

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 08.12.20

Burlesk

(_estetikk) Ordet stammer fra et italiensk ord for “vits”, “latterlig”. På italiensk betyr “burlare” å erte og drive gjøn med. Ordet “burler” betydde i renessansen på “italienisert” fransk å gjøre narr av, altså med samme betydning (Nédélec 2004 s. 27). Det burleske er ingen sjanger, men et stiltrekk. Det burleske kan gjenfinnes i skuespill, fortellinger, dikt etc., men målet er alltid å være lattervekkende (Nédélec 2004 s. 20-21).

“From the Italian word *burla*, meaning “mockery.” A crude form of satire in which the style of a work, or of an entire genre, is ridiculed by trivializing a serious subject or dignifying a trivial one, usually in the form of a stage performance. The purpose is to amuse and entertain, rather than to inform.” (Joan M. Reitz i http://lu.com/odlis/odlis_c.cfm; lesedato 30.08.05)

“Burlesques – literary or dramatic works that make a subject appear ridiculous by treating it in an incongruous way, as by presenting a lofty subject with vulgarity or an inconsequential one with mock dignity.” (Eberhart 2006 s. 244)

Det burleske er “in literature, comic imitation of a serious literary or artistic form that relies on an extravagant incongruity between a subject and its treatment. In burlesque the serious is treated lightly and the frivolous seriously; genuine emotion is sentimentalized, and trivial emotions are elevated to a dignified plane. Burlesque is closely related to parody, in which the language and style of a particular author, poem, or other work is mimicked, although burlesque is generally broader and coarser.” (<http://www.britannica.com/>; lesedato 18.12.12) Det burleske kan omfatte travesti, parodi og annen latterliggjøring (Dyer 2007 s. 38).

“What we may legitimately assert is that all species of burlesque involve the use or the imitation of a serious subject-matter or style; that this use or imitation is so developed as to produce an incongruity between subject-matter and style; and that this incongruity provokes laughter. The word ‘burlesque’ derives from the Italian *burla*, ‘ridicule’. While etymology cannot be allowed to dictate the meanings of the words we use, it does in this case draw our attention to what is central to the meaning of the word that interests us. Burlesque is mockery, it is joking, it is fun.” (Jump 1972 s. 72)

Det burleske er kjennetegnet av klovnerier, komiske overdrivelser og parodisk latterliggjøring. Det er komisk, kroppslig og kritisk. Det innebærer alltid latterliggjøring (Nédélec 2004 s. 42). Regler brytes, normer overskrides og det sannsynlige unnvikes (Nédélec 2004 s. 450). Burlesksjangeren “ønsker kaos”, som om et kaos-virus spredte seg (Petr Král gjengitt fra Esquenazi 2007 s. 151). Hovedpersonen befinner seg i et slags delirium som kaster han eller henne ustanselig inn i nye situasjoner, i et vilt, fortumlet tempo (Esquenazi 2007 s. 150-151). Det uforenlige blandes og forenes, slik at det oppstår noe “monstrøst” (Nédélec 2004 s. 448).

Handlingen rommer absurde, irrasjonelle, overraskende hendelser, ofte i raskt tempo, hendelser som viser at verden ikke er kontrollerbar. Det burleske foregår i en frenetisk virkelighet, et slags heftig kaos, der bl.a. autoriteter (politifolk og andre) mister sin kontroll (Esquenazi 2007 s. 151). Undergravningen eller oppløsningen er verken moralsk eller politisk, det er snarere slik at sosiale rutiner og roller mister sin gyldighet (Petr Král gjengitt fra Esquenazi 2007 s. 151).

Det er noe skandaløst ved den burleske latteren (s. 448). Det burleske kan karakteriseres med ord som bajaseri, komiske overdrivelser, opp-ned-vending på hierarkier, parodiering, forkledninger, uanstendigheter, skadefryd, obskønitet. Hensikten kan være enten latter i seg selv eller latter for å rive ned noe som andre anser for høyt og verdig. Det vil ofte være vanskelig å skille mellom disse to funksjonene, fordi latter uansett har noe avvæpnende og degraderende ved seg. Det burleske (ikke primært som estetikk, men som en sosial praksis) er sentralt i et tradisjonelt karneval. Det foregår “karnevalesk omsnuing” (Esquenazi 2007 s. 151).

