WHAT DOES A MAN WANT?

Ljiljana Filipovic, Zagreb University, Academy of Dramatic Art

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As jokes are one of the ways to our unconscious, idea is to show how jokes, very often obscene one, in this case on Bosnian woman Fata, can be one of the ways of recognizing not just woman's identity but as well as men's identity, considering her, this main character of a joke, also as an archetypal figure like Antigone or Electra, and thus also as revealing factor of our unconscious.

- It is war, the war in Bosnia due to the collapse of ex-Yugoslavia. There are piles of dead men completely mutilated except for their genitals and nobody can identify them, so Fata is called to help with identification. She looks at their genitals and names them: this one is Mujo, that one is Haso, this one is Fikret and so on. But in front of one man, she has paused for a moment and said:

- This one is not from our village!

Sigmund Freud admitted in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* that obscene jokes have been far more rarely deemed worthy of investigation, as though aversion to the thing itself had been transferred to the discussion of it. In his opinion smut is originally directed towards women and may be equated with attempts at seduction. We can also observe how men of a higher class, says Freud, are at once induced, when they are in the company of girls of an inferior class, to reduce their smutty jokes to the level of simple smut. While a person who laughs at smut that he hears is laughing as though he were the spectator of an act of sexual aggression. Namely, it is not the person who makes the joke who laughs at it and who therefore enjoys its pleasurable effect but inactive listener.2

We all know who Antigone or Electra are, these archetypal figures of sister (who disobeys ruler's command and decides to bury her brother at the cost of her life), and revengeful daughter (who, with help of her brother, has taken revenge on their mother and her lover because they have murdered their father). But who is Fata, that unknown woman who more or less exists in every language, under different names (it is Bara in Croatia, for example), as an object of a joke? Or, more correctly, main character and the laughable object in obscene jokes which nowadays can be found even on a web site.

Fata is a woman from Bosnia, and as her name signals she is Muslim. This is very important, also geopolitically, because she represents the third major religion in ex-Yugoslavia and Bosnian Muslims have always been mocked upon, objects of a joke. But she is also the one who has actually survived as Yugoslav from ex-Yugoslavia. One of the lasts which has stayed as such in our unconscious, which occupies the empty place of once existing political identity, lost national identity, the only real Yugoslav woman. Neither Serbs or Croats or Muslims have ever stopped to tell jokes about her.

What is Fata like? Fata is completely and always sexual, even when she is, like in the told joke, character of an obscene but morbid joke, which is very often the case. She is also frequently slow thinking, ugly, poor but good-hearted, naive, simple-minded, unsophisticated, very often a victim.
As for Electra, we are all well aware that Electra's plot has been used as a parallel story to Oedipus, and inspired psychoanalysts, namely Jung, to construct a parallel complex - Electra's complex. But although we cannot say that story of Electra gives the answers to the psychoanalytical hypothesis of the female development or that Electra's complex belongs to the Jung's conceptual system of archetypes, and even though it didn't fit to the Freud system from the very beginning, it has nevertheless stayed present as such and it appears repeatedly as a fundamental idea of psychoanalytic theory. The question is – why, especially as drama itself reveals completely different matrix of the one in Oedipus. Nonetheless, entering behind the Greek models means also going through, or behind labelling by concepts of Oedipus and Electra.

Antigone is an ideal figure representing courage and determination so it is no wonder that her personality has been model for various plays or theoretical and ethical discussions by Hegel, Lacan, etc. In contrast to these shiny but tragic although glamorous figures, archetypes of sublime daughter and sister who have inspired the most famous authors, and even one stream in psychoanalysis there is this unknown, uninteresting, despised woman, of humble origin, which probably lives in every linguistic area in the world as an laughable object, very often regarded unworthy even by her fellow countrymen showing also possible political context of the joke. Here, this is Fata:

- Mujo and Haso, two Bosnians are looking for Fata who has been missing, so they have come to the police station to report that and there they meet utterly upset Janez, a man from Slovenia, who has been desperately looking for missing Mojca, Slovenian woman, as her name discloses. They ask him how she looks like and he describes her as tall, slim, with a blond long hair, blue eyes, long legs, beautiful...

And Mujo and Haso immediately decide:

- Forget Fata let's search for Mojca!

