



# Diplomarbeit

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**The Humor of Christopher Moore**

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*To Graeme, Plague and Max,  
in gratitude for their professional advice  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Humour lies neither in laughter nor in jokes  
but only in the minds of men.  
(La Fave quoted in Alexander, 16)

Humor is a phenomenon that is valued by people all over the world, regardless of their nationalities, belief systems and education. Despite this general human appreciation of the comic, however, individuals may disagree greatly in terms of what they find amusing and what not. A particular person's sense of humor is shaped by his/her upbringing and past experiences, or more generally, the cultural environment in which he/she grows up and/or presently lives. Literature on humor research suggests

that sociocultural knowledge forms the foundation for an appreciation of verbal humour. [...] Sharing 'background assumptions' makes up a portion of these prerequisites. [...] The culture-bound nature of sense of humour comes from 'shared upbringing', presumably resulting in common prejudices, and world knowledge in general. (Alexander, 118)

Moreover, deeming a specific written or spoken representation of language or a sight funny is also connected to one's personality and subjective taste, both of which seem to be innate rather than accountable for by external influences. In Lodge's words, '[h]umour is a notoriously subjective matter[.]' (Lodge, 111) As manifold as the opinions and judgments about what is comic and what is not are the reasons for which people use humor. For instance, it allows us to connect and establish common ground when laughing at a joke together. Yet, it is also frequently used to set boundaries and exclude others from conversations, as can be the case with insider jokes. Of course, humor in fiction can serve similar purposes within the frame of the narrative, but its main aim is certainly to entertain the readers and elicit laughter.

This thesis strives to explore the means by which the novelist Christopher Moore achieves comic effect. To attain this goal, several aspects from the field of humor theory, which appears to serve as the most promising framework when engaging in the discussion of humorous fiction, is drawn upon. A thorough analysis of the novels

- *A Dirty Job*
- *Coyote Blue*
- *Fluke or, I Know Why the Winged Whale Sings*
- *Island of the Sequined Love Nun* and
- *Lamb – The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> They will be referred to as *Job*, *Coyote*, *Fluke*, *Island* and *Lamb*, respectively, in this thesis.

does not only allow an in-depth illustration of the author's narrative humor, but also provides an insight into his general writing style. The choice of the stories selected is based on the intention to present and discuss a varied range of Moore's fictional accounts, which unfold through the actions of his diverse characters and their interaction with each other. A comprehensive comparison of the protagonists and several minor characters as well as a discussion of prominent topics – both examinations beyond the separate story boundaries – serve to shed light on the stylistic characteristics of the contemporary American writer. Due to the subjective appreciation of various forms of humor, the object of this thesis is not assessing the comic value or success of particular amusing elements, but arranging them in suitable categories in order to present their variety. This classification also facilitates the identification of the common features found in the primary literature under consideration.

## **II. CHRISTOPHER MOORE: A POPULAR AMERICAN AUTHOR OF HUMOROUS FICTION**

### **II. 1 BIOGRAPHY**

Christopher Moore was born in Toledo, Ohio in 1957<sup>2</sup> and grew up in Mansfield, Ohio with his mother (a department store clerk) and his father (a highway patrolman). The writer describes his own upbringing as 'basic suburban' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>) and rather carefree. During his teenage years and twenties he held several jobs such as roofer, night clerk in a grocery store, factory worker, disk jockey and waiter. After having studied anthropology at Ohio State, the author moved to California, where he studied at the Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara. He also took a few extension courses in writing.

On his website Moore admits that he had an alcohol problem around the age of thirty. He then quit drinking and started to write. A year later his first novel *Practical*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.phantastik-couch.de/christopher-moore.html>



*Demonkeeping* was finished. The author says about himself, 'From the time *Demonkeeping* sold I have lived my life in books, not years. I never remember what year things happened, only what book I was working on.' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>)

Following the publication of his first book, Moore met with several movie producers but missed the opportunity to become a screenplay writer. During his research for *Coyote* the author lived in a trailer on a Crow reservation in Montana for one month. His acquaintance with an elderly shaman, who, during a traditional Native American sweat ritual, told him about the Crow's sacred medicine bundles and folk stories, gave him the necessary ideas to finish his second novel back in California.

The writer's third book *Bloodsucking Fiends* was originally intended as a radio play. In order to rewrite the script into a novel, Moore wandered the streets of San Francisco, watching people. The author explains that the main character Tommy 'was based more than somewhat on [him]self at the same age (19).' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>) By then, he had been awarded a contract with the publishing house Simon and Schuster.

While waiting restaurant tables, the author heard tales of Micronesia from a frequent customer. Inspired by such stories, Moore traveled to the island of Truk, resulting in his novel *Island*. He was also an anthropology student at this time, though he failed to complete his degree. Putting his knowledge to good use, he researched the native population on an outer island of Yap for a month.

Moore's next literary endeavor *The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove* was a reunion of the characters found in his debut novel. The town (Pine Cove) in both novels was modeled on the writer's experience with his own home, a Californian coastal village. Another autobiographical incident, several of his friends trying to stop taking anti-depressants, provided Moore with the necessary plot for the book.

After watching a series on PBS, in which scholars discussed the life of Jesus, the author decided to focus on Christ's first thirty years in his book *Lamb*. He researched Jesus' historical background through extensive reading and spent a few weeks in

Israel, where he took part in guided tours.<sup>3</sup> When asked about his own beliefs in an interview, Moore replied that he is a Buddhist with Christian tendencies.<sup>4</sup>

Research for *Fluke* consisted of living with a group of humpback whale researchers in Hawaii for two winters.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Moore was the primary caretaker for his mother when she was dying, as well as supporting his girlfriend and her dying mother a year later, gave him the necessary experience to write about such situations in *Job*.<sup>6</sup>

Questioned about his childhood, the author explained that due to his profession as a patrolman his father had developed a dark sense of humor in order to deal with the situations he was faced with during his shifts. He also mentioned that this sense of humor must have ‘rubbed off on [himself] somewhat[.]’ (<http://old.chrismoore.com/ing.com>) Among the authors who have inspired him and who he enjoys reading himself, Moore lists Douglas Adams, John Steinbeck, Kurt Vonnegut and Chuck Palahniuk.<sup>7</sup>

Thus far the writer has published the following ten books:

- *Practical Demonkeeping* (1992)
- *Coyote Blue* (1994)
- *Bloodsucking Fiends* (1995)
- *Island of the Sequined Love Nun* (1997)
- *The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove* (1999)
- *Lamb – The Gospel According to Biff, Christ’s Childhood Pal* (2002)
- *Fluke or, I Know Why the Winged Whale Sings* (2003)
- *The Stupidest Angel* (2004)
- *The Stupidest Angel 2.0* (2005)<sup>8</sup>
- *A Dirty Job* (2006)
- *You Suck* (2007)<sup>9</sup>

The eleventh novel titled *Fool* is scheduled to be released in February, 2009.<sup>10</sup> Several of the narratives are connected to each other as they are either set in previously described locations and/or contain characters that have already appeared in an earlier book. Yet, all the stories are self-contained, therefore knowledge of one plot is not

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. <http://oldchrismoore.com/interviews2.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews1.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. <http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/authorinterviews/a/chrisMooreInt.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews5.htm>, <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews6.htm>

<sup>8</sup> same as the first version, plus an additional short story of 32 pages

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <http://www.mostlyfiction.com/west/moore.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://www.chrismoore.com/>

required to be able to follow the others.<sup>11</sup> Of course, fans of Moore's fiction may experience additional pleasure when recognizing some of their favorite characters. This circumstance could serve as part of the reason why this author of humorous fiction has reached a cult status and could equally explain how certain insider jokes were created and still circulate between him and his most dedicated fans.<sup>12</sup>

## II. 2 MOORE'S SELF-CONCEPTION AS A WRITER

When developing the idea for a new book, the author explains, he starts with the story, which is followed by creating suitable characters. Moore points out the difference between the story and the plot, the latter 'merely [being] the mechanics, the logistics of telling the story[.]' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews6.htm>) He believes that strong characters can make a strong story, but not the reverse. Well-developed characters with distinct personalities enable the writer to plot and write dialog more easily. Rather than constructing entire life stories for his protagonists and minor figures, the author tries to generate a feeling for the way they think, act and talk.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, he admits that there is a great deal of his own personality in his characters, especially in regard to the know-it-alls. In general, his personae are composites of various real people Moore knows.<sup>14</sup> For plotting, the author uses the triangular-shaped structure suggested by John Gardener in *The Art of Fiction*. The following diagram illustrates the relevant points:

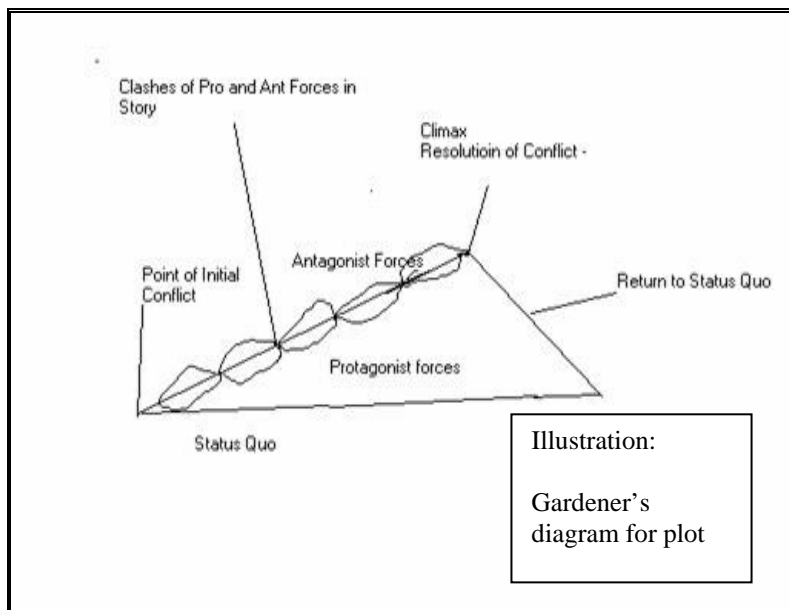
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<sup>11</sup> Cf. <http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/authorinterviews/a/chrisMooreInt.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Some of these private jokes are used as slogans on his merchandise.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews6.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews8.htm>



Moore explains as follows:

The bottom line is the status quo, how things would have gone if nothing had happened. The first ray moving upward is the way things have become, or the new set of events set off by the main conflict. The top of the triangle is the climax of the story, and the final line down is the return to a new status quo. Along the upward line forces clash causing conflict and producing motion. (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews10.htm>)

The author's approach to literary production, a process he also recommends to people asking him for advice, is writing in scenes, very much like one would for a play or a film. These episodes further divide and structure the individual chapters. Overall, he prefers the omniscient as well as the limited third person point of view to other narrative voices, but suggests changing the point of view between scenes if it seems appropriate. Letting one of his figures narrate the story, or parts of it, is a rather effective way of establishing character, as Moore points out.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, as a writer of humorous fiction, he also stresses the importance of trying to invoke laughter in his readers. The author calls humor 'the core of everything [he] do[es] [, and points out that he] construct[s] situations that can be played for comedy.' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews10.htm>) Moore believes that even without the funny aspects his books would still contain good stories. Thus, he sees humor as an additional treat, requiring writers to feel and anticipate those details their readers

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews9.htm>

(could) find amusing. The author also expresses his appreciation of irony and says about its benefits, especially in the literary field, 'Basically, for the writer and the reader, the best reason for irony is that it makes both feel clever.' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews10.htm>)

As far as assigning Moore's writings to a specific genre is concerned, he defines his own works as 'humorous novels that have a supernatural bent, but that's as close as you're going to get to fitting them all in the same basket.' (<http://www.powells.com/authors/moore.html>) He explains that he has tried to write straight fiction but automatically writes smart-aleck comments into his stories, thus the comic novel is his niche by nature. However, he has set his foot into such sub-categories as the historical (*Lamb*), the thriller (*Island*), science fiction (*Fluke*) and the modern fable (*Coyote*).<sup>16</sup>

## II. 3 ONLINE PRESENCE AND PUBLIC IMAGE

Christopher Moore not only uses the medium of the internet to promote his books (and fan merchandise) but also to keep in contact with his readers. Most notably, his online presence is maintained through 'The Official Christopher Moore Website' at <http://www.chrismoore.com>, a site that offers information about his publications and Moore himself (including the dates of his book tours and his e-mail address), i.e. press commentaries, interviews with the author and reviews of his novels. Furthermore, the interested fan will find book recommendations made by the writer.

Similar to countless members of the entertainment industry as well as common people, the author has his personal blog on his website. In this online log he presents excerpts from his writing and talks about topics such as books (his and others), his book tours, movie castings for his novels, and also ordinary every-day incidents that have happened to him. He answers questions asked by his fans as well. Like the style in his fiction work, the blog entries are written in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Per month there are usually two to three entries to be found. The blog was started on May 18, 2004 at 'The Official Christopher Moore Home Page' (<http://old.chrismoore.com>).

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. <http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/authorinterviews/a/chrisMooreInt.htm>

com),<sup>17</sup> his former website, and was later linked to his new site.

Finally, the website also offers a place for the readers to interact with the author, but mostly with each other. Various threads on the message boards enable fans to introduce themselves, discuss such topics as the news and politics, as well as Moore's fiction, read tips for writers, get reading suggestions and post their own fan fiction. People are also encouraged to participate in games and even exchange cooking recipes. The blog and the message boards can both be accessed directly via the internet address <http://bbs.chrismoore.com>.

Moore is also present on the popular social networking website 'myspace' (<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=95547714&MyToken=588c527b-8008-4541-a747-52f451a383e3>). Here, as well as posting his blog entries, he also gives more personal information about himself (music and literature tastes, heroes, etc.) At the website <http://www.cafepress.com/shopfruitbat/1237321> fans can order merchandise such as t-shirts, buttons and coffee mugs, each printed with quotes or images related to the author and his works. *The Griff*, a screenplay written by Moore, can be downloaded for free at [http://chrismoore.com/images/The\\_Griff.pdf](http://chrismoore.com/images/The_Griff.pdf).

The author stresses how important it is for him to keep in touch with his readers. The comments left by his fans on the message boards on his personal website and his page on 'myspace' illustrate his popularity. To his fans he has the aura of a cult author, despite being on best-seller lists. They have even coined the term 'Moorons' to refer to themselves as a way of expressing their appreciation and loyalty.<sup>18</sup> His replies in interviews and his blog entries portray him as a charismatic personality who is quick with a tongue-in-cheek remark and does not take himself too seriously.

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<sup>17</sup> This website contains the same overall structure with similar information as the new one, yet it is naturally not as up-to-date as the latter and includes broken links.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. <http://contemporarylit.about.com/od/authorinterviews/a/chrisMooreInt.htm>

## II. 4 RECEPTION OF LITERARY WORKS

Moore is recognized and praised for his talent for combining humor, satire and the supernatural in his books.<sup>19</sup> He is also given credit for being amusing, intelligent, educational and thoughtful, as well as informing himself in detail about the subjects he writes about. Online reviews use expressions such as ‘deadpan style’ (<http://blogcritics.org/archives/2004/10/03/212604.php>) as well as ‘dark, but at the same time infused with humor’ (<http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/stupidest.html>) to describe his novels and mention his ‘skillful puns and a playful sense of humor’ (<http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/stupidest.html>). The following paragraph (discussing *Fluke*) prototypically reflects the sentiment common in many other book reviews written about the author’s fiction:

Moore’s humorous patter keeps things lively and interesting. Quirky characters quip constantly, making the novel an easy-to-read delight. But when Moore kicks in his plots and premises, when he builds up his clever ideas, he will manage to take even veteran fans of weird fiction places they’ve never suspected would exist. (<http://trashotron.com/agonysite/reviews/2003/moore-fluke.htm>)

The sparse negative criticism that can be found is directed at the endings of his books. One reviewer called the plot (of *Fluke*) ‘a little weak towards the end[.]’ ([http://www.booksforabuck.com/sfpages/sf\\_04/fluke.html](http://www.booksforabuck.com/sfpages/sf_04/fluke.html)) Another reader was harsher when referring to the same book by saying that ‘the action takes a turn toward the farcical and, sadly, the unfunny. [...] [It] does not live up to the intelligent and sometimes hilarious action Christopher Moore so carefully crafted.’ (<http://www.sfsite.com/08a/fl157.htm>) In a review of *Island* a reader was disappointed that the ending of the novel ‘seems to have been treated with a bit of disdain and [...] quickness[.]’ (<http://www.legendsmagazine.net/112/island.htm>) The three critical quotes above by no means represent the general attitude found in the discussions of Moore’s books, but are rather exceptions.<sup>20</sup> In fact, even members of groups who are caricatured in the novels have expressed their appreciation of them. The writer has dared to touch on such sensitive subjects as Native Americans and Jesus. Yet, the response from the general public is largely positive and appreciative. Moore mentions that *Coyote* is