Burlesk humor er blant annet preget av overraskelser og gags. En gag er en komisk hendelse, f.eks. en “solution gag”. Et eksempel: I *Easy Street* (1917) Charlie Chaplin “confronts the villain and is being strangled, Chaplin does something that the audience would not be able to predict; he forces the head of the large man into the lamp post which makes the man sleepy and, thus easier to control.” (Andrew S. Horton m.fl. i https://www.cornellcollege.edu/classical_studies/lit/sightgags.htm; lesedato 24.09.18)

Det oppstår et “kosmisk kaos” der plottet bare fungerer som en unnskyldning for å spille ut en rekke gags (<https://charliechaplin.jimdo.com/i-la-caricature-par-la-gestuelle-dans-le-cin%C3%A9ma-muet/a-qu-est-ce-que-le-burlesque/>; lesedato 24.02.17).

“Burlesque consists in the use or imitation of serious matter or manner, made amusing by the creation of an incongruity between style and subject” (Richmond P. Bond sitert fra Jump 1972 s. 1).

John D. Jump bruker verbet “to burlesque” om å skrive et burlesk verk som travestierer eller parodierer et tidligere verk. Jump deler det burleske i høy og lav, og deretter i fire typer:

“1. Travesty, the low burlesque of a particular work achieved by treating the subject of that work in an aggressively familiar style: e.g., Byron’s *Vision of Judgment*.

2. Hudibrastic, the low burlesque of a less confined material: e.g., Butler’s *Hudibras*.

3. Parody, the high burlesque of a particular work (or author) achieved by applying the style of that work (or author) to a less worthy subject: e.g., Fielding’s *Shamela*.

4. The Mock-Poem, commonly the mock-epic, the high burlesque of a whole class of literature achieved by lavishing the style characteristic of the class upon a trifling subject: e.g., Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*.” (Jump 1972 s. 2)

“Like travesty, Hudibrastic is a form of low burlesque. But, whereas travesty aims at a particular author or work, Hudibrastic has a wider target. The long poem from which it takes its name, [Samuel] Butler’s *Hudibras* (from 1662), attacks the religious and political attitudes of the Puritans” (Jump 1972 s. 12). “*Hudibras* was written between 1660 and 1680 and is a satire on the Cromwellians and on the Presbyterian church written by a confirmed Royalist and Anglican. *Hudibras*, a colonel in the Cromwellian army, is involved in various comic misadventures and is shown to be stupid, greedy and dishonest. The poem is very well written in Chaucerian couplets and was popular for about 150 years, as long as its political attitudes were also popular.” (<http://www.exclassics.com/hudibras/hbintro.htm>; lesedato 19.12.12) Om puritanerne skriver Butler i diktet bl.a. dette:

“A sect, whose chief devotion lies
In odd perverse antipathies;
In falling out with that or this,
And finding somewhat still amiss;
More peevish, cross, and splenetick,
Than dog distract, or monkey sick.
That with more care keep holy-day
The wrong, than others the right way;
Compound for sins they are inclin'd to,
By damning those they have no mind to:
Still so perverse and opposite,
As if they worshipp'd God for spite.”

John D. Jump skriver om *Hudibras* at Butlers vers “tumbles and bumps along with aggressive inelegance” (1972 s. 16). Jump bruker “mock-heroic” og “mock-lyric” om innslag i burleske verk (1972 s. 14).

Italieneren Teofilo Folengo skrev det burleske eposet *Baldus* (1517) (Rieger 2002 s. 111). Italieneren Giordano Bruno skildrer et burlesk Olympen i *Forvisningen av det triumferende dyret* (1584) (Souiller 1988 s. 216), en allegorisk tekst som angriper overtro. “One of the best-known dramatic burlesques in the English language is the short play of Pyramus and Thisbe performed by Nick Bottom and his companions in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (about 1595).” (Jump 1972 s. 52) Den spanske dikteren Cervantes’ roman *Don Quijote* (1605 og 1615) har blitt kalt hans “great burlesque of the romances of chivalry” (Jump 1972 s. 55). Den franske dikteren Charles Coyseau d’Assoucy skrev burleske verk som *Paris’ dom* (1648) og *Ovid i godt humør* (1650) (Guy Riegert i Boileau 1984 s. 21). Typeportrettene i franskmannen Jean de La Bruyères bok *Karakterene* (1688) er ofte burleske (Soler 2001 s. 33).

