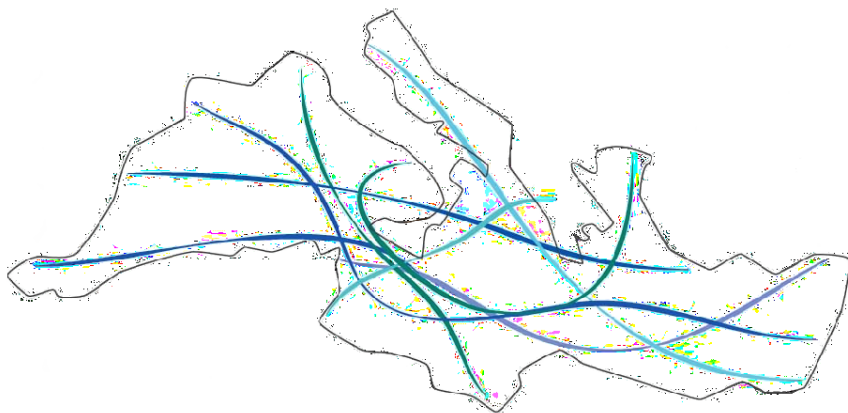


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*Humour as a way
to get away from lockdown*



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Humour as a way to get away from lockdown

Abstract

The spring 2020 lockdown literally immobilised the planet and people were legally obliged to remain locked up. Morocco could not escape the health instructions and was condemned, as early as March 2020, to lockdown. The situation of forced immobility is dual for a writer as it can be both a period of intense production and a source of anxiety resulting from the loss of autonomy and the lack of links with his fellow humans. As a result, resistance enters the scene and imagination gives way to an intellectual escape which takes the form of renewed creativity in order to express facts or feelings. In the process, recurring themes emerge. Youssouf Amine Elalamy, a Moroccan academic and author, has chosen humour to set free from constraints and unveil the ensuing fantasies. Using Indian ink instead of his usual pen, he composed an album, which he mischievously entitled *J'ai fait un Dream*.

This paper aims at bringing out the forms and contents of humour, as well as understanding how it works. The purpose will also be to highlight the preoccupations that are already present in other books by the pluricultural author whose implication in the understanding of the contemporary Moroccan society is undeniable. Moving away from fiction and novels, he chose to write an album, which combines drawings and short comments supporting or contradicting them thus proving, if need be, the capacity of humour to transcend anxiety.

Keywords: Lockdown, Humour, Morocco, Caricature, Narcissism.

El humor como forma de salir del confinamiento

Resumen

El confinamiento de la primavera de 2020 paralizó el planeta, obligando a los ciudadanos a permanecer encerrados en sus casas. Marruecos no fue una excepción y se vio obligado a cerrar en marzo de 2020. Para un escritor, la situación de inmovilidad forzosa tiene un doble efecto, ya que puede ser tanto un periodo de intensa producción como una fuente de preocupación por la pérdida de autonomía y la falta de contacto humano. En consecuencia, entra en escena la resistencia, mientras que la imaginación da paso a una fuga intelectual que toma la forma de una creatividad renovada para expresar los sentimientos o relatar los hechos. Hay elementos recurrentes en este proceso. Youssouf Amine Elalamy, académico y escritor marroquí, eligió el humor para liberarse de las limitaciones y revelar sus fantasías. Utilizando tinta china en lugar de su pluma habitual, compuso un álbum que tituló *J'ai fait un Dream*.

El artículo pretende examinar las formas y el contenido del humor y comprender su funcionamiento. También quiere poner de relieve las preocupaciones ya presentes en otros libros de Elalamy, cuya capacidad para comprender la sociedad marroquí contemporánea es indudable.

Palabras Clave: Encierro, Humor, Marruecos, Caricatura, Narcisismo.

