

Christina Howes\*

## Laughing and Crying at the Same Time: Reading Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* through a Bergsonian Theory of the Comic

**Abstract:** The fabricated disaster caused by war and conflict and its traumatic effect on people and the environment hardly seems an appropriate subject of comic representation. Yet such an unamusing topic has often been represented in literature and visual arts through humour. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch 22* and movies such as Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* or Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* exemplify artistic expression that uses laughter to substantiate the poignant absurdity of war and genocide. Similarly, British-Nigerian writer and film director Biyi Bandele's WWII novel *Burma Boy*, the focus of the present article, uses Comedy to portray the futility, irrationality and madness of a war that had mortal consequences and traumatic resonances on the lives of the often-forgotten young Black African soldiers who participated in the Burma Campaign. In this article, I read the novel through a Bergsonian lens of the Comic to suggest that such techniques reveal the absurdity and tragedy of war by dragging the reader onto the stage to perceive themselves as part of the failings of humanity and, above all, of western modernity.

**Keywords:** *Biyi Bandele-Thomas; Burma Boy; Henry Bergson; Comedy; the Absurd; the Burma Campaign.*

Susan Sontag proclaims disaster "one of the oldest subjects of art." (Sontag, n.pg.) Her essay 'The Imagination of Disaster' focuses on Science Fiction as one of its sub-genres. In this article, I address another — the war narrative. War has dominated fiction ever since the Ancient Greeks wrote about the Trojan Wars or the Revolt of Spartacus and, since then, it has "never been too far away" (Van Gils, De Jong, and Croon 1). Indeed, as Van Gils et.al. note, war continues to fascinate because of its "universal psychological themes of human frailty, and heroism, suffering and sacrifice, loyalty and betrayal, love and hatred, reasons for wanting to live or die, belief in luck or fate and, of course, the continuous

---

\* Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC); Spain.

presence of all-permeating fear” (1). Nigerian-British writer, playwright and film director Biyi Bandele-Thomas’ World War Two novel *Burma Boy* (2007), the focus of the present article, exemplifies this thematic universality. And yet it extends these classic tropes to warn of the dangers of anthropocentric modernity, the over-emphasis on rationality and quantification to the detriment of humanity and its relationship to nature. Indeed, scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman and Edith Wyschogrod have disclosed the relationship between modernity, the war and more specifically the Holocaust. But, as a second generation British-Nigerian, Bandele’s temporal and multicultural perspective allows a re-consideration of events within a contemporary socio-political, ecological and postcolonial lens. Indeed, Senayon Olaoluwa notes how the novel unveils the entanglement between colonialism and western modernity. And it does so through a blend of aesthetic approaches true to Bandele’s literary style, from the use of historiography to techniques common to the Theatre of the Absurd, such as surrealism, satire and humour (Bouchard; Kehinde; Negash). Having discussed the novel previously through the philosophical framework of Albert Camus’ Absurd to suggest it a critique of anthropocentric western modernity within an African epistemology, this article focuses on Comedy as a rhetorical device inciting the reader to see the illogicality of the logicity of our machine world, the irrational of the apparently rational and, as a corrective, to reconsider our cosmological connectedness if we are to survive in a more peaceful world.

Thus, I argue here that the techniques of Laughter strengthen the perception of the absurdities of western anthropocentric modernity, a technological world that has lost contact with the reality of human existence, and the disconnect from the one profound truth of life — Cosmic Relationality and human interdependence — at the heart of the disastrous events, not only of World War Two but of all war.

*Burma Boy* is Bandele’s most personal novel. Based on his father’s traumatic war experience in the Burma Campaign of World War Two, it can be regarded as a postmemorial act, filling in the gaps of familial experience through historical investigation and fictional recreation (Hirsch). Bandele admits that its composition enabled him to “confront and exorcise those demons that had hovered over [him] from [his] childhood” (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 216). Yet, it not only commemorates his father, who came back from the war “in a straitjacket” (Bandele n.ng.), but also, the forgotten history of these young black Nigerian soldiers who sacrificed their lives, and often their sanity, for the Allied Forces.