I boka *Sjangeren burlesk i Frankrike i det 17. århundre: Stilstudie* (1960) av Francis Bar oppfattes det burleske som en sjanger. Ifølge Bar kom ordet “burlesque” inn i det franske språket på 1500-tallet, tatt fra italiensk og med betydningen “latterlig”. Senere ble det en sjangerbetegnelse. Italienske kritikere på sin side brukte betegnelsen på en type dikt (Bar 1960 s. xi), og ordet ble anvendt i titler som f.eks. italieneren Francesco Bernis *Rime Burlesche*, skrevet på 1500-tallet. Burleske forfattere, slik Bar bruker termen, vil more leserne/publikum med alle midler, ikke minst ved å leke med ord (Bar 1960 s. 383).

Den britiske dramatikerer Francis Beaumont “produced one of our earliest full-length dramatic burlesques. His *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) exploits the device of having actors masquerade as members of the audience. A supposed Citizen and Wife, George and Nell, protest against the Prologue’s announcement of a play called *The London Merchant*. Suspecting that this will contain gibes at citizens, they insist on the insertion into the performance of a second plot in which the grocer, a member of George’s own trade, will shine as a gallant knight-errant. They secure this rôle for their stage-struck apprentice Rafe, who has accompanied them to the theatre. Remaining on stage throughout, they comment freely both upon the dramatic action and upon their fellow-spectators. So compelling do they find the theatrical illusion that they repeatedly mistake the fictional characters and situations for reality. This happens not only in connection with *The London Merchant* but also in connection with the plot of the knight-errant, despite the fact that they are themselves responsible for improvising it. Their reactions to the performance show them to be a very characteristic middle-aged pair from the shopkeeping class early seventeenth-century London. They resent the effrontery of the apprentice Jasper in presuming to love his master’s daughter; they wish to see her united with Humphrey, the rival favoured by her father. [...] In short, they are imposing their own fancies and desires upon a pattern of illusions created for their

entertainment and then mistaking the whole sequence for reality.” (Jump 1972 s. 52-53)

“In deriding the sub-culture of the London shopkeepers of his time, Beaumont was evidently catering for a sophisticated audience. He ridicules the attitudes and values of his victims by means of the direct satirical representation of the Citizen and his Wife. He ridicules their tastes by means of the two mock-plays, *The London Merchant* and the plot of the knight-errant. In these he burlesques respectively the domestic drama and the adventure drama as composed for citizen audiences; and in Rafe’s infatuation with tales of chivalry he burlesques, often by parody, one of the citizens’ favourite forms of reading. Neither his direct satire nor his burlesque is really harsh.” (Jump 1972 s. 57)

Det er i stor grad “incongruity between subject and style which makes for burlesque” (Jump 1972 s. 35). Den franske klassisisten Nicolas Boileaus komedie *Korpulten* (1672) er en parodi på et heroisk helte-dikt, og handler om plasseringen av en korpult i en kirke. Om denne komedien skrev den engelske dikteren John Dryden: “His Subject is Trivial, but his Verse is Noble.” (siteret fra Jump 1972 s. 38). *Korpulten* kan dermed oppfattes som et burlesk verk: “In telling his story, he [Boileau] burlesques such characteristics of the classical epic as the set speeches, the expansive similes, the battles, and the supernatural agents.” (Jump 1972 s. 39) Et annet fransk verk er Pierre de Marivaux’ *Homer-travesti, eller Iliaden i burleske vers* (1717). Briten John Gays *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) “was in part a burlesque of the popular Italian opera” (Jump 1972 s. 64)

Den engelske dikteren Alexander Popes komiske helte-dikt *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14) viser “What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things” (begynnelsen av Canto 1). “Robert, Lord Petre, had cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor’s hair, and John Caryll had asked Pope to write a poem to heal the consequent estrangement between the two families. Seeking, in his own words, to ‘laugh them together again’, the poet resorted to the mock-epic. [...] He starts in due style with a proposition and an invocation, and his five short cantos contain an astonishing number of mock-heroic allusions. Geoffrey Tillotson, in his Introduction to the poem in the ‘Twickenham Pope’ (6 vols, London, 1939-61), shows how he intensifies these by making most things ‘smaller in size and more femininely exquisite in quality’ (p. 116). Thus, the hero is a woman, the rape is that of a mere lock of hair, the epic feast becomes a coffee-party, the warrior’s shield becomes a hoop petticoat, the deities include the minute and impalpable sylphs, and the epic battle shrink to a game of cards and a hullabaloo in a drawing-room. Even the Baron’s prayer and sacrifice to the celestial powers, and Umbriel’s descent to the underworld, are accommodated to this scale.” (Jump 1972 s. 44)