L'umorismo come via d'uscita dal lockdown

Sinossi

Il lockdown della primavera del 2020 ha paralizzato il pianeta, obbligando i cittadini a restare chiusi in casa. Il Marocco non ha fatto eccezione e, nel marzo del 2020, è stato costretto al confinamento. Per uno scrittore, la situazione di immobilità forzata ha un effetto duplice, perché può essere sia un periodo di produzione intensa, sia una fonte di preoccupazione

per la perdita di autonomia e la mancanza di contatto umano. Di conseguenza, entra in scena la resistenza, mentre l'immaginazione cede il posto a una fuga intellettuale che assume la forma di una rinnovata creatività nell'esprimere sentimenti o raccontare fatti. In questo processo ci sono elementi ricorrenti. Youssouf Amine Elalamy, accademico e autore marocchino, ha scelto l'humour per liberarsi dai vincoli e rivelare le fantasie. Servendosi di inchiostro indiano invece della penna abituale, ha composto un album che ha intitolato *J'ai fait un Dream*.

L'articolo intende esaminare forme e contenuti dell'humour e capirne il funzionamento. Lo scopo è anche evidenziare le preoccupazioni già presenti in altri libri di Elalamy, la cui capacità di comprendere la società marocchina contemporanea è fuori discussione.

Parole chiave: Lockdown, Umore, Marocco, Caricatura, Narcisismo.

Humour as a way to get away from lockdown

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Silence fell upon the world in March 2020. Silence and a general paralysis, which left everyone sedentary, alone with themselves at home. The lack of entertainment as well as being reduced to the only “voyage around the bedroom” (de Maistre, 1794) have shaken people’s psyche while the media and the governments mentioned an enemy, which, though invisible, could be transmitted by a mere encounter. The Other then became threatening, a potential danger that had to be avoided. Such an attitude is totally opposed to what drives a writer: the observation of his fellow humans, sometimes through empathy and that he perceives as an anxiety filled by both the lack of freedom and fear of death. The fight against this harmful atmosphere became imperious and led to take refuge in creation, all the more so in Morocco, where conviviality is at the heart of any social encounter.

In such a prospect, Youssouf Amine Elalamy moved away from fiction and chose to write an album made of images without obvious link, a fragmented account of night wanderings. The book contains about one hundred drawings and proposes an image of its own entity undergoing metamorphoses. The drawings are accompanied by short explanatory texts. These physical variations, which play with the interactions between psyche, body and imagination, revolve around themes reflecting the obsessions of the mind in such troubled times and referring to constraints and their accompanying anxiety so as to try and set free from them through humour.

1. Humour as a commitment

First, in order to briefly introduce Youssouf Amine Elalamy, who calls himself YAE, it is worth mentioning that each one of his publications (a dozen novels and short-stories collections) largely uses humour. It is probably the result of his kinship with British literature and its black humour.

As for the wit and play on words, they result from his studies at the Lycée Français in Rabat and from his readings.

Though it is acknowledged that humour encompasses multiple aspects, its Latin origin (*humor*) referring to the Hippocratic theory of the humours, is here left aside to the benefit of the distance taken with the thing mentioned. This process, *de facto*, entails a smile as one examines a given situation with a certain coldness that excludes “the feeling of superiority of the person laughing and the combined devaluation of the thing/person being laughed at” (Moura, 2010, p. 27).

Elalamy’s approach followed this when he wrote *J’ai fait un Dream*. The title itself is filled with derision: firstly because of the mixing of two languages, and secondly because of the obvious reference to Martin Luther King’s speech, *I have a dream*¹. As it is used in a health context, its only common point with the original occurrence lies in the absence of freedom and the feeling of ostracising and insecurity. The assertion of the self, “J’ai fait”, is devoid of the militancy of the American Civil Rights Movement to focus more on an omnipresent Ego, which announces an imaginative delirium begotten by an imposed lockdown.

Also, the subtitle is meaningful: “Petit livre de twittérature illustrée”, which mixes the use of the abridged discourse used in Twitter (twitt) and literature cut from a part of its letters as etymologically speaking *litterae* means letters. This paves the way to the presence of short texts but also the notion of fractioning, which is, according to Elalamy, brought about by the unsettling experience of lockdown.