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews6.htm>

<sup>20</sup> It should be positively noted that the reviews from which the quotes are taken are linked from Moore’s website. Thus, the author does not only present texts that speak solely favorably of his work.

actually being taught on some reservations. Furthermore, Native American graduate students have used it as a part of their theses.<sup>21</sup>

In his online autobiography Moore points out that ‘despite what many people had anticipated, the response to *Lamb* has been overwhelmingly positive, even among clergy and seminarians.’ (<http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>) In an interview the author expresses his discontent with having the humor in *Lamb* labeled as ‘frat-boy humor’ in a review from ‘Publishers Weekly’. He elaborates that he could have related to a term such as ‘adolescent humor’ (as his characters are adolescents for the major part of the story). The label given to him by this reviewer, however, might lead prospective readers to expect the kind of comedy common with the American entertainer Tom Green or *The Man Show*, from which he wants to distance himself: ‘[D]ismissing it as frat boy humor is not indicative of me not doing my work, but perhaps a reviewer not understanding the scope of the project.’ (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews1.htm>) Moore also mentions that ‘major papers in LA, Washington, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Houston, San Diego, as well as the intrepid USA Today all loved the book.’ (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews1.htm>)

In an interview the writer states that *Lamb* was mainly received warmly from the readers. According to himself, he has not had one single negative reaction from the clergy. On the contrary, quite a number of ministers have shown up at his signings, expressing their appreciation of the novel.<sup>22</sup> The following quote from a review confirms this attitude: ‘Moore treats the historical Jesus gently, even honorably, focusing on the ‘love your fellow human’ message even as he makes jokes about turn-of-the-first-millennium politics and the Kama Sutra.’ (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews3.htm>)

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. [http://www.fwomp.com/moore\\_interview.htm](http://www.fwomp.com/moore_interview.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. <http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews5.htm>



### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HUMOR THEORY

#### III. 1 PRELIMINARIES: HUMOR – A CONCEPT HARD TO DEFINE

Two people are laughing together, say at a joke.  
One of them has used certain somewhat unusual words  
and now they both break into a sort of bleating.  
That might appear very extraordinary to a visitor  
coming from quite a different environment.  
(Wittgenstein as a preface in Attardo)

In the relevant literature humor is described as a competence in as such that ‘speakers know how to do it, without knowing how and what they know[.]’ (Attardo, 1) Humor research distinguishes between three types of theories that discuss the subject matter at hand:

1. Essentialist theories, which try to define the phenomenon
2. Teleological theories, which ‘describe goals of the phenomenon, and how mechanisms are shaped and determined by its goals’ (Attardo, 1)
3. Substantialist theories, which attempt to find ‘the unifying factor for the explanation of the phenomenon in the concrete ‘contents’ of the phenomena’ (Attardo, 1)

Numerous researchers agree that it is difficult to find an a priori definition of humor. Scholars in the past pointed out that the features of the comic could be more tangible if one contrasted them with those found in either seriousness or its exact opposite, the tragic. Yet, ‘[l]inguists, psychologists, and anthropologists have taken humor to be an all encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny.’<sup>23</sup> (Attardo, 3) Such a description focuses on the effect of a humorous remark or action and does not concern itself with its actual properties. Whereas it appears to be justified to call something that amuses funny, it does not account for how this funniness is created, which seems to be a far more delicate and also more interesting subject.

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<sup>23</sup> In reference to Freud, Attardo (10-11) points out that assuming automatically that what is funny makes one laugh and what makes one laugh is funny, is connecting a mental phenomenon (humor) with a complex neuro-physiological manifestation (laughter). More specifically, ‘laughter denotes an effect without specifying the cause[.]’

Different types of humor such as parody, irony and satire have long been established. These categories are defined by a certain kind of relationship between the said (or done) and reality, and the resulting, often critical, judgment about the latter. Another possibility of classifying humorous texts is by grouping them according to their semantic content. Thus, a distinction between scatological, aggressive and sexual humor (cf. substantialist theories), as suggested by psychologists, can be made. From a linguistic point of view, incongruity and its resolution are often referred to as being essential in the construction of (verbal) humor.<sup>24</sup>

However, it should also be noted that peoples' understanding of what is humorous seems to be historical, i.e. dependent on their contemporary circumstances. This, of course, makes a theoretical definition even more difficult. A rather broad and vague reading of the concept humor allows to describe it as 'whatever a social group defines as such[.]' (Attardo, 7)

### III. 2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERM 'HUMOR'

The Latin term humor/umor, -oris is based on the Greek χυμός, which translates to 'moisture' or 'liquid' in English. In this original meaning the word was used in the Theory of Humours of medieval medicine (based on the Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen) to discuss the effects of the four most important body liquids (humores naturales): blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. It was assumed that according to which of these prevailed in a human being, the person's disposition could be characterized as either sanguineous, phlegmatic, choleric or melancholic, respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Through the spread of this Pathology of Humours the word 'humour' entered the Middle English vocabulary via the French language. The word initially only referred to a person's current mood ('being of good/bad humour'). At the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare, introduced the 'humours' in his satirical comedies. These were characters whose disharmony of body

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Attardo, 3-4

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dopychai, 13-14

fluids led them to behave in unusual ways. Thus, the word gained an additional meaning and entered the realm of the comic. In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the semantic change from a term for a ridiculous drama character to a word for a human cognitive ability ('to have more/less humour') took place.<sup>26</sup>

The classical English humour term was established by Joseph Addison, the founding father of the tradition of modern humor. He was the co-editor of the moralist magazine 'The Spectator', in issue 23 of which humor was described as the ability to provoke laughter for the good and the bad. In an attempt to define humor further, Addison constructed the following family tree: 'TRUTH was the Founder of the Family, and the Father of GOOD SENSE. GOOD SENSE was the Father of WIT, who married a Lady of a Collateral Line called MIRTH, by whom he had issue HUMOUR[.]' ('The Spectator' quoted in Dopychai, 18) Thus, the moralist assigned an ethical relevance to humor. Furthermore, he pointed out that what he called 'false humour' resulted from the concurrence of falsehood, nonsense, frenzy and folly.<sup>27</sup>

In accordance with Addison's humanitarian understanding of the term, the writer Laurence Sterne created literary humor as a new genre. In his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, the main character is a jester whose self-conception is that of a wise man in a disguise of folly. The novel is remarkable for its language use, which has been likened to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The author used impressive vocabulary and style to render marginal information just to express more crucial matters through colloquial language. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is the first work of literature in which humor is not only a feature of a character but also of narrative style.<sup>28</sup>

### III. 3 A SURVEY OF HUMOR RESEARCH

#### III. 3. 1 From the Greeks to the Renaissance

Literature often accredits the Greek Plato (427-347 BC) with having been the first official theorist of humor. He defined this rather elusive concept as being 'a mixed

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dopychai, 14-15

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Dopychai, 18-21

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Doychai, 22-25

feeling of the soul[.]’ (Attardo, 18) His theory is based on ambivalence: the concurrence of the contrasting feelings pleasure and pain. Aristotle (384-322 BC), Plato’s student, built upon this theory. Similar to his teacher, he understood excessive laughter as being ridiculous and ugly. In Aristotle’s opinion the only rightful place to use humorous remarks was rhetorics; solely for the purpose of serving the orator’s argumentation. He despised examples of buffoonery and favored irony, witticisms and puns – all instances of verbal incongruity.<sup>29</sup> It was also this Greek philosopher who was the first to elaborate on the opposition between comedy and tragedy.<sup>30</sup>

Theophrastus (ca. 373-287 BC), a mental follower of Aristotle, introduced the comic of character. In his characters theory he analyzed literary characters that aimed at producing comic effect, such as the boasting warrior and the drunk. These were traditional staples of comedy plays. The short anonymous Greek manuscript *Tractatus Coislinianus* (10<sup>th</sup> century AD), which is believed to summarize Aristotle’s thoughts on comedy, distinguished between two different types of humor. Derived from the idea that ‘[l]aughter arises from the words and from the facts[.]’ (Attardo, 24) the author sets speech or verbal humor apart from actions or referential humor.<sup>31</sup> As will be seen, this essential opposition has been repeatedly referred to throughout history and is still an elementary feature of contemporary humor research.