They served in a group of special forces called the Chindits under the mandate of the infamous and eccentric General Orde Wingate against the Japanese in what was then known as Burma — present-day Myanmar. And Bandele leverages historical hindsight to great effect in his often-satirical portrayal of the general as a member of the colonial forces, whilst maintaining a respectful appreciation of his position and accomplishments.

The protagonist, 14-year-old Ali Banana, a Hausa Nigerian, joined the British army — having lied about his age — typically under heroic delusions of courage and bravery, and naivety of his status as cannon fodder to the ‘Whiteman’s’ war. Indeed, Senayon Olaoluwa, in his postcolonial reading through the Anthropocene, viewed these mainly Nigerian soldiers as children exploited by the excesses of western modernity at the heart of colonialism. The narrative, furthermore, reveals Banana’s transformation from innocent and ignorant of this reality to his confrontation and final acceptance of the absurdity of his situation. As I have argued previously within the philosophical framework of Albert Camus, by accepting the Absurd and realising the beauty of the world and his relation to it, Banana finally finds consolation and meaning, exemplifying what Camus termed ‘Revolt’ (Howes).<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, the novel functions simultaneously as therapeutic — working through family trauma — and political in its revelation of the futility of war, the ills of colonialism and imperialism rooted in anthropocentric technological modernity. Nevertheless, Bandele engages with such critical and weighty themes through irony, satire and, as we shall see in what follows, instances of Laughter.

The use of Comedy as a narrative strategy to portray the horrors of war presents a paradox bordering into the unethical. Surely, war is no laughing matter. And yet there are many artistic representations that employ this technique. The most notable of these include Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* (1961), Spike Milligan’s World War Two memoirs, *Milligan’s War* (1988), and the popular British BBC sitcom *Dad’s Army* (1968-1977) or the World War One series *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) — of which the final scene remains poignantly memorable as the main characters are absurdly ordered to ‘go over the top’ to their inevitable deaths. By marrying Comedy with tragedy and disaster, this scene brings viewers onto the stage to perceive the inflexibility and dogged rigidity of the higher command and, thus, realise the heart-rending absurdity of

---

<sup>1</sup> Article currently under review for publication (2022).

these young men's death. The use of Laughter unites these narratives as an instrument to highlight the futility, irrationality, and in Paul Fussell's terms 'the madness of war'.

The way these narratives draw attention to absurdities resembles Henry Bergson's conceptualization of the Comic outlined in 'Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic' (1912) in which he suggests that Laughter acts as 'corrective' by permitting us to see beneath such inelasticity of body, mind and character, and to view the world as creative, chaotic and unpredictable. Thus, with Bergson's theory in mind, as Joseph Heller, and Richard Curtis and Ben Elton — the writers of *Blackadder Goes Forth* — well knew, Laughter provides an ideal technique to critique the extreme logicity of the dispassionate and 'inelastic', to use Bergson's term, military machine over human need, emotion and adaptability. Military inflexibility, moreover, reflects the strict rationality, quantification and Cartesian workings of modernity. Thus, I suggest Bandele's war narrative frames a converging critique of colonialism, western modernity and a re-assessment of Relationality through a narrative focusing on the peculiar logic and intransigence of the British military forces.

Besides his opposition to Cartesian dualism, attracting many female followers at the time, Bergson thought that Humankind must adapt to the environment and its inherent changes as part of evolution and progression. And we laugh at its absence. We find humour in inflexibility and automatization "where one would expect to find a wide-awake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being" (Bergson 10). In other words, we find funny a person who insists on the logical or mechanical habits, ignoring the need for adaptation to circumstances, or 'pliability'. As Simon Critchley puts it, "[w]hat fascinates Bergson is the comic quality of the automaton, the world of the jack-in-the-box, the marionette, the doll, the robot" (56). To support his argument, Bergson cites examples such as an involuntary stumble or sitting on a non-existent chair. But perhaps his most pertinent example is Charlie Chaplin's most notable achievement, *Modern Times*. Written at a time of increasing automation, and rising fascism with its emphasis on rationality, it criticises industrial, technological modernity and a system in which human beings have become products for capitalist consumption. Heidegger termed this condition 'standing reserve' — a state in which "human beings [have] become a resource to be used, but more important, to be enhanced like any other" (Dreyfus 306).