However, Antigone, Electra and Fata suggest similarities: Each of them are literary characters used all over again (of course Fata more often as this permits inherent character of a joke) as a reflection of some period of history of mankind. Their names are rich in meaning. Fata comes from Fatima, which in Turkish means the woman who rejects the baby from her breast, or in Latin from fatum, which means destiny. Electra is amber, goldy, shiny but also, as A-lektra, unmated. Antigone - bear against, borne against or for.

All three of them are alone, solitary figures or lonely in a way in which main characters often are, one could say they act like singles, autonomously, they are losers, but nevertheless they are heroes, they are fair, they are honest. They have all made the necessary step by which the individual emerges from group, they are also politically involved, or they are used as a subtle political comment like in the following joke on Fata:

- Fata had sex with one man from UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Forces in Bosnia), and after the whole thing she asks:

- Have you got certificate that you are not HIV positive?

-Yes - he answers.

And Fata says:

- Well, now you can throw it away.
Although it is an obscene joke it also reveals the hidden feelings towards the political context and the men from UNPROFOR. Unlike Electra and Antigone who are decisive so that Electra is revengeful, and Antigone is uncompromising, or that Thanatos rules their lives, Fata has a forgiving nature, she is foolish but pliable, kind-hearted, she is not glamorous as a beauty (but then let's recall that Antigone becomes beautiful only when she finds herself between the two deaths, symbolic and the real one, when she is excommunicated), she is slow-thinking, silly, but while Electra and Antigone are maids, Fata is very sexual, lustful, Eros reigns her life:

- **Fata has three similarly ugly sons.**

  - How do you recognise them - she has been frequently asked.

  And she explains:

  - By their second names, family names!

  ....

- **Or how Fata makes comparison of big:**

  - Big, bigger, big enough!

While Electra and Antigona are ruled by gods, Fata is ruled by people, the chorus (we could say she is acting as PR for chorus, she is its loudspeaker, or she is chorus herself), she would not kill because of love neither for brother or father, she would rather take submissive position of a benevolent person than being bitter and revengeful on purpose. However, all three of them act by their self-will, they are all candid in their actions and disregard any consequences in the world of living.

Fata, similar to Antigone or Electra leads us to catharsis but not to one which stems from tragedy but to one which stems from joke. Although she is often victim of the jokes, she is not self-victim, resentful or full of self-pity, she would appreciate Eros more then Thanatos. Even though jokes about her operate as a veil to our unconscious, signalling thus that we are hiding our shame, humility or diffidence, Fata functions like every day mirror showing to us every change in us and our scenery.

But who are Electras or Antingones nowadays? It would be difficult to imagine a contemporary woman who would say that she would die for a brother but not for a husband or a child since the latter can be duplicated and brother cannot. Unfortunately, modern Antigone can be considered more like a sister of Gregor Samsa from Franz Kafka's short story "Metamorphosis" who wants to throw her brother out from their home as an repulsive vermin, while Electra would most likely just dump her parents in old people's home or remember their weaknesses on some T.V. show.

Freud and his followers encouraged women to participate in the psychoanalytical movement. But although some of them have inspired with their ideas future feminists, first psychoanalytical hypothesis have been considered as promoters of the discrimination towards women. Juliet Mitchell has criticised some anti-Freudian feminist’s accusations of his concepts because they understood his texts literally and in that way neglected psychoanalytical context of the unconscious mental processes.

For Jacques Lacan masculinity and femininity are symbolical positions. So his provocative claim, that woman does not exist, just remind us that there is no universal understanding of what it means to be a woman. While Freud poses enigmatic question: What does a woman want? considering feminity as a mystery, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari agree with a feminist statement: We are not castrated. But for them the problem is only if unconscious itself believes in that, because what kind of unconscious is that which only believes instead that it produces.
But have women ever answered Freud's question about their want, and in that way closed their bibliographical departments filled with resentment, historical revivifications, and mutual sophistry, solving thus this enigma because isn't that also the answer to the liberated question: What is actually that what men want? Because is it accidental that the concept of the doubtful Electra's complex has arrived to our days in spite all wrong interpretations, even of the fundamental dramas? Is it accidental that Freud has the question for the women entrusted to the woman and the pupil, Marie Bonaparte.6 Is it necessary that woman’s mysteriousness should be equalled with invisibility? Although the art of posing the questions doesn't have to correspond to the parallel art of answering, undoubtedly it opens up that possibility.

