

## I' M NOT FEELING SO WELL

After *Charlie Hebdo's* attack

by *Pat Carra*

Suddenly, satire is under the spotlight, a light so glaring that shadows and nuances are totally lost.

Definitions pour in: satire is freedom of expression's higher form, Voltaire's spirit, the best of Western civilization, Illuminism's legacy and so on.

Suddenly, I'm not feeling so well.

Why, in Italy berlusconism has cut hands and tongues, in a metaphoric way of course, closing up tv programs, censoring columnists, suing people, inducing a sad propensity to self-censorship, but no advocate of democracy and right has felt the need to protest. Luckily, since ancient Greece's times, satire has learned to resist and survive, usually far from the spotlights and money. To make satire means to take the risk of clashing against those who have power, be it based on money, armies or muscle, be it clad in prestige or backed by family or society consensus. And the charm of satire lies just there, the excitement of entering the game as the weakest, and then all is turned upside down and you, with your childish, unarmed boldness, become the strongest.

Unarmed, I said.

After the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, some have implied - one for all, the *Financial Times* - that those people was looking for it. Actually, satirists are always "looking for it", inasmuch as they want to produce an effect, to spark, through the pleasure of laughing, a consciousness' leap.

Such was, I believe, the original spirit of *Charlie Hebdo*, but I must confess that director Charb's declaration "better to die standing that to live kneeling" doesn't sound right to me, that's not the way an humorist talks. I wonder how did he come to this stance and why he went on in an escalation.

In 2011, after the magazine's headquarters were set on fire, I was interviewed among other cartoonists, and distanced myself from what appeared to me as a phallic challenge, somewhat in the visceral way of Oriana Fallaci.

On the other hand, some cartoons may in the end cause offence, and this is part of the game and depends from many factors, not the last of which is the sense of humor of the public and of those that are the object of satire.

My impression is that those cartoons were issued from a position and presumption of cultural and political power. Did Wolinski, Charb, Tignous really believe in the great islamic enemies?

I'm not feeling so well.

I feel an angry compassion for the dead, and anger toward the abstract vindication of the freedom of satire. Which, prior to being a right, is a subjective choice, conscious/unconscious of the risk and pleasure that comes from it. Putin sending to Siberia the Pussy Riot is enlightening on danger. If

the species of femina and homo ridentes has survived, it's not thanks to the political vindication of its rights.

In the past, court jesters needed to be near the court and to know things from inside, in order to limit and expose the follies of the powerful. Jesters and women who laugh have always been highly exposed to danger. In today's democracies, we are jesters in different ways but our art, in its essence, is the same and its intent is to reveal that the king is naked.

After the events in Paris, powers that be have concentrated in their hands media information.

A raving message has been spread: the Great Islamic enemy declares war on Europe by slaying its satirical cartoonists.

We see on our screens a Paris resembling a sci-fi setting where men stalk around clad in ski masks or Dart Fener helmets, as if they were the dark forces of *Star Wars*. Emotional waves keep us glued to social networks and unending live programs.

We assist to the launching and spreading of the slogans *We are all Charlie* and *Je suis Charlie* on banners, pins, t-shirts and merchandising.

Cartoon people start swaying between fear and delirium of omnipotence. Are we the paladins of Western freedom? How come nobody ever told us? Now we can swing between poverty and martyrdom, unemployment and posthumous glory.

As well as mourning, we experience a slight daze. Our pencil seems suddenly a weapon capable of challenging machine guns. We see drawings of twin towers in the shape of pencils, ink like blood and so on.

All of a sudden we are potential heroes and heroines, and that editorial and media world, that with the excuse of the crisis more and more often doesn't pay for our cartoons or censors them, declares its unconditional admiration for this noble art.

I follow the trail of satire to reach the backstage of this war performance. To find the other side of appearance. I know that we satirists and buffoons are childish and naive. After all, we are fools.

It's a paradox: a satirical magazine has become the flag of freedom in the hands of powers that be. Our craft is not suited for a rhetoric that's both heroic and pretentious, and is just the opponent we challenge. Yet, the first result of *Charlie Hebdo's* tragedy has been a massive fall out of rhetoric, that is, of lies. From the comics pages we are hurled on those of macho parade, of armies and democratic omnipotence.

But the story they tell us is a sham: it's as if Dom Quixote, whom Cervantes created when he was in prison, had become the flag of the Crusaders instead of their satirical alter ego. As if the king could crown the jester, the patriarch could bow to the laughing woman, the inquisitor could sanctify the witch. As it there was nothing left to laugh at.

It's not the way the story goes.

The cartoon's world won't fall into this trap, it won't change from its subtle and melancholic humanity to the rhetoric of death's instinct, swollen with weapons and paranoia.

After 9.11, the Nato and the USA have declared wars in the name of feminine freedom, bombing countries and destroying ancient civilizations under the pretense of freeing women from the burqa.

After January the 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 the flag of freedom of expression is waving.

Must I expect a drone bombing my desk under the pretense of freeing me from censorship and underpaid jobs?

Milano, January the 14th, 2015

*Published on [aspirinalarivista.it/aspirina-parigina/](http://aspirinalarivista.it/aspirina-parigina/)  
(Translated by Elinor Rigby)*