Echoing Bauman and Wyschogrod's argument in which the Holocaust and

Slavery remain the utmost extreme of the 'mentalité' of technological modernity and western capitalism, in his postcolonial reading of *Burma Boy*, Olaoluwa argues that these child African soldiers are mere objects. I support this viewpoint and suggest that they too have become mere 'standing-reserve', product for the consumption of the Imperial War Machine. Significantly, Chaplin was inspired by meeting an upholder of Relationality and opposer of colonialism, Indian activist and pacifist, Mahatma Gandhi in London (1931). Ghandi's abhorrence, however, was not only of the machines themselves that had taken over a more culturally traditional lifestyle but rather, to use Heidegger's term, in the 'mentalité' of the machinist world which blurs the boundaries between machine and humankind. *Modern Times* and Bergson's theory of the Comic reflect this mentalité. In brief, Bergson tied his observations around one main thesis — that laughter occurs when instead of adapting to new circumstances, we maintain what he terms 'mechanical inelasticity'. And it is precisely this 'machinic' characteristic in Chaplin's protagonist that we find so humorous.

If we laugh at 'inelasticity', then his theory may explain why we do so at certain goings-on in a Theatre of the Absurd. Writers working within this tradition drag the audience onto the stage to see themselves as part of the absurdities, challenging them to "make sense of non-sense, to face the situation consciously rather than feel it vaguely, and perceive, with laughter, the fundamental absurdity" (Hinchliffe 12). There is a clear semblance between the Absurd and Charlie Chaplin's Comedy in their balancing of entertainment, artistic form, and socio-political criticism. As Arnold Hinchliffe points out, in the Absurd, Humankind is hopelessly committed to "making sense of the world" (16) to rationalise what is irrational, to quantify what cannot be quantified, to impose meaning on that which has none, and to insist on the logical of the illogical. As a technique, Comedy within the Absurd forces us to confront the contradiction between this commitment to logical imposition and the reality of human existence. Bergson believes that Laughter acts as a 'correction' in that "it makes us at once endeavour to appear what we ought to be, what someday we shall perhaps end in being" (17). Furthermore, and significantly for the present argument, Hinchliffe contends that Western Man denies a chaotic universe and refuses to yield to the irrational, whereas the Asian and African, may give in to it (16). As we will see in what follows, this is a fitting observation regarding the use of Laughter in *Burma Boy* since the contradiction and friction between western colonialists, the military command and the African soldiers' deep cultural

consciousness forms the basis of many instances of Comedy. Thus, as correction to the adversities of western modernity, rooted in extreme adherence to rationality and logic, and disregard for the relational dimension of life, Bergson's theory appears an appropriate framework through which to view the Comic in this African narrative of World War Two.

So far, we have seen Bergson's over-riding thesis — the lack of 'pliability' or 'elasticity' when circumstances require and its relationship to his critique of modernity. Moreover, within this general assertion, he had several key observations: The first is that although it can be a coping mechanism, "laughter has no greater foe than emotion" (4). If we feel pity, fear or horror then we do not laugh — Laughter needs the emotional distance of a "disinterested spectator" (5). Second, it is "strictly *human*" (3). For example, we do not laugh at objects or animals unless they are given human characteristics. Third, it is social and belongs "to a group" (6). By this, he means that Laughter needs mutual cultural understanding and "certain requirements of life in common" (8). In what follows, we will discuss some key scenes and characters in the novel within the light of these observations.

