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Humor in Sarah Kofman (1934–1994)

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Sarah Kofman who is mostly known for her exegetic work on Freud and Nietzsche, was a prolific writer and representative of French continental philosophy. Although her intellectual trajectory and writing were deeply influenced by the traumatic experience of having her father deported during World War II and, later, living as a hidden child, humor is a key concept of her philosophy. The awareness of sensitive political issues Kofman had enabled her to address problems like latent antisemitism in occidental philosophy, but her work, however, was mostly oriented towards jubilant issues — as she herself would qualify some aspects of her intellectual life, for she considered laughter the best way to deal with death, and the doomed-to-fail search for truth.

Freud states that the wit (*Witz*) is produced by the unconscious as a manner of dealing with what is forbidden by social rules. It happens as language offers a way to express and live what is forbidden without acting it. According to that proposition, Kofman widens this interpretation by categorizing laughter as means to survive trauma and process it through language. This resource is used when one cannot deal with trauma or other aspects of human experience. Moreover, Kofman argues that humor is the only behavior able to act as a preventive cure for melancholy, the illness of the individual who spends his or her time struggling with guilt.

In sum, Kofman states that wit (*Witz*) is a superior type of humor, and, consequently, a potential “truth bearer”. Due to that, making jokes provides more than psychological liberation or relief: it helps us to deal with the absence of meaning and make the best of it.

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