The Self is a major part of the illustration on the front cover. As a matter of fact, it is represented by this funny little man wearing striped trousers and a dotted jacket, bare-arms, the face of whom resemble Picasso’s portraits and a reminder of Egyptian frescos. One can then sense the fantastic aspect of self-portrait as well as self-mockery, which both liven up the metamorphoses of the character. The left foot, resting on a globe no larger than a ball, heralds self-reflection and the swelling of the Ego initiated by compulsory isolation.

Also present on the next page, the figurine is accompanied by a text which expresses the afore mentioned dream: “I have dreamt that the planet was getting smaller and I was growing bigger. Difficult then to keep your feet on the ground” “J’ai rêvé que la planète était de plus en plus petite et moi de plus en plus grand. Difficile dans ces cas-là de garder les pieds sur terre”. The character, which appears as a caricature of the author, is transformed into many figures, some of which are a hybridization between man and animal. This obviously hints at the bestiality of mankind but also at precise reminders of the epidemics. Furthermore, the use of black and

¹ Speech given on August 28th, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC.

white throughout the book clearly suggests the division of the psyche which excludes all forms of nuances. This choice is all the more edifying as “chronèmes” are particularly important and always full of meaning in YAE’s writings. (Rey & Mimoso-Ruiz, 2021).

As a consequence, the album resembles press caricatures, which aims at denouncing human’s failings or the oddity, even stupidity, of a situation through humour. YAE’s approach follows these elements but places them at the level of the elucubrations engendered by sleep or daydream, that is at a time when conscience is freed from good manners to express one’s most incongruous preoccupations or fantasies. In the context of Morocco, the flaws of which YAE has often highlighted, these caricatures embody the preoccupations of the author, prove to be sometimes haunting and constitute a proof of how essential the freedom of expression is (Ory, 2015).

In this unique introspection, YAE hints at, more than his personal unease, the problems encountered by and disturbing Morocco and to some extent Maghreb and the whole planet.

Humour used to consider lockdown as a revealing element, just like vinegar or acetic acid allow a photography to appear. The set of personal fantasies proposes a series of images of the Moroccan (and more largely the Mediterranean basin) society and its preoccupations, among which extreme Islamism. Other themes are linked to our contemporary world – pollution, emigration, racism – or prove more personal, like death, libido and of course the feelings entailed by a forced seclusion.

2. *Humour and religion*

Several illustrations allude to religion in all its excess and useless demands, some elements of which the author stigmatises, hence creating stereotypes.

The first refers to the original sin: “I dreamt that I was in the garden of Eden and the fruit that was given to me was rotten”. It reminds of the weight of guilt as well as represents some kind of incredulity in the text. Much in the same way, the image shows a character holding an apple from which a worm comes out. The reference to Charlie Chaplin’s movie (*The Circus*, 70 mns, 1928) is quite obvious even though it has a different meaning. In fact, for Chaplin the aim is to undo the legend of William Tell and also probably to call into question the legend of the Big Apple and the myth of the American dream (Vigouroux-Frey, 1999, p. 148), while for YAE, it is a question of undoing the myth of paradise on Earth as it is henceforth wormy.

Another one is more directly linked to Islam; it shows the character dressed as a Pedrolino whose outfit is sliced; to which a comment about the obligation of eating halal meat is added. This establishes a link between the devouring woman – “I dreamt that no women wanted to eat me because my meat wasn’t halal” – and what is coined as pure food. It also alludes to the *Commedia dell’Arte* with the white outfit with black buttons. If the readers think further, they come to the conclusion that the playfulness of Pedrolino annihilates the religious recommendation by endowing it with a farcical dimension.

It is the same thing, later on, when the protagonist has four arms, which clearly recalls Shiva, who is reduced to this detail in the comment: “I dreamt that I was an Indian deity and that I was wandering with my love arm in arm, arm in arm”. The spiritual value of the divine power all over the four cardinal points is lost to the benefit of a derisory lovers’ walk despite the imposed lockdown.

Then comes an image of Jesus Christ on the cross, or more precisely a bearded man in a crucifixion position, with a desacralizing legend: “I dreamt that they wanted to crucify me, but couldn’t find nails” “J’ai rêvé qu’on voulait me crucifier, mais qu’on ne trouvait pas de clous”. The central scene of Christianity completely loses the idea of sacrifice and falls into triviality.