Let us first consider the need for emotional distance. In her essay on Bergson's theory of the Comic, Emily Herring recalls the public condemnation of Comedy in the immediate wake of 09/11. She offers a fitting example of how the world, particularly the United States, still finds Comic representation of the event taboo. And yet Italian film director, Roberto Benigni in his award-winning film *Life Is Beautiful*, (1997) "dares to find humor and tenderness in the midst of the Holocaust" (Maslin n.pg.). Benigni's courage may arise from the temporal distance of the post-generation, allowing for a more critical view of events through irony, satire and Comedy without abandoning pathos. Bandele's rendering of the plight of these young Africans in Burma similarly reveals a post-generational and post-colonial consciousness that neither abandons pathos. Indeed, it is the subtle use of Comedy that creates affect. Perhaps, then, temporal distance allows "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" as Bergson puts it (5-6). But it also allows a reconsideration and a fresh view of historical events. He suggests that [Comedy's] appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple [...], [and] is the laughter of a group" (5-6). Bandele's group comprises of post-generational and post-colonial readership.

This leads us to our second point, that Laughter is *human*. It needs, in his

words, “complicity” (Bergson 6). The aesthetic response of a novel depends on the complicity between the writer and implied reader, without which Comedy would fail. In *Burma Boy*, this complicity relies not only on temporal distance with its historical hindsight and postcolonial cognizance, but also a sensitivity to deep cultural differences between a western and African consciousness, and between diverse Nigerian cultures. We laugh, for example, at the innocence of these boy soldiers’ reverence of King George, whose name they pronounce ‘King Joji’, and who Banana innocently equates with an African chief. Banana’s humorous attempt to disguise his age to join the army poignantly reveals his naivety regarding the truth of war, colonialism and the workings of the military. Yet, although the British Army may be accused of complacency and double standards in enforcing the legal minimum recruiting age of sixteen, Bandele unveils deeply challenging cultural differences at the heart of its practical implementation. After all, the age in which an individual reaches maturity is not necessarily quantifiable nor so precisely age specific. And it is the African commander, Damisa — having been a child apprentice executioner — who ultimately concedes to Banana: “A boy is a man when he feels a man. A man at forty can remain a child if he hasn’t decided to be a man” (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 51). Given the efforts by Human Rights organizations today to put an end to child recruitment around the world, such as Afghanistan (Becker n. pg.), it seems nothing less than an immoral aberration to justify the recruitment of children in the army, or as executioners, albeit unwittingly. Bandele certainly raises this issue. But Banana’s comic attempts to trick the recruiters into believing him of age not only reveals the cultural ravine between the recruiters and recruits, but also the former’s lack of elasticity and adhesion to rationality in their unyielding military and cultural perspective in contrast to the Africans’.

Something similar occurs with the comic anecdote of the regulation boots. The boys were not used to wearing shoes and, “finding bare-footing much more comfortable” (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 44) hung them around their necks. This ‘barrack necklace’, as it was known, became a symbol of pride and honour for those “who had been specially invited to Boma by King Joji” (44). It is not only the mismatch between the boys’ African village upbringing and the inelasticity of the army that creates Laughter here, but also the soldiers’ unpredictability, from a western viewpoint, in their use of the boots.

The characterization of General Wingate provides another example of inelasticity and the failure to adapt to circumstances or environment. He

represents what Bergson terms “the professional comic” (177), so set in his military professional mentality that he manifests “professional callousness” (177), having “no room to move or be moved like other men” (177). The ‘professional comic’ confines themselves within their jargon, professional habits and logic to the extent that they are incapable of “talking like ordinary people” (179). The army is a clear case in point and its members often archetypal of such behaviour. Much like Chaplin in *Modern Times*, we laugh at these characters because they often “lack awareness of their surroundings and themselves” (Herring n. pg.), and according to Bergson, Laughter serves as correction to such deficiencies.

In the opening scenes of the novel, with Wingate in a state of debilitating malarial fever in Cairo, Bandele immediately establishes a sharp cultural contrast between the dogged military rationality, western colonial mindset and local culture. He is confined within his own logical world. Furthermore, Bergson suggests we laugh at eccentricity as an instance of inflexibility that disallows evolution. Wingate was indeed well-known for his eccentricities, such as eating an onion as if it were an apple, or his dishevelled appearance. In this scene, however, he also behaves outside of expected social norms, even being rude to the Colonel, who asks after his ill-health in the hotel. But when we first meet Wingate, “a strange man dressed in a British Army uniform” (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 3), he appears out-of-synch with the chaos of the Cairo Street scene, “looking, he said, for a chemist”, which “existed only in his fever-sapped imagination” (3). But his malarial state betrays his professional status by manifesting a bodily limitation that he desperately wishes to control by obtaining some Atabrine.

