cartoons and caricatures in satirical English publications such as *Punch*.[48] Charles H. Bennet initially uses the anthropomorphic techniques to illustrate Aesop's fables, but moves on to mock Darwin's theory of evolution through the staged transformation of a domestic appliance or animal into a person.[49] Bennet's use of objectification constitutes a major degradation of both Darwin's theory and the utterly inanimate element (who is now a human), inviting the reader to cast a superior glance upon the depicted and apparently 'evolved' individual. In a similar way, Montt depicts household item-headed couples to ridicule human relations (see figure 2).

When discussing postmodern contributions to the transmorphic imagery in cartoons, Gary Larson provides a key reference point. And since Montt's most immediate reference is Larson's *The Far Side*, this reinforces the claim that the presence of personification in both of their works is a parodic criticism of humans' egocentric

Figure 8. ...His last words were: 'Can I ask you a question, just out of curiosity?'

and anthropocentric perspective. Both cartoonist's transcend the Aesopian notion that was enhanced by the Neo-Darwinist emphasis in so-called "radical anthropomorphism."[50] In Montt's work, transmorphic characters coexist with popular culture, performing in both literary and biblical scenes, and articulating numerous media references. Therefore, the inference process becomes more complex than that in which the reader decodes humour in fables. As a norm, fables involve universal knowledge, while Montt's intricate system of up-to-date and historical references challenges us to comprehend a more complex message. If the reader is unaware of the original reference, they may be unable to interpret its reformulation in the graphic joke. Reformulation often occurs in linguistic humour, for instance, and figure 8 (below) recreates the idiom 'curiosity killed the cat' with an anthropomorphic technique.

Montt's work often incorporates references to idioms but, being culture-bound, only a few of them can be successfully translated. Indeed, figure 8 represents an exception to the norm because it works literally in both languages: "la curiosidad mató al gato" means the same thing as "curiosity killed the cat." Furthermore, the cultural load contained in such idioms is not always accessible to readers not familiar with the language. This relates to this essay's earlier premise of information overload in contemporary cartoons, where personification acts as an empathising cue for the reader, allowing for an expansion of information and affect. Thus, regardless of the opaqueness of the references within a particular joke, anthropomorphic cartoons can help the reader to alternate between a compassionate perspective and a merciless one based on the positive or negative charge that is associated with each animal, through such anthropomorphic traits as as their facial expressions.

Conclusion

Contemporary cartoons, exemplified by Montt's work, contain influences from the early stages of art, when caricatures did not yet exist. On top of the canonical functions (didactic, universal, or anecdotal) and their traditional methods and topics, innovative uses of transmorphic techniques have emerged. Readers now have more responsibility in interpreting the humoristic messages of cartoons in that they need to possess previous knowledge about a variety of historical and contemporary cultural reference points. Such a task is a challenge in the era of digital encounters and information overload, and may lead to an overwhelming focus-dispersive phenomenon that makes knowledge acquisition difficult. The shift from the didactic form of transmorphic humour to a more demanding transmorphic device defines the current time as distinct from the era of fables and bestiaries in the past. 'Getting the joke' in a cartoon now entails the understanding of references from other cultures and periods. And even when authors attempt to employ universal

humour, they may often draw allusions to contextual characters or events. In contrast to ancient graphics, contemporary cartoons contain external references to numerous public figures, potentially restricting or curtailing humour's reach.

A cartoonist chooses their method of depiction according to the effect that they wish to have on their reader. Anthropomorphism seeks the reader's empathy, while dehumanisation tends to promote the reader's adoption of a superior stance by degrading the depicted individual. The use of either of these techniques ensures that a cartoon maintains a strong connection with humour. In fact, transmorphic cartoons contain all the elements of a humoristic message: incongruity, superiority, and relief. Of the two transmorphic techniques, Montt's predilection for anthropomorphism is partly motivated by his cartoons' genres and themes. Indeed, the author creates situational caricatures, focusing on the circumstances of the cartoon rather than on the depiction of dehumanised protagonists, as in zoomorphism. Figure 6 shows the figures of the Christian God and Satan, performing human roles, and engaged in human conversation, deconstructing the circumstances in which the immaculate conception is undertsood to have occurred. As in this case, a great many of Montt's cartoons accord with Mankoff's unreal and surreal categories, which are especially relevant to anthropomorphism. And on the whole, anthropomorphism prevails over zoomorphism in Montt's work.