Greek humor theory influenced the Latins greatly. Cicero (106-43 BC) discussed five humor-related topics in his *De Oratore*:

- 1) what humor is
- 2) where it comes from
- 3) if it is fitting for the orator to use humor
- 4) to what extent it is fitting<sup>[32]</sup>
- 5) what the genres of humor are (Attardo, 26)

Whereas ignorance was admitted of point 1, point 2 was answered by rendering the humorous into the realms of baseness and deformity. The final point mentioned the verbal/referential humor distinction: ‘about what is said [...] [vs.] [...] about the thing’. (Attardo, 27) Cicero suggested that the difference between the two could be made clear by trying to translate the humorous text. He pointed out that verbal humor

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<sup>29</sup> Attardo (21) points out that interestingly, Greek humor in Aristotle’s days consisted mostly of what would be referred to as crude slapstick filled with obscenities, profanity and insults today.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Attardo, 18-21

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Attardo, 22-24

<sup>32</sup> The points 3 and 4 refer specifically to the field of rhetorics and will thus not be further addressed in this thesis.

is often not funny anymore when re-told in a different language. Yet, depending on the semantic content, puns can frequently be translated into other (related) languages without losing their comic effect.<sup>33</sup>

Like the other early humor theorists, Quintilian (35-100 AD) discussed its use in the art of oratory. He stressed that it serves to relax the mind, that laughter has a psychological as well as physical source (a sort of tickling). The Roman rhetorician did not restrict laughter as a reaction to funny texts or actions. The stupidity or misfortune of someone else can cause it as well. Quintilian accepted the verbal/referential humor division and even added his own tripartite distinction for both categories:

- 1) Humor can deal with others (censorship of others' activities, praising others, etc.).
- 2) Humor can deal with ourselves. One can either make fun of oneself voluntarily or it may happen accidentally.
- 3) Humor can be the effect of a play with words, 'taking differently the things said' (Attardo, 32) (tropes, irony, parody, etc.).

The third group is the center focus of modern humor research.<sup>34</sup>

In the Middle Ages little theorizing on the topic took place. During the Renaissance, however, Aristotle's *Poetics* was rediscovered and highly valued. Italian theorists used the Greek's ideas to construct a new theory of humor and comedy in accordance with their own art and culture. In the foreground stood formulating a set of rules to distinguish between medieval farce and cultivated comedy.<sup>35</sup>

In his booklet Vettore Fausto (1480-1550) included Aristotle's equitation of comedy and ugliness as well as the opposition between verbal and referential humor. Franciscus Robortellus (1516-1567) quoted Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Horace and stressed that the diction in comedic discourse should be in humble style, i.e. simple and clear, as in common usage. Correspondingly, the subject of comedy should also be a simple one. Madius (?-1564) followed Cicero closely but departed from his views by emphasizing the importance of surprise or incongruity when trying to create comic effect. Trissino (1478-1550) was inspired by Horace and Aristotle, yet pointed out that pleasure itself does not generate laughter. The object must also contain

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Attardo, 26-29

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Attardo, 29-32

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Attardo, 33-35

ugliness as well as thwarted expectations to appear humorous. Thus, he, too, stressed the effect of surprise. Similarly to Madius, Bernardo Pino (ca. 1530-1601) ascribed humor to the presence of something ugly. According to his grasp of the subject, this ugliness should not only be understood as dishonesty and obscenity, but also applied to matters that are out of proportion.<sup>36</sup>

In Lodovico Castelvetro's (1505-1571) effort to create an autonomous literary theory, he also developed a humor theory independently from Aristotle. The Italian listed four sources of laughter:

- 1) the sight of people that are dear to us
- 2) deceptions of others than ourselves; this can happen because of four reasons:
  - (a) ignorance of customs, madness, drunkenness
  - (b) ignorance of arts or sciences, and boasting
  - (c) willful misinterpretation and witty retorts
  - (d) chance and intentional deceptions
- 3) evil and physical disgrace presented under cover
- 4) sex (Attardo, 42)

The points 2 and 3 had already been established by previous theorists of the classical period or their commentators. Sex as a source of humor is interesting in the regard that this category predates Freud's elaborations on this subject by 330 years. Castelvetro claimed that everything about sexual intercourse is funny, except for the direct exposure of human genitals (which he referred to as simply embarrassing).<sup>37</sup>

### III. 3. 2 Modern theories

#### *III. 3. 2. 1 Incongruity, hostility and release theories*

Most Renaissance theories did not actually describe the phenomena they concerned themselves with, 'but rather mix[ed] a description of the phenomena with explanatory attempts that cover[ed] some of the phenomena, yet fail[ed] to be 'descriptively adequate' [...] (Attardo, 46) Linguistics was not an independent field until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which usually resulted in little interest in the investigation of humor in general. Bergson and Freud are the two most important theorists of modern approaches to humor research, which consist of three families:

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Attardo, 36-40, 43

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Attardo, 42-43

- 1) The cognitive incongruity theories
- 2) The social hostility theories
- 3) The psychoanalytical release theories<sup>38</sup>

Kant (1724-1804) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860) are the first ones to be associated with fully-fledged incongruity theories. Kant defined laughter as ‘an affection arising from sudden transformation of strained expectation into nothing.’ (Kant quoted in Attardo, 48) Schopenhauer noted the following:

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. (Schopenhauer quoted in Attardo, 48)

Both men explained the source of laughter as the perception of a contrast, a mismatch between two ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Hostility theories are based on Plato and Aristotle’s idea of humor being aggressive. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) elaborated on this in more detail and suggested that laughter arises from a feeling of superiority towards something or someone other than oneself. He referred to this feeling as ‘sudden glory’, a feeling that is connected to keywords such as aggression, triumph, derision and disparagement. This sort of humor is exclusive, and stands therefore in opposition to inclusive humor, which often strengthens affiliation amongst members of a (social) group.<sup>40</sup>

Release theories describe humor as something that allows to release tensions or relieves people from inhibitions, conventions and laws. They are thus connected to sublimation. According to this category, the humorous allows the liberation from the rules of language. This aspect of linguistic humor is frequently labeled as defunctionalization.<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact that Freud was not a linguist, his conclusion that humor allows for a kind of release still contributed to the linguistics of humor. In his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) he researched on techniques often found in jokes. He analyzed his data by means of reduction (summarizing) and grouped his findings according to the twenty different methods he had found. In the discussion of the twenty mechanisms found in jokes two major hyper-methods were pointed out. The first one is condensation, which takes place ‘each time that only one

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Attardo, 46-47

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Attardo, 47-48

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Attardo, 49-50

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Attardo, 50

signifier takes us to the knowledge of more than one meaning; or more simply: *each time that meaning exceeds the signifier*[.]’ (Todorov quoted in Attardo, 55) This happens in the case of ambiguity, whenever a polyseme is used in a context that allows for more than one explicit reading. The other one, displacement, is created by ‘the essentialist element [being] given by the diversion of the mental path, by the displacement of the psychic accent on a theme different from the initial one[;] a change in the way of considering [something.]’ (Freud quoted in Attardo, 55) While condensation belongs to the field of paradigmatic relationships (tropes, metaphors and metonymy), displacement relies on the syntagmatic connections in language. In the latter case, the meaning of a word is not substituted by another meaning, but the focus lies on the relationship between the meanings of two words that are both presented in one sentence.<sup>42</sup>

### III. 3. 2. 2 Semiotic and text theories

An example of a semiotic theory is the Bisociation Theory that originated from Arthur Koestler’s research. He defined it as

*the perceiving of a situation or idea (...) in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference (...) the event (...), in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths, as it were. While this unusual situation lasts, [the event] is not merely linked to one associative context, but bisociated with two[.]* (Koestler quoted in Attardo, 175)

This idea is a certain type of incongruity theory as it combines two different elements, the perception or identification of which as such may result in amusement. Related to this theory is Dorfles’ view that ‘humor consists of a process of *ostrananie* ([...] ‘alienation’, ‘detachment,’ or ‘defamiliarization’) [...] realized by a ‘shifting [...] of a sign (a word, an action) from its context’[.]’ (Dorfles quoted in Attardo, 176)

Johnson’s explanation belongs to the same field: ‘[T]he meaning of any given joke arises from the interplay of many layers of bisociation, deriving from the most specific

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Attardo, 55; In his survey of Freud’s work Attardo pointed out that ‘[his] analysis is not so much specific to humor, but rather serves as an analysis of the linguistic tools that express it which are not peculiar to humor[.]’ (Attardo, 55) The same holds true for Bergson, who mentioned the three mechanisms repetition, inversion and interference of series that are employed in verbal as well as in referential humor.