With an appearance and behaviour that does not conform to the efficiency and logic of a military commander, the readers’ impression is of someone whose body is out-of-control, recalling bodily materiality and the uncontrollable chaotic nature of human existence. His malarial state lies in opposition to his usual mechanical functioning. We see the man in all his humanity under the military armour, revealing the absurdity of this rigidity. And despite his stubborn determination to find a non-existent chemist, he only receives “curses and insults”, according to the local custom of insulting one’s parents, and is further “palmed off to the concierge [of the Continental Hotel] like an unwanted gift” (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 4). This comic scene highlights both Wingate’s, and thus Colonialists’, lack of cultural and circumstantial adaptability and, equally, the Egyptians’ inability to understand the Whiteman’s lack of versatility. His



quintessential 'Englishness', inelasticity at odds with his surroundings and his attempt to control his illness renders him a comic figure at the same time as pitiable.

Furthermore, Wingate's inflexibility also extends to his strict Christian beliefs. He fails to see other viewpoints, further exposing the absurdity of religious dogmatism. This is staged in a scene in which he attempts to raise his men's morale through a rallying cry to the Scottish Cameronians. He states that the soldiers would be "armed with the sword of justice and protected by the Breastplate of Righteousness" (Bandeles, *Burma Boy* 169), to which a Scots soldier opines "[y]ou and God can f...ing well do without me, sir" (169). We find this comic not only for the Scotsman's blunt honesty but because of Wingate's inelasticity, awakening us to the absurdity of dogmatic religion and the assumption that others should conform to these beliefs. Finally, in addition to his professional persona, Wingate's cultural inadaptability, his personal vaingloriousness and narcissism mean a fundamental lack of awareness of others. Thus, laughing at these rigid traits serves as a corrective of such attitudes which Bergson considered as inconvenient to society.

Similarly, we also find comic the Colonel who, having met a sick Wingate in the hotel, rather than adapting to the latter's mental or physical state, rigidly confines himself to military rules. He remarks, "you look as pale as death. I want to make sure you are all right. Then I'm going to have you arrested for rudeness to a superior officer" (Bandeles, *Burma Boy* 12). This incongruence causes laughter precisely because the first part shows awareness of others, but it is neutralized with his ultimate persistence of rigid mechanical social norms and military rules over human need. Thus, it serves as a correction to this hypocrisy.

Yet the British are not the only objects of Comedy. Despite his likeability, we smile at Banana for similar reasons as Wingate — his inadaptability. And he is just as eccentric. Thus, viewed within Bergson's framework, he represents a threat to society, and we laugh at him to counter the threat. Banana's inelasticity, however, is due to his childlike innocence and outsidership. Bergson points out that laughter arises from 'not belonging' just as much as 'belonging' (135; 177). In Banana's case, more education, worldliness and inter-cultural insight would help him to "figure out what it was about him that was [...] so laughable" (Bandeles, *Burma Boy* 97) and the reason for him being "the unwitting butt" (99) of jokes. He remains in 'un-evolving' child-like state and, thus, the joke about the man who lost a ring inside his house but looked for it outside because there was

more light, illustrates this state. He fails to understand the joke, and when asking if he found the ring, he “was baffled by the raucous laughter that greeted his question” (97-8). He had only asked because he had also lost a ring and thus thought that he should have also looked for it outside. We laugh at the joke because of its incongruence, but also because his naivety situates him as an outsider. Banana, however, personifies the very incongruence that causes us to laugh in the first place.

Within a Bergson’s framework, then, laughing at his inadaptability and innocence is punitive. After all, in the theatre of war, these traits could cost him his life. But drawing our attention to his innocence also underscores the scrupulousness of the army in their use of such innocent recruits. Banana remains ignorant of his own absentmindedness and difference, and thus, resembles Bergson’s notion of a comic character who is “invisible to himself while remaining visible to the world” (17) and therein partly lies his tragic status. Unlike the Scotsman mentioned earlier, Banana is like a “simpleton who is hoaxed” (Bergson 17). And Laughter draws attention to this hoax.