Buddhism is not spared either. It is shown in its Chinese version with a paunchy, cross-legged Chan Butai but without its friendly smile, which annihilates the image of benevolence normally associated with it. Usually a symbol of prosperity, Buddha here appears as suffering from obesity, a comorbidity criterion according to the doctors: “I dreamt that I was Buddha and all the doctors agreed on saying that I was a risky case”.

The uneasiness that goes together with lockdown is also perceptible in the angel-winged figurine represented by a detail of the icon, but it comes with the comment “allergic to feathers” which reduces a sacred and allegorical code to a biological malfunctioning.

These examples, all linked to religion, stigmatise faith in its specificities and deprive it from any spiritual dimension. It may be read as a response to Mahomet’s caricatures published in Denmark and in the French newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, the dreadful outcome of which we all remember. It then stands as an assertion of the freedom of speech.

However, if YAE makes fun of religions, he does not provide of image of Mohamed the prophet. He limits himself to the mention of one of Islam’s rules, halal food. Neither does he criticize the Hebrew tradition, except for the mention of the Garden of Eden, which is actually common to all three monotheist religions. Mocking religion may verge on blaspheme, but it never crosses the line and sometimes leads to a bitter smile.

Humour, which is paradoxically inspired by reason in this apparent delirium, rests upon distance and exaggeration. Contradiction belongs to

the irrationality of dreams. This is essentially in line with Voltaire's vision: cults are only visual manifestations devoid of meaning. In this respect, YAE dismisses the idea of the pandemic being a divine retribution, in line with the tradition considering all plague as a new version of the Flood. According to him, it is more a criticism of superstition than a rejection of God, which implies a dissociation with the discourse heard in some mosques where the virus needed there to be fought against not with medical treatment but thanks to a new form of djihad with the purification of the planet from non-believers. (Fondation Recherche stratégique, 2020).

YAE allows himself to use caricatures to bring them back to their true dimension: discrediting stereotypes and associating the religious discourse during the pandemic with a simplistic belief.

3. *Humour and Covid 19*

If religion does not appear as a help and is shown in everything superficial, Covid 19 is represented by all the constraints it has generated. Indeed, the first mention focuses on the feeling of clausturation, for an unspecified duration, with the drawing of a fading character inside an hourglass together with the comment: "I dreamt that we were all locked up and it was only a question of time". "J'ai rêvé que nous étions tous confinés et que ça n'était qu'une question de temps" Proximity with death can be read through the next illustration showing a funeral urn, inside which an imprisoned character tries to open the top with his foot. The text leads the reader to consider lockdown as a step to an unavoidable death: "I dreamt that they could not incinerate me but had still managed to put me inside the urn". The use of *on*, an impersonal pronoun in French, summarizes the ways in which governments' decisions were perceived by the populations, that is to say without any identifiable figure, conveying thus the impression of an obscure coalition.

The absurdity of the situation becomes provocative when the character sees himself as a homeless obliged to stay inside. The obligation of staying at home becomes meaningless when it comes to homeless people; it even nourished many bad jokes seen on social networks.

Paradoxically, the terms "coronavirus" or "Covid-19" do not appear; they are only alluded to with words such as "virus" or "epidemic" and suggested by their effects and consequences on people's mind, imagination or unconscious.

Such an omission is meaningful and makes it easy to recognise the so far unprecedented phenomenon. In fact, the reader can do so thanks to clues – about lockdown for instance – but also to clear suggestions. As an example, it is the case with China, where the virus originated: "I dreamt that

I was dressed up as Mickey Mouse and that Chinese people had mistaken me for a bat and wanted to eat me.” “J’ai rêvé que j’étais déguisé en Mickey que des Chinois m’avaient pris pour une chauve-souris et voulaient me manger”. First, Mickey Mouse embodies here the US nation as the economic rival of China. Then, the bat alludes to the supposed origin of the virus and underlines the eating habit of the Chinese people. In fact, it is acknowledged that the virus first appeared in Wuhan’s market which had been infected by bats. Added to this is the xenophobia that gripped the West in the face of what Donald Trump has called “the Chinese virus”, an anxiety response correlated with the observation of the powerlessness of science.