Den britiske forfatteren Henry Fieldings *Tom Thumb: A Tragedy* (1730) er en burlesk gjenfortelling av “the classic English fairy tale of the miniature figure who vanquished the giants. It burlesques the genre of heroic drama through its

ridiculous characters and contrived events, including the death of the title character by ingestion by a cow and the suicide of King Arthur after the death of every other character on the stage.” (<https://exhibits.library.rice.edu/exhibits/show/axson/henryfielding/earlycareer>; lesedato 11.05.20)

Den engelske dikteren Henry Carey, “already a successful parodist, produced the burlesque *Chrononhotonthologos: The Most Tragical Tragedy, That ever was Tragediz'd by any Company of Tragedians*. His ‘Prologue’ promises ridicule of the ‘big bellowing Bombast’ of modern poetasters.” (Jump 1972 s. 64)
Chrononhotonthologos (1734) er “an operoarious burlesque of post-Shakespearean dramatic bombast, with silly names and overwrought heroic couplets. The play's linguistic energy is most appealing; it has a brilliant first line:

Aldiborontiphoscophornio!

Where left you *Chrononhotonthologos*?

Carey also has frequent fun with polyptoton, or the variation of word-forms:

Let the singing Singers
With vocal Voices, most vociferous,
In sweet Vociferation, out Vociferize
E'vn Sound itself.”

(Conrad H. Roth i <http://vunex.blogspot.no/2006/07/sleep-of-reason.html>; lesedato 11.02.13)

Den franske opplysningsfilosofen og ateisten Voltaire oppfattet framstillinger av det kristne helvetes lidelser som burleske beskrivelser (Gallo 2012 s. 129).

Den engelske romanforfatteren Jane Austen skrev i sin ungdom et utkast til en burlesk brevroman med tittelen *Love and Friendship*, et verk på ca. 50 sider som ikke ble publisert i hennes levetid. Teksten er en latterliggjøring av følsomhetskulten på 1700-tallet. Skuespillet *To evige jøder for en*, framført 1846 med den østerrikske forfatteren Johann Nestroy som en av skuespillerne, blir av Otto Basil kalt en burlesk, dvs. innplassert i burlesk som sjanger (1967 s. 165). Stephen Sondheim og Jule Styne's musikal *Gypsy* (1959) er burlesk ifølge Dyer (2007 s. 81).

Det burleske omfatter ofte det seksuelt dristige og løsslupne, f.eks. slik ordet “burlesque” har vært brukt i den amerikanske teater- og filmverden: “Burlesque is elastic; more so, perhaps, than any other form in theatrical entertainment. [...] In *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, Robert C. Allen traces the history of burlesque as it was transformed from a middle-class entertainment that relied upon parody and spectacle in the form of transgressive female sexuality to a working-class form that existed primarily as a vehicle for female nudity. [...] The incorporation of the “cooch” dance (belly dancing) into the burlesque repertoire around the turn of the century helped push parody, song, and an inversive/

transgressive female sexuality to the background. [...] The striptease dance is generally considered the single most distinguishing feature of burlesque theater.” (Eric Schaefer i Mathijs og Mendik 2008 s. 188)

“The burlesque film was a tremendously malleable form. Movies could be short or feature-length, recut, repackaged, and retitled with almost no effort, making them particularly attractive to exploitation producers and distributors alike. [...] Thus they [filmene] offered several economic advantages to producers, chief among them being that they were simple, cheap, and quick to shoot. In the most basic form of the burlesque movie, performers danced, stripped, or did their comedy sketches in front of a single, static camera in one long take, ranging from three to ten minutes.” (Eric Schaefer i Mathijs og Mendik 2008 s. 189) Den franske filmskuespilleren Max Linder opptrådte i en filmserie kalt *Onésime*, der skuespillerne viste en burlesk kroppslig elastisitet (Hamus-Vallée 2001 s. 20). I en fransk stumfilm kalt *Syv års ulykke* har en tjener knust et speil. For å slippe unna må en tjener som ligner på husets herre Max mime Max sine gester mens han barberer seg, slik at han ikke legger merke til at speilet er borte.

Langsom film og ekstra hurtig film ble også oppfattet som burleske innslag i disse og lignende stumfilmer.

“At its best, burlesque was a rich source of music and comedy that kept America, audiences laughing from 1840 through the 1960s. Some sources try to wrap burlesque in a mantle of pseudo-intellectual respectability. Yes, it involved transgressive comedy and songs, but the primary attraction of burlesque was sex... in the form of ribald humor and immodestly dressed women. Although many dismissed burlesque as the tail-end of show business, its influence reaches through the development of popular entertainment into the present. Without question, however, burlesque's principal legacy as a cultural form was its establishment of patterns of gender representation that forever changed the role of the woman on the American stage and later influenced her role on the screen... The very sight of a female body not covered by the accepted costume of bourgeois respectability forcefully if playfully called attention to the entire question of the “place” of woman in American society. - Robert G. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*” (<http://www.musicals101.com/burlesque.htm>; lesedato 18.01.13).