Thus, Banana contrasts with the army’s rigidity and insensitivity. His innocence and cultural idiosyncrasies clash with the military world — his convoluted comparison of himself to the pot in the “tale of the scorpion and the pot” (Bande, *Burma Boy* 40), for example, only irritates the captain, who merely wants Banana for a mule driver. But Banana, through a convoluted elaboration on family ancestry, insists that is it beneath the social standing expected in his culture. The officer, however, in his ‘mechanical inelasticity’ cares nothing about family lineage nor Banana’s cultural mindset. But, whilst Banana remains ignorant of western thinking and machinistic mentality of the military, the latter makes no effort to adapt to local circumstances either. This mutual inadaptability not only creates Comic affect but serves as corrective, exposing the tragic drama of these innocent young African boys vis-a-vis the merciless rigidity of the colonial forces.

Bande leverages, moreover, his contemporary multicultural and plurilingual cognizance, creating comic scenes, often reassembling classic slapstick, whilst alluding to the need for intercultural understanding. From a Bergsonian standpoint, this is “comic *created* by language” rather than “the comic *expressed* by language” (103). He makes use of translations between different African languages, and from these to English, to comic effect. Consider, for example, the scene in which the Gambian Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) with scant understanding of Hausa heard the phrase ‘dan kilaki’ and wondered

what was said about “the chief’s clerk”, to which a Nigerian explained that “[it] means son-of-a-clerk [...] a Hausa term of abuse. It means son-of-a-woman-who-trades-her-body-for-money,” prompting the Gambian to ask if “Nigerian clerks [were] prostitutes” (36). Absurdity arises because of the Gambian’s lack of creativity, literal thinking and lack of cultural awareness. Also, as Bergson notes, “language only attains laughable results because it is a human product” (129). It is as organic and flexible as the human mind. Literal translations abound throughout the novel, reminiscent of those automatically generated on YouTube, revealing a mechanical rigidity inconsonant with the adaptability of life and requirements of social life.

Yet Banana ultimately shows a great deal of flexibility when confronted with the chaotic nature of the natural world. In the denouement, having shed his army uniform, he appears a “naked African” (Bandeled, *Burma Boy* 211) in harmony with nature, in sharp contrast to the military’s disregard for the environment. Bandeled also creates a sense of mutual dependency between humans and nature — Banana needs the leeches that feed off his body as much as they need him. He expresses his gratitude to a snake whose “home” he had requisitioned for the night: “Come back my friend [...] There’s room enough for both of us. It’s your home after all. There’s room enough for every one of us” (Bandeled, *Burma Boy* 207). There may indeed be ‘room’ enough for humankind to exist in harmony with nature, but he leaves the “generous snake” with “two pistols, a Bren rifle, some ammunition and quite a few grenades” (209). Confronted not only by the war, but by western modernity, it will need to defend its ‘home’.

Whilst these closing scenes convey a serious note, Bandeled’s technique remains light. Bergson suggests that we only laugh at animals if we impose upon them some human characteristic. We smile at Banana talking to the snake, the monkeys who ‘boo’ at the follies of human beings, and the leeches who fall “to the ground in a happy swoon [...] with a dance of ecstasy and gratitude” (Bandeled, *Burma Boy* 208). Personification draws attention to what needs correcting: anthropocentric modernity. As I have argued elsewhere, the change in Banana is not so much from a boy to man, a common trope in war literature, but of his state of awareness of the connectedness between nature, and humankind (Howes). And, having confronted death closely, he becomes more acutely aware of mortality. After the horrors of war, as he stumbles into the stronghold, it is as if he has discovered the truth of existence — Relationality and love for others.

This what brings him meaning and resilience and, thus, his euphoria.