utterances and social context to the most general principles of logical paradox and social ideology.’ (Johnson quoted in Attardo, 178)<sup>43</sup>

Eco took a special interest in the technical pragmatic means by which humor can be produced. According to him, the violation of a rule (e.g. Grice’s maxims) is often a source of amusement. Infractions of narrative topoi (standard scenes) could have the same effect.<sup>44</sup> Paletta pointed out that ‘[the humorous text] produces a surprise effect, because it provides new interpretations for the same discursive situation[.]’ (Paletta quoted in Attardo, 181) An exponent of the Bologna School, Manetti, contrasted humorous with serious language. He identified six mechanisms of *ostrananie*, namely metonymy, metaphor, changes in the subject of enunciation, decontextualization, parallels and deformation. He also pointed out that the punch lines of jokes are usually particularly rich in information, which ‘triggers a feedback effect that leads to a rereading of the text to identify its ambiguous part.’ (Attardo, 177)

Linguo-literary approaches are linguistics-based theories with an interest in literary phenomena. Schmidt stressed the importance of pragmatics. His *Texttheorie* (‘Theory of a Text’) took

the global socio-cultural setting in the speech community, the participants to the communication with all the premises and presuppositions influencing them, a communicative situation functioning as a ‘frame,’ the text uttered and the verbal, factual and relatable (con-)texts (Schmidt quoted in Attardo, 185)

into account.<sup>45</sup> Wenzel, a German researcher on narrative and literature, studied the semantics of punch lines. He pointed out two humor-generating devices: The establishment of a frame of reference, which ‘imposes an unexpected coherence on an apparently incoherent set of events/entities[.]’ (Attardo, 191) and the breaking of a frame of reference, which comes unexpected as ‘[the] part of the text up to the element that breaks the frame [was] integrated into a coherent frame[.]’ (Attardo, 191) In summary, Wenzel emphasized the interaction between the plot development and the punch line. Either has to be logically aligned to the other.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Attardo, 175-176, 178

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Attardo, 178-179

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Attardo, 185

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Attardo, 190-192

### *III. 3. 2. 3 Script-based theories*

Raskin outlined the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), in which he discussed the concept of humor competence. Following the notion introduced by Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar, this competence meant to account for a native speaker's ability to recognize and produce humorous texts. In order to be able to consider a text jocular the reader/listener has to be aware of its perlocutionary goal (i.e. the underlying intention of a text or remark). If one compares humor competence to Chomsky's grammar competence, it has to be noted that native speakers' judgments about what is grammatically correct are generally more uniform than their estimations as to what is amusing and what is not. However, despite the fact that individual people might not appreciate a certain type or instance of humor in a specific text to the same extent, they are usually still able to detect that it was meant to be understood as such. The competence concept, of course, is part of an abstract model. Thus, only the constructed 'idealized speaker/hearer who is unaffected by racial or gender biases, undisturbed by scatological, obscene or disgusting materials, not subject to boredom, and, most importantly, has never 'heard it before' when presented with a joke[,] (Attardo, 197) possesses the impeccable humor competence. The SSTH should enable its users to 'generat[e] a humorous text out of its elements, or [to] recogniz[e] a humorous text when presented with one.' (Attardo, 198) The complicated theory strives to create an algorithm with which checking whether a given text is funny or not can be carried out easily and quickly.<sup>47</sup>

The term script is understood as a 'cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc.' (Attardo, 198) It contains information that is evaluated as typical, well-established and common in a certain culture group. Raskin distinguished between the encyclopedic knowledge, which is not positioned within the field of linguistics, and the semantic network, which is. The former holds contextual information about the world that is accessed during the processing of sentences. The latter contains language knowledge, a mental lexicon. For instance, the semantic knowledge allows the native speaker to grasp the meaning of the word 'beer': It's a brownish liquid that can have intoxicating effects, etc. The encyclopedic knowledge enables him/her to keep in mind that it

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Attardo, 196-198

comes in bottles, and therefore can be stacked, etc. It is through the semantic network that scripts are linked, namely via synonymy, hyponymy, etc. The SSTH consists of the scripts and their combinational rules.<sup>48</sup> The algorithm mentioned above can be put into a computer database to ‘render all possible meanings of the scripts and discard those combinations that do not yield coherent readings[.]’ (Attardo, 202)

When combining scripts, stretches of text that enable more than one reading (ambiguity) are frequently encountered. This is referred to as the overlapping of scripts. Raskin coined the term script-switch trigger for an ‘element of the text that causes the passage from the first to the second script actualized in the text[.]’ (Attardo, 203) This element can also be called the disjunctive. While this overlapping is often a necessary prerequisite, this alone does not induce humor. To achieve comic effect the overlapping scripts also have to be opposed. This causes a contradiction, thus confusion and the re-reading of the script. Overlapping alone can only result in (non-humorous) cases of ambiguity, metaphorical and figurative speaking.<sup>49</sup>

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) is a revised version of the SSTH that, going beyond the scope of jokes, wishes to account for any kind of amusing text. In comparison to Raskin’s earlier theory, this one does not only include semantic aspects but also textual linguistics, pragmatics and narratology. In addition to the script opposition (SO) mentioned above, there are five other knowledge resources (KRs), or parameters, that are to be found in various sorts of humorous texts. These are the language (LA), the logical mechanism (LM), the narrative strategy (NS), the situation (SI) and the target (TA).<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that the GVTTH can be put to use on a wide variety of texts, and ‘even though it may overlap with it substantially[.]’ (Attardo, 255) it should be noted that its application is not an exercise of literary criticism per se.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Attardo, 198, 200-202, 218

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Attardo, 203-204

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Attardo, 222-223; Please refer to Attardo, 223-226 for more information on the KRs.

### III. 3. 3 Special types of humor: register humor, puns, canned and conversational jokes

A specific type of humor is the one that uses (a) certain register(s) to achieve comic effect. 'Registers may be pre-theoretically defined as language varieties associated with a given situation, role, or social aspect of the speakers' experience. [...] [Humor can be the result of] an incongruity originating in the clash between two registers[.]' (Attardo, 230) Bally's *Stylistics of Humor* dealt with the use of registers in humorous texts. He explained the term *stylistics* as 'a branch of psychology which studies the correlations between language, on the one hand, and thoughts and feelings (sentiments) on the other[.]' (Bally quoted in Attardo, 231) In Bally's theory the social, or more precisely the affective aspect of communication is predominant. The notion of *valeur affective* (affective value) refers to the conscious choice speakers make when verbalizing their thoughts using affective elements rather than objective ones. These elements can for instance carry evaluative or emotional undertones. Alexander described the 'comical confusion of register [...] [as the] [...] select[ion of] a lexeme or phraseological unit from a different style level than the context would predict[.]' (Alexander quoted in Attardo, 235) Haiman pointed out that register clashes can particularly function as indicators of sarcastic texts.<sup>51</sup>

Another sub-category of humor is to be found in the form of puns. These were originally seen as the only legitimate field for interdisciplinary contacts between linguistics and humor studies. 'From a linguistic (and semiotic) point of view, puns are phenomena which involve the '*signifiant*' facet of the sign of which they are part in a relevant sense, to be defined later.' (Attardo, 108) They can be verbal but can also rely solely on visuals, thus can be spoken, written, signed or graphic. This word play is generally possible due to the existence of homonyms: words that share the same phonemic and graphic representation but have different meanings. They can be subdivided into homographs, words that are spelled the same way but pronounced differently according to the various meanings they can bear, and homophones, which are pronounced identically but have a different spelling for each different meaning they can have. Consequently, puns traditionally involve two senses, referred to as S1 and S2 in humor research literature. The difference between them cannot be random,

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Attardo, 231-233, 235-236

but must be opposed, i.e. ‘semantically incompatible in [the given] context[.]’ (Attardo, 133) Puns can function as the shortest jokes possible, sometimes consisting of one single word. In the case of jokes and puns the information necessary to disambiguate the text immediately is intentionally omitted. The language element that finally allows for the clarification of the text is called the disjunctur. Once the reader/listener has reached this disjunctur the process referred to as backtracking is made possible. The previous interpretation does not make sense any longer, thus, one is forced to return mentally and re-interpret the text.<sup>52</sup>