“In the 19th Century, the term “burlesque” was applied to a wide range of comic plays, including non-musicals. Beginning in the 1840s, these works entertained the lower and middle classes in Great Britain and the United States by making fun of (or “burlesquing”) the operas, plays and social habits of the upper classes. These shows used comedy and music to challenge the established way of looking at things. Everything from Shakespearean drama to the craze for Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind could inspire a full-length burlesque spoof. On Broadway, the burlesque productions of actor managers William Mitchell, John Brougham and

Laura Keane were among Broadway's most popular hits of the mid-19th Century. By the 1860s, British burlesque relied on the display of shapely, underdressed women to keep audiences interested. In the Victorian age, when proper women went to great lengths to hide their physical form beneath bustles, hoops and frills, the idea of young ladies appearing onstage in tights was a powerful challenge.” (John Kenrick i <http://www.musicals101.com/burlesque.htm>; lesedato 18.01.13)

Stumfilm-komikere som Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Mack Sennett og Harry Langdon spilte i filmer som har blitt kalt burleske (Pinel 2001 s. 37). Forfølgelsesjakter er vanlig – eksempler er innslag i Chaplin-filmen *Easy Street* (1917) og Keaton-filmen *Cops* (1922) (Esquenazi 2007 s. 181).

1800-tallets amerikanske “burlesque comedy did not permit refined types. The Dutch comics (German) were played as stupid, coarse, blustering barbarians in loud checkered suits. The smart-mouthed Irish comic wore chin whiskers, and the level of his courage or cowardice was commensurate with his liquor intake. Jews were represented by shuffling, bearded older men worried about holding onto their money and making more. Negroes were portrayed by white men in blackface and Chinese by white men in pyjamas with a pigtail trailing from under their caps; both were as peripheral to the plots of the sketches as they were to mainstream American life, serving in sketches as waiters, shoe-shine boys or laundrymen when they were not handling a razor, a pair of dice or an opium pipe. There was another category of comic called the dude, a sissy represented as a timid, bespectacled mama’s boy afraid of women or, in the parlance of the day, a pansy, who swished and lisped his way through sketches.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. 166-167)

Petr Král’s bok *Det burleske eller bløtkakens moral* (1984) handler bl.a. om filmer av Charlie Chaplin, Harry Langdon, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy (Helan og Halvan) og Marx Brothers. Helt fra barndommen har mange menneskers sans for det burleske blitt preget av slike filmer (<http://www.eyrolles.com/Audiovisuel/Livre/le-burlesque-ou-la-morale-de-la-tarte-a-la-creme-9782841148745>; lesedato 01.02.17). Jean-Philippe Tessés bok *Det burleske* (2007) handler mye om stumfilmer med “helter” som Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, og Laurel and Hardy. Disse filmene var inspirert av populær underholding i vaudeviller, og fikk folk til å le av det irrasjonelle og absurde. I filmene skjer uvanlige hendelser på overraskende steder. Kroppslige bevegelser er ofte overdrevne. Mye av komikken er fysisk, og kan være med slag og spark (slapstick) (<https://www.cahiersducinema.com/produit/le-burlesque/>; lesedato 21.06.18).

“[T]he nearest we get to the mock-poem in the present century is in the burlesque of the mental habits and the jargon of particular trades, professions, and other social groups. When Paul Jennings writes a piece of spoof Higher Journalism on the modish French philosophy ‘Resistentism’, or Daniel Bell concocts ‘The Parameters of Social Movements: A Formal Paradigm’ with so straight a face that

fellow-sociologists fail to appreciate that he is joking, we have perhaps the mock-poems of our own age.” (Jump 1972 s. 51)

“Med utgångspunkt i bilden av flickrummets gullighet införlivar *gurlesken* groteska element. Det kan vara en sax i dockans huvud som får symbolisera ett uppror mot de könsnormer som finns i samhället. [...] Den gurleska estetiken är både sockersöt, aggressiv, lynnig och listig. Men framför allt är den full av kraft. [...] *Gurlesk* är bildat till engelskans *girl*, ‘flicka’, och *burlesque*, ‘burlesk’.” (<http://spraktidningen.se/artiklar/2014/02/gurlesk>; lesedato 10.05.16)

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>