This detailed summary of the comic function of transfiguration has made a comparison between transmorphic illustrations in early stages of art and in current contextual caricature, applying this comparison to Montt's work. Although Montt's paradigm adopts characteristics of previous transmorphic visual media, some of his cartoons' features challenge cartoons' traditional interpretation. Specifically, this paper has presented cartoons which represent object-headed humans as one of the consistencies in Montt's work. This is a case of overlapping between anthropomorphism and dehu-

manisation. On the one hand, where objects have human bodies, they may be regarded as humanised items. On the other hand, the objects do not have facial gestures, so they may also be interpreted as dehumanised people. Montt's innovative yet uncertain imagery thus addresses an active reader, requiring them to critically analyse the cartoon. A second particularity is Montt's use of anthropomorphism, which is linked to linguistic humour, and the cultural barrier for translation, which needs to be addressed on its own in further research. Distinguished by its consistent use of anthropomorphism, Montt's work provides a comparative ground through which this paper has analysed the transmorphic thorough visual media history.

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Notes

1 Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, "Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 4, nos. 3-4 (1991): 293-347.

2 Best Blog in Spanish 2011, *The Deutsche Welle Blog Awards* (The BOBs), 2011, accessed March 5, 2014, available from http://thebobs.com/espanol/category/2011/best-blog-spanish-2011/.

3 Instances of Gary Larson's work are available in Charles D. Minahen, "Humanimals and Anihumans" in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History,* eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1998), 235.

4 Alberto Montt, *Dosis Diarias* (2006), accessed 11 September 2014, available from: https://www.blogger.com/profile/08151545008436598322.

5 The captions in this article are translated from the original Spanish by the author of this article.

6 Interactive cartoons are graphic jokes that require the reader's participation to complete the message, either by mentally filling a gap in the captions or by completing the visual component.

7 Suzanne Keen, "Fast Tracks to Narrative Empathy: Anthropomorphism and Dehumanisation in Graphic Narratives," *SubStance* 40, no. 1 (2011): 137.

8 See Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1872); Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1961); and Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1989).

9 Minahen, "Humanimals and Anihumans," 232.

10 John S. Allen, review of *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, edited by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, *American Anthropologist* 108, no.3 (2006): 576-577.

11 Peter Joseph Ward, "Animals in the Fiction of John Irving and Haruki Murakami," master's thesis, University of Canterbury, 2012, accessed March 7, 2014, http://hdl.handle.net/10092/7544.

12 Gary R. VandenBos and the American Psychological Association, *The APA Dictionary of Psychology* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2007), 1011.

13 Miguel Rojas, "Krahn o la Metafísica del Humor," *Miguel Rojas Mix* (blog), May 19, 2009, accessed March 7, 2014, http://miguelrojasmix.net/wp/?p=404; Daniel López Zamora and Miriam López Rosales, "Los Efectos del buen Humor y la Caricatura en la Sociedad Contemporánea," bachelor's thesis, University of Cuenca, 2010, http://dspace.ucuenca.edu.ec/handle/123456789/3095, 24. Rojas refers to a reflection by Ortega and Gasset—"I am myself and my circumstance"—which had a strong impact in Latin America.

14 VandenBos et al., *The APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 59.

15 Minahen, "Humanimals and Anihumans," 233.

16 Ibid., 239.

17 Faustin Betbeder, "Prof. Darwin", *The London Sketch Book of Celebrities*, February 18 (London: Wellcome Library, 1874).

18 Salvatore Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humour* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

19 Plato, *The Philebus of Plato*, ed. Robert Gregg Bury (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 49. Plato, *Plato on Poetry*, ed. Penelope Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 34-35.

20 Minahen, "Humanimals and Anihumans," 233.

21 Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

22 Jytte Klausten, *The Cartoons that Shook the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

23 Montt's 'blogger' profile describes his blog as a medium through which he can express random thoughts: "Ahora estoy haciendo lo que hace mucho quería, dibujar las idioteces que tengo en la cabeza" ["Right now I am doing what I wanted to do long time ago, which is to draw the foolish ideas that I have inside my head"], accesed June 21, 2014 https://www.blogger.com/profile/08151545008436598322

24 Ward, "Animals in the Fiction of John Irving and Haruki Murakami," 23. Ward emphasises the uniqueness of animal imagery to develop a role unsuitable for the inanimate in symbolism and dramatisation.