Wearing a mask is far from the Mediterranean people’s habits and it is mentioned in the only hope to see it disappear: “I dreamt that we finally had overcome the epidemic and that I could take my mask off.” The anaphora “I dreamt that” suggests an indefinite duration and reinforces the theatrical aspect initiated by the figure of Pedrolino. Unlike what is expected, the mask bears the features of the character and once removed it lets appear an empty face, thus highlighting the absurdity of the situation.

This ideas can also be perceived in the playing card where the character becomes a king holding a sword: “I dreamt that I was wearing a crown and that I was mistaken for a virus.”

“J’ai rêvé que je portais une couronne et qu’on m’avait pris pour un virus”. This obviously refers to the peoples’ obedience to the advances of the pandemic which then ruled human behaviour. This is confirmed by two other images, one evoking Adolf Hitler with his military uniform, moustache and lock of hair on the forehead. However, the swastika is replaced by a heart, and torture changes into tickles. Hitler is then devoid of any monstrosity and is rather presented as a puppet, which in the end sheds light on the unsettling dimension of the pandemic. The second image is linked to black humour as it shows the character wearing a long white gown, a white pointed hat and holding a torch. It is followed by a comment which summarizes the Ku Klux Klan’s ideology : “I dreamt that I was a depressed racist and that I was in the doldrums”².

The presence of the sect which is the most representative of racial hatred and the allusions to the persecutions against Black people in the Southern states of the US both suggest the devastating effects of the pandemic among the Afro-American population as well as the inertia of Donald Trump’s administration in protecting these citizens.

The plays on words which appear throughout the book come together with black humour when the devastating effects of the virus on the respiratory tract are represented by a nest with three eggs resting on lungs,

² Literally, “broyer du noir” means “smash some black(s)”.

as seen through X-rays. The most common cause of death is here combined with the popular expression in French “faire son nid”³ and the comment “in my bed, at night, I could hear it whistle” “le soir dans mon lit, je l’entendais siffler” which offhandedly refers to the symptoms of respiratory infection.

Taking seriously the obligations and precautions to protect people, the book puts hygiene and barrier gestures forward. For the first, the character physically changes and explains the transformation like this: “I dreamt that I was cleansed and I shrank while in the washing machine”. “J’ai rêvé que pour me désinfecter, on m’avait passé à la machine et que j’avais rétréci au lavage”. It is obviously a metaphor of the restrictions of freedom and the obligation to wash hands. As for lockdown and the removal of physical contact, they are shown through a sewn mouth, a truncated body with arms crossed behind the back and legs stuck in the chest. And, as a testimony of the forced immobility and the suppression of any manifestation of affection, the comment says: “I dreamt that I could no longer kiss someone, hold them in my arms or even stand outside. “J’ai rêvé que je n’avais plus le droit d’embrasser, ni de prendre quelqu’un dans mes bras, ni même de mettre un pied dehors”. Here too, the popular expression is transcribed in its first sense which becomes grotesque, in the bakhtinian sense of the term, because linked to deadly impulses (Bakhtine, 1970).

The troubles linked with the emergence of the virus and their ensuing protective measures come under a common feeling of threat and loss of autonomy in movements and emotional life.

YAE has chosen humour by taking official recommendations at face value and showing the accompanying psychological damage in the drawings. Such a behaviour clearly belongs to an intellectual taking his distance with the pandemic; it also is a way to find, in creation, a compensation to bans. This allows some kind of psychological transgression unlike what sociological surveys conducted in France and Morocco indicated: that populations were passive and subdued because they were frightened by the situation. (Mariot, Mercklé & Perdoncin, 2020). In Morocco, the phenomenon was studied in *the Survey on the impact of Coronavirus on the social, economic and psychological situation of households (Enquête sur l’impact du coronavirus sur la situation sociale, économique et psychologique des ménages)*, conducted by Abdelhak Najib et Imane Kendili in 2021 upon the request of “le Haut-Commissariat au Plan” (High Commission for Planning).