The unconscious factors inherent in jokes are binding moment for the listeners. Jokes very often, with its density, allow the listeners possibility to feel superior towards their past, towards their weaknesses in relation to former and present acceptances of grotesque situations which are now mocked. Questions and issues that are taboo are mentioned openly, contradictorily, in obscene jokes. Jokes serve as some kind of cathartic psychotherapy which enables the listeners to remember and in some way objectifies traumatic events and free themselves from the unpleasant affects.

Jokes could be read as symptoms of the social repression and their study corresponds to a return of the repressed.7 Politics in them has been turned into comical nonsense. True humour works not just as a critique but it has a therapeutic function as well. We could say that psychodrama has been replaced by psycho joke.

Humour acknowledges the problematic situation and indicates that it is necessary to transform it. Our laugh demonstrates how close the joke has come in disclosing our repressed or unconscious thoughts. Besides representation of social situation, humour functions also as the way of social critique and questions cultural codes. The joke is an opening from which the truth bursts out. Humour helps in accepting difficult topics. But as Sigmund Freud has reminded us, every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity.8

As it is known condition for the recognition of the joke is implicit social understanding and correspondence between the structure of a joke and the social framework. Consequently, jokes are often not translatable in a way that they could produce humorist effect on foreigners because they are connected with particularities of language and are interwoven with cultural, historical and political context of the area from which they stem, its past and everyday life. Hence the joke could be understood as a communion for the community which shares the same ideology. A joke is, and what Freud confirms, the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure. "It often calls for three persons and its completion requires the participation of someone else in the mental process it starts. The condition of intelligibility is, therefore, binding on it; it may only make use of possible distortion in the unconscious through condensation and displacement up to the point at which it can be set straight by the third person's understanding." As he points out: "a joke is developed play".9

Tragedy in the net of psychoanalysis and literature initiates reflection of that interaction. Not only because it is in the foundation of psychoanalytic study, in the roots of our experience, 10 but as it is similar to psychoanalysis itself, it is normal that it is also its (psychoanalytical) concern. In the text "Comedy and Finitude" Simon Critchley points out that tragedy assumes fearless hero, who is able to confirm his finitude only through his heroism. Since that destroys a real and less idealised recognition of our finitude, he proposes, as an alternative, a comedy which is something more appropriate to our experiences of being finite as we are far from being heroes. Therefore "the tragic heroic paradigm", has been replaced by "the comic anti-heroic paradigm". Namely, more than heroism, it is humour that "recalls us to the modesty and limitedness of the human condition, a limitedness that calls not for tragic affirmation but comic acknowledgement, not heroic authenticity but laughable inauthenticity".11 And he considers the case of Antigone who affirms the finitude of the political law as well as human
being acting as a fearless, aloof and unyielding person even when she is confronted with death. Critchley sees that heroism as contradiction to the finitude it aims to affirm and deems that it should be broken in order that Antigone emerges as a more modest acknowledgement of our human finitude. By making her less pure, by letting her “break wind on the way to her death” he says, she would give us a more appropriate image of our limitedness.

Already in Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious we could find what kind of associations produces Antigone, as Greek tragedy, in contemporary public. Freud retells how once Sophocles’ Antigone was produced in Berlin and “the critics complained that the production was lacking in the proper character of antiquity. Berlin wit made the criticism its own in the following words: ‘Antik? Oh, nee’”.

But need Antigone or Electra actually to belch or break wind to become, or give the impression of being more human? Jokes on someone like Fata step into the places which are not approachable to them. In this context obscene jokes have special meaning as they reveal how we construct not just our sexual identities but also our desires. The joke, especially the obscene one, reveals male's attitude towards the female identity but thus also his own identity. And as it frequently exposes cultural diversity and politics of the area from which it stems, it could be considered as geopolitical issue, or geopsychoanalytical one.

- Fata starts visiting international workshop for women where they have been complaining how repressed they are, how they work too much, particularly at home, etc. So the woman-leader of the workshop has given advice to the group:

  - Well, when you come home refuse to cook, iron, or wash etc. and let’s see what’s going to happen in three weeks.