Yet another specific category can be sub-divided into two broad classes, according to their context. There are canned jokes, which have been used before and can be re-used at a later point, and conversational jokes, which are often spontaneously created on the spot in a conversation. Examples of the first group can be found in a multitude of printed collections. They are not dependent on contextual factors of a conversation at all. In contrast, conversational jokes are impromptu creations that actually spring from the context in which they are told. They are instances of situational humor, and therefore hardly transferable from one context or situation to another. Canned jokes usually require a sort of introduction and can have a narrative character. The second group often uses a previous part of the discourse as a preface and is hardly ever narrative. Morreal pointed out a similar dichotomy, using different labels: ‘(A) Saying things funny – being witty is context bound. (B) Saying funny things – a joke is context-free.’ (Morreal quoted in Alexander, 11) Category A was defined as ‘open-ended, ongoing, linear, temporally limited[, ...] multi-sourced and dialogic’ (Alexander, 11) and contrasts with B being ‘circumscribed, closed, complete, time-independent[, ...] unidirectional and monologic[.]’ (Alexander, 11) Morreal also addressed the difference between a funny remark being created and verbalized spontaneously and it being a planned (or canned) joke. Despite the differences presented above, there are cases in which the distinction between the two classes cannot be made in such a clear-cut way. One reason for this is that both types can have a similar structure. A canned joke can be altered to fit a certain situation in which case it would become a conversational joke. By the same token, a conversational joke can

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Attardo, 108-109, 111, 115-116, 127-128, 133-135, 140

be re-told outside of its original setting, describing the situation, thus creating a narrative, which would result in a new canned joke.<sup>53</sup>

## IV. ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY LITERATURE

### IV. 1 NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

#### IV. 1. 1 The function of physical movement

The action in Moore's books is driven by movement. The author points out that '[p]lot is merely the equitation by which one calculates the movement of the story.'

(<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews10.htm>) Each of his novels starts with an action or a situation that is out of the norm. How the story unfolds is dictated by the reactions of his characters to these initial circumstances, or rather, to these initial predicaments.

In each of the novels under consideration the (physical) movements of the main characters are indeed essential to the progression of the stories, and also lead to their culmination and finally, their resolution. As soon as the protagonists change their environment, be it by means of a longer journey or of just leaving the safety of their own homes, they find themselves faced with a series of unexpected events.

The main character in *Island* leaves the United States and goes to Alualu (with stopovers at Truck and Yap), then he is flying back and forth between the island in the Pacific Ocean and Japan. On Alualu he is also moving between his bungalow and the housing area of the natives. Later he leaves the island via boat and arrives in Hawaii, then returns to Alualu and flies the indigenous population to Costa Rica, where the story ends.

The central character in *Coyote* travels to the spirit world as a child to find his spirit helper (a metaphysical journey), and later flees from his reservation, goes to Sacramento and then to Santa Barbara. As a grown-up man he leaves his home in California to follow the woman he has fallen in love with to Las Vegas, and

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Attardo, 293, 295-296, 298-299; Alexander, 11

eventually to South Dakota. Then the protagonist and his friends return to his home, the Crow reservation. After a trip to Billings to retrieve a certain object, the main character goes to the underworld (another metaphorical journey) and finally returns safely. He then decides to remain on the reservation with his new family.

In the book *Fluke* the main character's most important movement is not horizontal, but vertical: He travels underwater. At the beginning of the novel the protagonist researches on the channel between Maui and Lanai, Hawaii. While he is diving a whale swallows him and he finds himself in a submarine, where he spends several days until he is transferred to the next whale-ship. Eventually, he is brought to the underwater grotto Gooville, six hundred miles off the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Later, the man is rescued with a submarine and returns to land. The last setting is Antarctica.

In *Lamb*, the first important change of setting takes place when the two central characters have to commute between Nazareth and the Roman city Sepphoris. For Passover they go on a pilgrimage from Galilee to Jerusalem with their fellow Jews. Jerusalem is the starting point for a journey of 17 years that first takes them to the city of Ptolomais. Then they go via ship and travel on the Silk Road. The first longer stop is Balthazar's stone fortress. Eventually, the journey continues and takes the protagonists to Gaspar's monastery, from where they visit a special meditation place in the mountains. Before the two pilgrims are homebound again, they go to India to meet Melchior. The young men later reach Judea via Kabul and the Damascus Road. After a wedding in Cana, the Sermon on the Mount is an essential setting. The last stop before the Son of God is nailed to the cross is Jerusalem. The resurrections of both central characters are the most remarkable changes of location, or rather of states of being (from the dead back to the living), and naturally stand out from the physical journeys listed above.

*Job* begins with the protagonist's wife leaving the world of the living, which is such a shock to her husband that he does not leave his own four walls for two weeks. Ultimately, he resumes his normal life (or tries to) and goes out as he did before. His usual routine starts to change once he pays a visit to the Fresh Music store, after which he takes a walk in the city of San Francisco every morning to fulfill his new destiny.

His job as a Death Merchant is put on hold when the main character travels to his dying mother in Sadona and also attends her funeral there. Back in San Francisco the Buddhist center of his new girlfriend is the starting point of his journey into the underworld, which he reaches by means of the municipal sewer system. Thus, the location changes from one above the ground to one that is below (cf. *Fluke*). Once the protagonist finds himself out of the sewers again, there are two instances of metaphysical movement: The soul of the main character's late wife travels from its vessel (a CD) into the body of his new love, and his own soul is transferred from his dead body (he died shortly after returning from the underworld) into the body of a Frankenstein taxidermy creature consisting of various animal parts.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. 1. 2 Structural aspects

The books *Island*, *Fluke* and *Job* share their tripartite structure. The first part of each novel serves to introduce the characters, as well as describe their lives and home and/or work environments. They also present the decisive events that force the protagonists to rise to the challenge posed to them. (Cf. 'The Phoenix', *Island*, chapters 1-22; 'The Song', *Fluke*, chapters 1-15; 'The Sorry Business', *Job*, chapters 1-9.) The second chapters deal with the main characters' new situations and how they slowly learn to adjust themselves. At this point each of the three men realizes that the lives of many others are threatened and will be put into jeopardy if he does not act like a hero. (Cf. 'Island of the Shark People', *Island*, chapters 23-41; 'Jonah's People', *Fluke*, chapters 16-26; 'Secondhand Souls', *Job*, chapters 10-18.) The final parts of the books describe how the central characters prepare themselves to take action against the evil-doers. Each of the books closes with a happy ending: The heroes manage to fight the injustices (with the help of their friends) and save the day. (Cf. 'Coconut Angel', *Island*, chapters 42-67; 'The Source', *Fluke*, chapters 27-38; 'Battleground', *Job*, chapters 19-27.) Both *Island* and *Job* have concluding epilogues that briefly portray how the characters live happily ever after.

*Coyote* is divided into four parts and is furthermore interspersed with unnumbered chapters, each of which presents a short episode of the life of the trickster figure

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<sup>54</sup> The movements are not listed in the order that they are narrated in the books, but in the chronological order of the life stories of the protagonists.



Coyote. The latter have the effect of putting the main story on hold, thus creating suspense for the eager reader, as well as giving a more vivid picture of the mythological character. The parts one to three contain similar plot elements as the ones discussed in the paragraph above: 'Epiphany' (chapters 1-12) introduces the characters and the locations that are important for the story. In 'The Call to Action' (chapters 13-22) the protagonist realizes that he cannot lead his life in the same way that he has done before having fallen in love. 'Quest' (chapters 23-30) describes how the main character and his group of friends track down their enemies and finally defeat them. The fourth part 'Home' (chapters 31-36) can be seen as a doubling of the third section: The hero has to prove his determination and risk his life once again, this time to resurrect the love of his life.

*Lamb* holds a special position in comparison to Moore's other novels, both in regard to form and content. The main story (set in Jesus' time) is framed by a second storyline (set in the contemporary USA): In the prologue the readers are informed that the I-narrator is resurrected to tell the story that they are about to read. This frame storyline interrupts the actual narration (and thereby provides extra suspense, cf. *Coyote*) on several occasions. The concluding epilogue gives a happy ending to the background story.

In contrast to the prologue and the epilogue, which are narrated by an omniscient third-person narrator (as are all of the other four novels discussed above), the six parts of the main story in *Lamb* are told by a first-person narrator (one of the two protagonists, Biff), thus in a more limited and subjective way; even in retrospect from the point of view of about two millennia later. 'The Boy' (chapters 1-8) introduces the main characters and depicts them in their home and work environments. Then they set out on their long journey. 'Change' (chapters 9-15), 'Compassion' (chapters 16-19) and 'Spirit' (chapters 20-22) each describe the experiences the adolescents make when living with and studying under one of the three magi. In part five titled 'Lamb' (chapters 23-29) like the whole book, they return to their home and Christ prepares himself and the others for his inevitable crucifixion. The chapters in part six 'Passion' are labeled according to the day of the week on which the events described occurred

(from 'Sunday' to 'Friday'). They paraphrase Christ's last six days and conclude with his death on the cross and his best friend (the I-narrator) hanging Judas.