25 Katja Gelbrich, Daniel Gäthke, and Stanford A. Westjohn, "Effective-

ness of Absurdity in Advertising Across Cultures," *Journal of Promotion Management* 18, no. 4 (2012): 393.

26 See Glenn Collins, "Toonology: Scientists Try to Find Out What's So Funny About Humor," *New York Times*, September 2004, accessed March 7, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20040928tuesday.html

27 Ibid.

28 Attardo and Raskin, Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model," 293-347.

29 Jim Lyttle, "The Effectiveness of Humor in Persuasion: The Case of Business Ethics Training," *The Journal of General Psychology* 128, no. 2 (2001): 206-216.

30 Keen, "Fast Tracks to Narrative Empathy," 145.

31 Namely, sculptures such as *Löwenmensch*: a human figure with a lion head. See Die Rückkehr des Löwenmenschen, Ulmer Museum, November 2013, accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.tourismus.ulm.de/web/de/news/artikel/rk_loewenmensch.php.

32 Pamela Rushby, *Inside Cartoons* (Melbourne: Rigby Harcourt Education, 2005).

33 Patrick F. Houlihan, *Wit and Humour in Ancient Egypt* (London: Rubicon, 2001).

34 Thomas Garnet Henry James, *Egyptian Painting* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1985); James, *La Pintura Egipcia*, trans. Rosina Lajo (Tres Cantos: Akal Ediciones, 1999), 60.

35 Houlihan, *Wit and Humour in Ancient Egypt,* 65.

36 James, *La Pintura Egipcia*, 60.

37 Other of Montt's cartoons that are unrelated in shape are, however, related in aim. Examples include when Montt mocks the Spanish Ecce Hommo restoration, or portrays the Egyptian pyramid construction as a fraud.

38 See Richard Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

39 See Joseph B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

40 John Granger Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion: Light from Several Inscriptions and the Palatine Graffito," *Novum Testamentum* 50, no. 3 (2008): 262-285.

41 Guillermo Guerrero, "Alberto Montt: '¿Famoso yo? En Internet somos cuatro pelagatos nada más,'" *Milenio*, November, 2012.

42 Hurtado notes that medieval bestiaries in Arreola's work are a tool that Arreola uses to satirise masculine and feminine idiosyncrasies. In his use of humour, with its emphasis on the animal imagery and the fantastic to mock human vices, Montt's graphic work shares common ground with Arreola's narrative. See Milena Miriam Hurtado, "Humorismo sexual y humorismo doméstico en Bestiario doméstico de Brianda Domecq y en La señora Rodríguez y otros mundos de Martha Cerda." PhD diss., University of California, 2006, esp. 35-36.

43 See Rojas, "Krahn o la Metafísica del Humor," 2009.

44 Alan Scott, "The Date of the Physiologus", *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 4 (1998): 430-441; Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

45 See Rojas, "Krahn o la Metafísica del Humor," 2009.

46 Walter Bosing and Ingo F. Walther, *Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1450-1516: Between Heaven and Hell* (Cologne: Taschen, 1987).

47 Andrew Schulz and Francisco de Goya, *Goya's Caprichos: Aesthetics, Perception, and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

48 David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture, 1830-1848: Charles Philipon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford: New York, 2000).

49 Another key contribution to the transmorphic conceptualisation in editorial cartoons was Thomas Nast's (1840-1902) animal symbolism for Democrats and Republicans in the US. See Thomas Nast, "Illustrations and Political Cartoons by Thomas Nast" (Washington: Library of Congress, 1902), accessed March 24, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/famous-cartoonist-made-donkey-and-elephant-the-symbols-of-political-parties/2012/01/20/gIQAm5aWVQ_story.html

50 David Lavery, "Aesop After Darwin: The Radical Anthropomorphism of *The Far Side*," *Studies in Popular Culture* 28, no. 1 (2005): 71.