After three weeks she asks Englishwoman:

  - So have you seen any progress?

  And she answers:

  - Yes, my husband was so afraid that I was going to leave him that he started to iron and wash.

Then the leader asks Frenchwoman:

  - Have you noticed some change?

  And Frenchwoman replies:

  - Definitely, my partner takes me out every night to have dinner.

Finally she puts the same question to Fata, if she has seen something and Fata answers:

  - The first week I couldn't see a thing, and the second week was the same, only the third week I could have started seeing a little with my left eye.

Obscene jokes unavoidably emphasize the question of sex of the person about whom they speak. And as they are mostly directed to the women this also opens up a question of shame, which Freud considers in context of inherent but conventional feminine characteristic. At this point it is difficult not to recall Salman Rushdie’s novel Shame, in which the animal of shame is situated just in one woman. Namely, she accumulates in herself the shame which others do not feel and which finally turns her into a horrifying creature who not just kills everyone who has disgraced someone, but at the
end just everyone. Another important issue on relation between women and obscene jokes concerns the women to whom jokes are told or the one who are retelling the obscene jokes. Very often Freud is ready to turn obscene jokes which women tell into the slip of tongue finding his reasons in the repression as a power which makes it difficult or impossible for women, and to lesser degree for men as well, to enjoy undisguised obscenity.

Recently at a political assembly in Croatia one foreigner, a member of SFOR (stabilisation forces) situated in Bosnia, has told to another one, who has obviously just arrived in this area, and in context of data about Bosnia:

- Women there are absolutely the most beautiful women in Balkan.

Is that our Fata? Where does she sleep nowadays in that divided Bosnia, ethnically very cleansed? How is she geopolitically placed after the war in Bosnia? As jokes show Fata is everywhere, because she inhibits us.

In that way Fata - who has become classic figure through obscene joke, and who teaches us not just about female identity (often expressed in the roles of mother, sister, lover, daughter) and discloses our fears, desires, repressed situations - is an archetypal figure like Antigone or Electra. Joke is like harmless play of the power which springs from permanent powerlessness. Fata, more than archetypal tragic figures, demonstrates the actual relation towards women but this very relation often reveals cultural and political truths. Obscene jokes are frequently typical release of tension in morbid, sad and unbearable situation. Joke as a form which quickly and constantly changes, where eternity is a moment while, as it is said, moment in tragedy is eternity, has opportunity to disclose, in the same way as archetypal texts, identity of the maker and the listener of a joke, of a mutual inter-play of that what woman and man wants. Fata’s lustfulness has reduced her only to the sexual object and thus she cannot activate horrifying instance, the picture which almost every man has on his mind, sublime picture of his mother. Nonetheless, Fata’s naïveté is often the source of unexpected turning points and subtle not agreeing to standard model of being just an object.

• Husband asks Fata:

- Would you like to be a man?

And she answers:

Would you?

If a desire which leads us is the desire of the Other, then Fata is the most literally one. Fata has survived while her homeland Bosnia still fights for its political life. And that is something which makes her a classic hero even though she is an antiheroic figure. The jokes on her are similar to the commentaries of chorus, which watches but doesn't participate. She functions as our unconscious, we could say that she is not just symptom of the man but also of the nation.

And at the end there is, no joke, but excerpt from reality which writes the best, but unfortunately bizarre, jokes.

A beautiful woman from Sarajevo has been arrested in Rome because of prostitution. She was caught unaware between her customers because she was completely immersed in reading. She was reading Kant. Namely, she was also a student of philosophy. (Der Spiegel, 13/2000)
2 Ibid., p. 143
5 Slavoj Zizek, “Izmjedu dve smrti” (Between two Deaths), Theoria 1-2/1986, Beograd.
6 “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is: ‘What does a woman want?’”. (Was will das Weib? (Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, Volume Two, London: The Hogarth Press, p. 468.
8 Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, op. cit., p. 203
9 Ibid., p. 238
11 Simon Critchley, “Comedy and Finitude” in Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity, London: Verso, 1999
12 Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, op. cit., p. 64
15 Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, op. cit., p. 145