³ Literally it means “make one’s nest”; but it can also mean “set up” or “set in”.

4. Humour as an expression of fantasies

Living in a country where frontiers are closed (15 March 2020) and the state of emergency declared right after (20 March 2020) left the population without any personal project especially because no end date was given. Being under strict travel controls severely enforced by the police, people developed frustrations and a feeling of insecurity that only imagination could ease. In this logic, it is in times of privation that fantasies emerge, covered by dreams that are out of control because they appear while sleeping or result from a mind's wandering. The vision of the Self in a hybrid-half man, half animal – mode undoubtedly is a variation of Oedipe's Centaurus or Jérôme Bosch's creatures that were taken up by Surrealism as the reminiscence of an animistic cult present in religions in India or Egypt for instance. This therianthropy is sometimes, according to some psychiatric studies, linked to behavioural disorder, which allows a lingering doubt on the effects of lockdown on people's psyche. However, in the book under study, it fully belongs to the creation process and gives the various urges one could be submitted to during lockdown. As a matter of fact, the character is successively transformed into a fish, a pangolin, a giraffe, and finally into a butterfly. The choice of animals is quite significant: the fish allows YAE to hint at another painful phenomenon in Morocco, that is to say the often deadly attempts of *harragas* to cross the Strait of Gibraltar. The image of the fish alludes to two novels by the author: *Illegal immigrants – Les Clandestins – and War is beautiful – C'est beau, la guerre*.

The first novel gives a voice to some dead migrants drown in the Mediterranean Sea and often compared to fishes. The second portrays an actor fleeing by sea a country completely devastated by bombing, which is confirmed by the comment under the drawing: "I dreamt I had lost both my legs, both my arms during the fights but when I had to cross the sea to flee, I was in my element". "J'ai rêvé que les combats m'avaient pris les deux jambes et les deux bras, mais lorsqu'il a fallu traverser pour fuir la guerre, j'étais comme un poisson dans l'eau". The French expression "être comme un poisson dans l'eau"⁴ is here ironic in the way that it establishes a gap between the disasters of migration and the easiness it suggests.

As for the pangolin, it is a hint at the rumour making of this animal a scapegoat as, because it is appreciated by Chinese people for its supposed medicinal virtues, it was declared the origin of the pandemic: "I dreamt that I was a pangolin and that, all alone, I defeated all human beings". However, if the pangolin bears viruses as any other mammal, "the analysis of the genetic material of SARS-Cov2, the virus responsible for the pandemic, shows that it is very comparable to coronavirus found in bats.

⁴ Literally, "to be like a fish in water".

Does that mean that pangolin has nothing to do with the current pandemic? The answer is no, because the S protein visible at the surface of the virus – the entrance key to human cells – is very close to the pangolin’s coronavirus S protein. In other words, the pangolin virus is the entrance door”. (David, 2020). The linkage of the character to the pangolin underlines how ridiculous its stigmatisation is. It also aims at condemning society’s vision of difference and the speed with which it is prone to accusing in order to find a scapegoat identified by all as the guilty one (Girard, 1982).

The giraffe with a human face incarnates hybridity as a source of instability in a world where uniformity is a rule. As the animal is imprisoned in a zoo, it underlines the fact that social constraints are bad for individual fulfilment: “I dreamt that, visiting the zoo, I had meant an animal in the midst of an identity crisis”. “J’ai rêvé qu’en visitant le zoo, j’avais rencontré un animal en pleine crise identitaire”.

In such a bestiary, the personality of the character is polymorphous, an indication of the instability resulting from lockdown which imposes self-questioning. The only ray of hope is the presence of a butterfly in the last pages of the book, thus representing the last step of the metamorphosis toward freedom. However, the anaphora “*I dreamt that* I finally was out of my cocoon”, immediately suppresses the idea of freedom by referring to a chimera.

The drawings portraying animals belong to a long tradition, first of fables then of comics and can make us think of Art Spiegelman (1980-1991) who transposed Nazis’ persecutions on Jews into cats chasing mice. Nonetheless, the author is in YAE’s book physically present as the intra and homodiegetic narrator (Genette, 1972), who claims responsibility for the imaginative delusions that he tries to overcome.