## IV. 2 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### IV. 2. 1 General comparison of the protagonists

Moore's novels surely differ in regard to their plots but when his main characters are concerned, striking parallels between

- Tucker 'Tuck' Case (*Island*),
- Nathan 'Nate' Quinn (*Fluke*),
- Samuel 'Sam' Hunter/Samson Hunts Alone (*Coyote*),
- Biff/Levi & Joshua/Josh (*Lamb*) and
- Charles 'Charlie' Asher (*Job*)

become apparent. In the books under consideration the protagonists are all males. The age range they span is approximately twenty years. All men are well beyond adolescence and stand on their own feet. Tuck's age of thirty and Sam's age of thirty-five are the only instances of explicit mention.<sup>55</sup> Biff and Joshua develop from children to young adults and finally to grown men in the course of the story. Yet, they are self-dependent at a very early age and experience a series of life changing incidents, and can thus be seen as equals of the other main characters. The only novel in which the age of the main character plays a (not too significant) role, even though it is only vaguely alluded to by Nate being described as 'completely gray' (*Fluke*, 61), is *Fluke*. Nate is depicted as being considerably older than his assistant Amy, which makes him feel even more awkward about his attraction to her.<sup>56</sup>

Each of the men (with the exception of Biff and Joshua) holds a secured job, with which he is content. (In fact, in the beginnings of *Fluke* and *Coyote*, Nate and Sam, respectively, seem to live entirely for their jobs.) However, it is their professions, additionally to their character traits, that make them the outsiders that they are. Tuck is a pilot for a make-up company, which renders him rather popular among the ladies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Island*, 5; *Coyote*, 4

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 7, 33, 39

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Island*, 5, 31

He does not have a regular love relationship with a woman but frequently enjoys a different female's company for otherwise lonely hours. What women see in him is merely the opportunity for a one-night-stand with an attractive man who has an exciting job; probably because he is a 'geek' (*Island*, 7, 27). Nate at least has the company of his equally 'action nerd[y]' (*Fluke*, 56, 57) scientist co-workers and friends, but his profession as a dedicated whale researcher makes it impossible to find a partner who does not work in the same field.<sup>58</sup> Sam's professional success is the result of his ability to display the most appropriate kind of persona to sell an insurance package to a specific client.<sup>59</sup> Due to his criminal past, and possibly the fear of being confronted with prejudices about Native Americans, he does not want other people to find out who he really is.<sup>60</sup> In his personal life he does not have any real human contact and leads a lonely life in his luxurious condominium.<sup>61</sup> Charlie, the owner of a thrift shop, is timid and average. The man is generally clueless, but especially overtaxed with the situation of recently having lost the mother of his new-born daughter.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, he is always worried and uptight, as well as overly careful.<sup>63</sup> After the death of his wife, Charlie hides from the world in his apartment for two weeks.<sup>64</sup> As a typical 'Beta Male' he is convinced that the world is constantly trying to harm him in one way or the other.<sup>65</sup> Additionally to his introvert eccentric personality, his newly acquired professional and ethical responsibility as a Death Merchant (who retrieves the souls of the recently deceased) naturally sets him apart from other people.

By divine destiny, Joshua is the extreme example of the perpetual outcast. Initially, he battles with his self-doubt as to whether he really is the Son of God, which eventually turns into the constant worry of how he could ever live up to this standard.<sup>66</sup> In addition to being the only one of his kind, the Messiah's ceaseless self-reflection, altruism and feeling of responsibility for all his fellow beings segregates him from everyone else.<sup>67</sup> Biff's repeated choice to stand by Joshua no matter how grim the

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 8, 60-61

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 3, 16

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 4

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 17, 39

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Job*, 116

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Job*, 3-8, 33, 41

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Job*, 21

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Job*, 28, 32, 104

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 50-51, 74, 93

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 29

situation is puts him into a similar position, at least in regard to how he is perceived and treated by other people. His best friend's enemies are his enemies. Irrespective of his loyalty to the shunned and prosecuted Messiah, Biff's cheekiness, wisecracking and general urge to say what he is thinking without considering the consequences of such an action are not appreciated by others, either.

#### IV. 2. 2 The protagonists as 'picaresque saints'

In Hinchcliffe's discussion of the absurd in literature the focus is, as it is the norm, on the drama: the Theater of the Absurd. However, he also refers to the absurdity found in the works of novelists. Although time as well as writing style and subject matter separate the books of such writers as Franz Kafka and Fjodor Dostojewski, whose characters are referred to as being absurd, from those of Moore, the latter also makes use of what was coined the 'picaresque saint'.<sup>68</sup> He is described as an unusual hero figure:

[A] saint with more than a touch of the rogue about him: 'It is exactly in their impurity – whether it is reckoned by official morality or by any other kind – that the saintly characters achieve, and in fact incarnate, that trust in life [...] [...] They are outsiders who share; they are outcasts who enter in[.]' (Lewis in Hinchcliffe, 93)

This 'impurity' of character is most visible in Tuck, who indulges in excessive drinking and meaningless sexual encounters with numerous females. In fact, it is these two vices that lead to the life-changing accident in the beginning of the novel: The pilot causes a plane crash because he has sex with a prostitute while trying to fly in a state of intoxication.<sup>69</sup> Later, his lust for the female body makes him susceptible to the Sky Priestess' seductions.<sup>70</sup> However, at the end of the book, Tuck lives monogamously with the former island beauty Sepie.<sup>71</sup>

Since '[r]espect for authority had never been his strong suit' (*Island*, 150), the pilot keeps asking unwanted questions and does his own research behind the back of the Curtises. Despite his shortcomings he does not hesitate to help the natives whose organs are ruthlessly harvested by the married couple that supposedly takes good care

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Hinchcliffe, 93

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Island*, 4-11

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Island*, 275-276, 290, 298-300, 328-329

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Island*, 400-403

of them. Like a true hero, the pilot selflessly risks his own safety to successfully rescue the Shark People.<sup>72</sup> Due to his reckless behavior, Tuck used to be an outcast in his former environment and professional life. On the island Alualu he is still an outcast but he eventually decides to ‘enter in’, to become active and change the lives of the natives for the better.

Similar to Tuck, Sam is ‘an ambiguous hero [...] a confused and mixed character – a mixture of criminal and saint – whose innocence is met by the destructive nature of his experience, and who finds himself in a truly existential situation.’ (Hinchcliffe, 94) As a teenager, Samson Hunts Alone has to flee from his home, a Crow Reservation in Montana, because he believes he has killed a policeman who was taking advantage of a girl.<sup>73</sup> Ever since then, the protagonist has been living with the constant threat of the officials being able to trace him back to this incident, which, of course, would put an end to the new life he has built for himself as the white businessman Samuel Hunter.

Sam is innocent as far as the violence against the policeman is concerned. The officer did not die, and Sam only acted violently towards him to protect the girl. However, the maintenance of his cover existence depends entirely on his ability to manipulate and trick other people. While Sam, just like Tuck, is not a criminal in the restricted definition of the word, he surely is not a saint either. He repeatedly deceives and skillfully cajoles his clients into buying expensive insurance packages.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, he is, alongside Old Man Coyote, another roguish trickster figure of the book. According to the characterization of the ‘picaresque saint’, Sam acts like a figure from an absurd novel:

Chance and absurdity rule human action, and this the hero recognizes, knowing that reality is just another name for chaos. Consequently there are no accepted norms of feeling or conduct, and, therefore, courage is the prime virtue because it implies self-sufficiency. Whether rebel or victim, the hero is at odds with society, his motives are forever mixed, his perception of the situation remains limited and relative, and his actions cut across the lines conventionally drawn between good and evil. (Hinchcliffe, 95)

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Island*, 379-398

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 107-108

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 16-21

Sam, like his fellow Crow tribesmen, is a victim of the police officer's repeated injustices.<sup>75</sup> They can be understood as being generally representative of the prejudices about and ignorance towards the indigenous population by the US-American society. For instance, on the door of a saloon it says '*No Indians or Dogs Allowed.*' (*Coyote*, 254) When Sam leaves the reservation, he is an outsider to the world of the white man at first, but he quickly adapts to his new environment.<sup>76</sup> In fact, soon he fits so well into the Western world of business that he outdoes members of it who have been part of it ever since they were born.<sup>77</sup> On the one hand, Sam rebels against his roots by abandoning them completely. Life on the reservation does not hold much interest for him any longer once he has been lured away by Old Man Coyote who, appearing to the teenager Sam in a dream, showed him the material treasures of the white man's world.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the main character also rebels against the white world by infiltrating it, by becoming 'whiter' (more successful) than the white man himself.