Finally, we may be left with a sense of the madness of the Burma Campaign, the suffering of these very young African soldiers, and the tragedy of war. But, while for Sonntag science fiction extends the boundaries of science, *Burma Boy* extends its immediate subject boundaries by offering an indictment of western anthropocentric modernity and machinistic mindset that led the world into the disaster of World War Two. The novel forwards the humanist, ecological viewpoint that the disaster of war and conflict remain absurd confronted with the reality of the world. The machinistic, Cartesian mentalité of the western world remains at odds with the chaotic, ever-evolving universe with which Banana finally becomes integrated, offsetting the deeper African cultural mindset against White, western values. There may be other reasons for Laughter, and the novel may proffer examples, but since Bergson upholds that Laughter stands to correct a society entrenched in 'mechanical inelasticity' and a machinistic worldview that rides roughshod over nature, and our embeddedness in it, *Burma Boy* illustrates how Comedy may function to warn the post-generation of the deep root of human-made disasters of which war forms part. And, ultimately, Bandle's comic technique opens our eyes to a reconsideration of Relationality and to view life as creative, chaotic and unpredictable as an alternative way forward.

### **Works Cited:**

- Bandle, Biyi. *Burma Boy*. Jonathan Cape, 2007.
- . "First Person: Biyi Bandle on His Father, Who Fought in Burma | Life and Style | The Guardian." *The Guardian.Com*, 2007.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/jun/30/familyandrelationships.family2>.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. "Towards a Sociological Theory of Morality." *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 1st ed., Polity Press and Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989: 169–200.
- Becker, Jo. "This Is Our Opportunity to End the Taliban's Use of Child Soldiers." *The Hill*, 18 Sept. 2021.
- Benigni, Roberto. *Life is Beautiful*. Melampo Cinematografica, 1997.
- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. 2014th ed.,

- Martino Publishing, 1912.
- Bouchard, Jen Westmoreland. "Representations of Diasporic Unbelonging." *Migrations and Identities*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008): 99–114.
- Chaplin, Charlie. *Modern Times*. United Artists. 1936.
- Critchley, Simon. *On Humour*. ProQuest E, Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2002.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. "Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics." *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Charles Guignon, Cambridge University Press, 1993: 289–316.
- Fussell, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*. Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Herring, Emily. "For Henri Bergson, Laughter Is What Keeps Us Elastic and Free." *Aeon.Com*, July 2020.  
<https://aeon.co/essays/for-henri-bergson-laughter-is-what-keeps-us-elastic-and-free>.
- Hinchliffe Arnold. *The Absurd: The Critical Idiom*. Edited by D Jump, John, Methuen, 1969.
- Hirsch, M. "The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, 2008: 103–28, doi:10.1215/03335372-2007-019.
- Howes, Christina. *Stretching the Temporal Boundaries of Postmemorial Fiction: Shades of Albert Camus' Absurd in Biyi Bandele Thomas' Burma Boy*. 2022, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.12682.54729.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360476585>.
- Kehinde, Ayo. "A Parable of the African Condition: The Interface of Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Biyi Bandele-Thomas's Fiction." *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, vol. 16, Special Issue devoted to Literatures in English, 2003: 6–35.
- Maslin, Janet. "'Life Is Beautiful': Giving a Human (and Humorous) Face to Rearing a Boy Under Fascism." *The New York Times*, Nov. 1998.  
[archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/archivemain-l.html](http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/archivemain-l.html).
- Negash, Girma. "Migrant Literature and Political Commitment: Puzzles and Parables in the Novels of Biyi Bandele-Thomas." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1999: 77–92.
- Olaoluwa, Senayon. "Postcolonial Anthropocene and Narrative Archaeology in *Burma Boy*." *Close Reading the Anthropocene*, edited by Helena Feder, 1st. Editio, Routledge, 2021: 93–101, doi:10.4324/9781003030270.

- Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster." *Commentary*, Oct. 1965, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/susan-sontag/the-imagination-of-disaster/>.
- Van Gils, Lidewij, et al., editors. *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narrative: Thermopylae, Cannae and Beyond*. Brill. Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology, Volume 291, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004383340>.
- Wyschogrod, Edith. *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death*. Yale University Press, 1985.