Together with these metaphors, there are more personal fantasies, as, for instance, that of wanting to still make one’s partner dream. This obviously shows some kind of discontent, of romantic frustration. Others, in a society where virility is important, express the fear of helplessness, even impotence, with women: “I dreamt that I was making love to a mermaid and she couldn’t come”. The play on word brings face to face the popular expression with the fact a mermaid doesn’t have feet and can’t therefore “take(prendre) her foot (son pied)”. The expression here loses its meaning and is on the verge of absurdity as “the absurdity of the words is added to the absurdity of the situation” much in the same way as nobody then really understood the (irrational) pandemic. (Perès, 2016, p. 117). The fascination for anything that is feminine, the dream to change sex are perceptible when the character sees himself dressed as and behaving like Marilyn Monroe in the famous scene of *The Seven Year Itch* (Bill Wilder 1955) – taken up in a Tex Avery cartoon – when Marylin stands in a white dress above a metro

air vent. The allusion to the American movie is devoid of all its sensuality with the comment: "I dreamt that I was Marilyn and hadn't waxed that day". The uneasiness felt in front of women becomes ridiculous and even appears as a deadly resignation when the character is hit, not in the heart but in the navel, by an arrow and says: "I dreamt that Cupid hadn't aimed accurately and that love made me sick". The arrow in the navel alludes to narcissism as a metaphor of withdrawal into oneself and an expression of suffering, which humour seems to attenuate. Fantasy becomes a reality with the drawings, even though they are often contradicted by the comments accompanying them. The constant swing between dream and disappointment marks the instability the character has to cope with while maintaining a certain distance since, because it is a "dream", it is less terrible.

Conclusion

Choosing the pandemic as the main theme of one's book may seem provoking if we consider the number of casualties; it may even make us believe that, out of respect for the victims, there are forbidden topics. This would amount to believe that art is under some kind of moral censorship when it is in fact below and beyond and should only be seen as an artist's vision of reality and the world combined with his own imagination. Even though the character epitomizes Morocco, it represents a kind of universality, much in the same way as the pandemic does. Such a *mimesis*, entwined with humour, rejects the idea according to which humour is a European, even Anglo-saxon, trait. It then follows Mohammed Aïssaoui conception when he said: "Yes, Arabs also are endowed with a sense of humour! Humour is a form of resistance to obscurantism", that is to say to all that is not accessible through Reason: "Yes, the Arabs have also humour! It is a form of resistance against obscurantism" (Aïssaoui, 2015, p. 9)

In this respect, YAE's album exemplifies modern time literature, that is far from the prejudices surrounding books coming from Maghreb considered by some people as mere ethnic testimonies. YAE's approach, using a variation of comic books, playfully expresses one's need to set free from personal anxiety. In doing so, he expresses the anxieties of all human beings: the fear of death, the fear of not being in tune with what is expected from you. The whole book makes us smile as a way to defend ourselves from forbidden things, frustrations and the uncertainty concerning the end of the pandemic. Humour takes many forms in the book but is closer to black humour than to anything else. In fact, it highlights the impossibility of the character to break free from the grip of the virus. The only possible

escape is imagination as the recurring anaphora “I dreamt” suggests. André Breton (Breton, 2019, p. 15) mentioned the freeing power of humour citing Freud: “Humour is not only a liberation factor, much in the same way as the mind and comedy, but it is also sublime and higher [...] The sublime is obviously linked to narcissism, to the invulnerability of the Ego which victoriously asserts itself”, which is reinforced by the recurrence of the personal pronoun I.

“Humorous is not only something liberating, analogue to the spirit of the comic, but also something sublime and elevated”. (Freud, 1994, p.137). The use of black for the illustrations as for the nature of humour lets the shadow of death linger as Dominique Noguez suggests: “Black, obviously representative of humour, is linked with death” (Noguez, 2000, p. 227). Even though narcissism is undeniably present as a protective shield, the metamorphoses of the body hint at the fragility of being. Nonetheless, the character never loses his head, thus keeping safe his true freedom.

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