

Miloš Ševčík

**Louis Cazamian's
Theory
of Humour**

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Preface

The theory of humour put forward by French historian and literary theorist Louis François Cazamian has so far escaped scholarly attention, in contrast to some of his writings on the history of English literature. Remarkably, this theory has not yet been examined systematically and in detail. Cazamian's thinking on the principles and the workings of humour is truly original and insightful, despite being inspired, as he admits, by Bergson's conception of the ridiculous and Bergson's remarks on humour itself. Cazamian drew attention to the paradoxical, complicated, ambiguous, and even contradictory effects of the particular type of comic linguistic transposition which is humour. In Cazamian's conception, humour acquires a noteworthy status as a specific comic phenomenon that nevertheless finds its place in the field of artistic creativity. The penetrating character of humour stems mainly from the ambiguity in which different and even contradictory reactions to reality are both rejected and emphasised. In the present monograph, I attempt to identify and interpret the motifs driving Cazamian's reflections on humour, noting their evolution over time. At the same time, however, I point to the possibility of revealing what is implicit in these considerations. I elaborate on these implications with an eye towards grasping the special critical impact of humour. In the monograph I show that the ambiguity in the nature of the reactions to reality occasioned by humorous transposition is reflected in the ambiguity of the critical impact of humour, which suppresses any simplistic, dogmatic or inattentive reactions to reality. This is based on the premise that such an examination of Cazamian's thought is fully in line with the thrust of his reflections and their meticulous character. At the same time, however, such an examination of Cazamian's writings on