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The Use of Verbal and Physical Comic Devices in Ann-Marie Macdonald's, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*.

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Ann-Marie Macdonald employs both verbal and physical comic devices in Act III, scene iv in her play, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*.

One verbal comic device is Macdonald's extensive allusion to sex through bawdy double entendres. Examples of this device include Romeo's lament to Constance, "O that I were a fountain pen within thy hand, / to spurt forth streams of eloquence at thy command," (63) and Juliet's admittance to Constance, "I'd have thee penetrate my secret source" (p. 64). This restoration comedy is very successful as it lightens the mood and allows the members of the audience to feel witty for catching the slightly obscure allusions.

Another verbal comic device is high burlesque parody. Romeo and Juliet's formal Elizabethan dialect used to sling insults at each other creates a comic juxtaposition:

JULIET     with each new lust, thou creepeth close  
                  unto the agèd day when soft moist lip  
                  and dewy eye convert to senile rheum.  
ROMEO     Thinkst *thou* to leave a lovely corpse my dear,  
                  when even now the crows have footed it  
                  In merry measure all about thine eyes? (p. 66).

Words like “thou” and the addition of “th” to the end of verbs such as “creepeth” (66) give the effect of high language, but still remain accessible to modern-day audiences.

Farcical low comedy slapstick... is used as a physical comic device with Romeo’s and Tybalt’s escalating “friendly brutality” (60-61). The scene is reminiscent of Sergeant Tackleberry and his father in the slapstick *Police Academy* series. “[T]he characters and their discomfitures engage [the audience’s] pleasurable attention rather than [their] profound concern” (Abrams, 38).

Another comic physical device is Constance’s cross-dressing. As Romeo and Juliet are unaware of her true identity, hilarity ensues. This also produces comic irony as the audience is in on the secret. Just as for Shakespeare, a willed suspension of disbelief is necessary for the sake of this enjoyment.

Verbal and physical comic devices serve to lighten the mood and engage the pleasurable attention of the audience.

### Negative Animal Imagery in Ann-MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and William Shakespeare’s *Othello*

Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and William Shakespeare’s *Othello* both use negative animal imagery to refer to human frailty, to repress characters, and to make comparisons and metaphors. Their reasons for using animal imagery, however, are different.

*Othello* employs an extensive chain of animal imagery. Within five acts, Shakespeare negatively refers to an ass, daw, fly, ram, ewe, Barbary horse, gennet, beast, cuckoo, cod, salmon, dog, lion, monster, goat, toad, monkey, wolf, raven, fitchew, hobbyhorse, bear, crocodile, and serpent. An example of how animals are used to show human frailty includes Iago’s description of Cassio’s and Desdemona’s lust for each other: “[w]ere they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride” (3.3.400-401). Iago’s appeal to Brabantio to rescue his daughter is an example of how animal imagery represses Othello: “you’ll have your nephews neigh to you, / ... and gennets for germans” (1.1.109-111). An example of a

comparison includes Othello's description of Desdemona's supposedly treacherous charms: "An admirable musician. O, she / will sing the savageness out of a bear" (4.1.190-191). Examples of metaphors include Iago's reference to Othello's and Desdemona's love for each other ("Even now... an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.85-86)) and Othello's reference to a Turk who traduced the state ("I took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him" (5.2.350-351)). Except Othello's reference to the silk worms that made his handkerchief and Emilia's dying attempt to "play the swan" (5.2.244) all animal images are used negatively. This consistent derogatory use stems from the general view of animals during the Elizabethan era - a poor and dirty time. Animals were viewed as ungodly, dangerous or merely as sustenance. Animal imagery in *Othello* is so pervasive, any adequate revision of the play must employ the same technique.

*Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* also uses animal imagery. It is used to negatively describe the protagonist, Constance, before her enlightenment. An example of how animal imagery describes Constance's frailty is when her colleagues refer to her furtive nature by labeling her as "The Mouse" (MacDonald, 30). Professor Claude Night's use of the term "titmouse" (15) serves to repress Constance. Believing this epithet, Constance stays holed up in her office eating "Velveeta cheese" (7) and slaving over her professor's publications. When Claude declares his love for another, Constance feels lost and destined to "sell pencils" (20) on the street. Only with her spiritual journey through the green world, "the zone of the unconscious mind" (22), does she begin to extricate her true character. Comparing herself with Desdemona, Constance says, "Next to her I'm just a little wimp. / A Rodent. Road-kill. Furry tragedy / all squashed and steaming on the 401" (45). Iago's attempt to turn Desdemona against Constance by referring to her as a "cunning mouse" (39) is a metaphor. Iago uses another metaphor to describe how Constance takes advantage of Desdemona's kindness: "Beware my lady, of the mouse who eats / the lion's cheese while sitting in his lap" (40). MacDonald's reason for negatively portraying Constance as a mouse in the first half of the play is to show her evolution from nervous and shy to an "Amazonian" who "stud[ies] to be blood (32). Eventually, Constance is able to take off her mask and turn her personal "tragedy" into a "comedy" (87).

Animal imagery is one tool available to authors who want to, among other uses, adeptly portray human frailty, repress characters, show comparisons, and create metaphors. Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and William Shakespeare's *Othello* both use animal imagery similarly, but for different reasons.

### Works Cited

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