Ultimately, Sam proves to be a true hero (or saint) by risking his life for the newly found love of his life and her son Grubb. The Native American has been forced to be self-sufficient at a very early age, which surely required a lot of courage on his behalf. However, until he meets Calliope this courage only served his own selfish interests and survival. At first, the protagonist follows Calliope, who is putting her own safety in jeopardy by pursuing the biker father of her child.<sup>79</sup> By doing so, the man risks both losing his job and his life. Then, he puts himself into more danger by entering the premises of a violent biker gang when his group of friends rescues the baby.<sup>80</sup> Finally, he even crosses over to the spiritual underworld to bring the late Calliope back to life.<sup>81</sup>

The following quote describing the 'picaresque saint' characters also refers to the two protagonists discussed above:

These heroes all begin their quests with a vision of the apparent lack of meaning in the world, of the mendacity and failure of ideals, but they conclude that gestures of

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 104-105; Oddly enough, Officer Enos Windtree is half Native American himself (cf. *Coyote*, 104). Apparently, he decided to reject this part of himself – very much like Sam.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 116

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 125

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 70-77

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 205-255

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 279-285

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 322-327

affirmation derived explicitly from their realization of the significance of love.  
(Galloway in Hinchcliffe, 96)

Young Sam is confronted with inequity based on racial grounds. The values of his culture are laughed at by the white man who holds materialistic commodities in higher regard than spiritual ideals. For a while the protagonist adopts this view and believes to be leading a satisfying life in luxury. However, after his first meeting with a beautiful woman he feels that there is something missing in his life, namely love. After the reunion with Calliope, who was taken for dead, he returns to his home, the reservation, to live with her. It seems that through Sam's realization of the significance of love, he is able to maintain a meaningful position in a world in which different cultures exist side by side. He combines returning to his roots with using the skills he has acquired in the white world by functioning as a mediator between the Crow tribe and the US-American government.<sup>82</sup> Tuck's disillusionment with his environment may have started before he lands on the island Alualu, but it is there that he becomes aware of how unsuspecting faithful people are abused by the ones who claim to be concerned with their health. The pilot experiences the loving interaction between Kimi and Sepie and realizes that he must help the natives.<sup>83</sup> In the end he is rewarded by having someone to love of his own, a wish that has not been met in his teenage years, but that he nonetheless seems to have always had.<sup>84</sup>

#### IV. 2. 3 The function of the (main) characters' humor

As can be expected, the use of humor by the characters is highly positively connotated in the books under consideration. Even though it is employed for various reasons and to achieve different effects, the practice of joking is illustrated as a favorable activity. It characterizes especially the protagonists as intelligent, quick-witted and, despite their partly preposterous eccentricities, as amiable.

Even in the most serious and life-threatening situations, the main characters do not lose their sense of humor. Quite contrarily, they use jokes to soften threatening circumstances and, consequently, to feel more relaxed in the face of danger. As a

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 338-339

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *Island*, 263-265

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Island*, 36-37

matter of fact, this is exactly what enables them to overcome all the obstacles in their way. In the following quotes, the narrator of *Island* employs black humor, rendered from the perspective of the main character Tuck, whose private parts have been severely injured:

He could see the infection around the sutures. He imagined gangrene, amputation, and consequently suicide. Then, looking on the bright side, he realized he would die of thirst long before the infection had gone that far. (*Island*, 99)

I am the Phoenix, rising from the ashes. I am the comeback kid. I am the entire 1980s gold-medal-winning U.S. Olympics hockey team. I am the fucking walrus, coo-coo ka-choo.

He went into the bathroom to brush his teeth, caught his reflection in the mirror. His mood went terminal. I am never going to get laid again as long as I live. [...] I am a spineless worm. I'm scum. I'm the *Hindenburg*, I'm Michael Milken, Richard Nixon. [...] I am the ringworm poster boy of Gangrene City. I'm an insane, unemployed bus driver for the death camp cartel. (*Island*, 171-172)

In *Lamb*, Biff makes the following comment when he and his friends suddenly encounter a menacing wildcat:

Rumi had expressed my sentiments exactly, but I would be damned if I was going to let my last words be 'Eek, a tiger,' so I listened quietly as urine filled my shoes. (*Lamb*, 299)

Hellenthal points out that dark or black humor often deals with the taboo subjects death or sex. In the case of the first, as shown in the examples above, humor is a device of self-defense: a way of acknowledging a horrible situation, but at the same time trying to eliminate the horror of it. Since this gallows humor enables the joker to defy death (or pain or grave humiliation) by ridiculing it, it empowers and liberates the threatened (fictional) individual. Due to the (apparent) absence of sense, black humor is often associated with absurdity.<sup>85</sup>

Gallows humor, however, is not the only instance of self-irony to be found in Moore's novels. The main characters frequently mock themselves on various occasions, not only when facing a dangerous situation:

Kimi interrupted. '[... Y]ou mean, nasty, Chevy-drinking, milk-drinking, American dog fucker.'

'I don't drink milk,' Tuck said. Ha! Won that round. (*Island*, 91)

I just stood there staring with my mouth open, drooling like the village idiot. (*Lamb*, 40)

I don't exactly know what I expected it would be like working as a stonemason, but I know that in less than a week Joshua was having second thoughts about not becoming a

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Hellenthal, 29, 37-39, 49, 67



carpenter. Cutting great stones with small iron chisels was very hard work. Who knew? (*Lamb*, 54)

‘Huh?’ I said eloquently. (*Lamb*, 150)

‘Josh, look! That guy is trying to lick his own balls! Just like Bartholomew, the village idiot. These are my people, Josh. These are my people. I have found home.’ (*Lamb*, 324)

The protagonists’ ability to laugh at themselves, to actually point out their own shortcomings, implies that they do not take themselves too seriously. This, of course, is a very positive character trait that renders the joker in question as likable. Therefore, the use of humor, even if it conveys a negative (self-)portrayal, only heightens the popularity of the self-deprecating figure. Furthermore, by poking fun at their own persons, the main characters automatically distinguish themselves from the humorless, and generally dislikable, negative characters, who are frequently their antagonists. In some cases the protagonists’ adversaries do not only not joke themselves, they also fail to recognize non-bona fide remarks made by others. The following conversation takes place when Josh and his friends talk about the dinner the Messiah had with the Pharisees who were cross-questioning and accusing him of blasphemy:

‘[... T]hen Jakan asked me by what authority I raised Simon from the dead.’

‘And what did you say?’

‘I didn’t say nothing, not with the Sadducee there. But Joseph told them that Simon hadn’t been dead. He was just asleep.’

‘So what did they say to that?’

‘Then they asked me by what authority I woke him up.’

‘And what did you say?’

‘I got angry then. I said by all the authority of God and the Holy Ghost, by the authority of Moses and Elijah, by the authority of David and Solomon, by the authority of thunder and lightning, by the authority of the sea and the air and the fire in the earth, I told them.’

‘And what did they say?’

‘They said Simon must have been a very sound sleeper.’

‘Sarcasm is wasted on those guys,’ I [Biff] said.

‘Completely wasted,’ said Joshua. (*Lamb*, 440)

Of course, the characters in Moore’s books also use humor, especially sarcasm, as a medium of self-assertion and a way of exerting power over others. Whoever gains the upper hand in a humorous exchange holds the more favorable position, if only for the duration of the conversation:

‘I know he has enemies. I am Coyote. I know everything. What’s this guy look like?’

‘He’s white. He has a gun.’

‘That narrows it down.’ (*Coyote*, 144)

[The whale] surfaced behind them, not ten feet away from the boat, the blow making both of them jump, the spray wafting across them in a rainbow cloud.  
'Ho! Dat buggah up, boss!' [Kona informing Nate that the whale has surfaced.]  
'Thank you, Captain Obvious,' Nate said under his breath. (*Fluke*, 81)

'That's how you hire? I'm smart and I'm cheap – that's it? What kind of standards do you guys have?'  
'Have you met Kona?' (*Fluke*, 169)

[Charlie makes a fool of himself, trying to talk African-American slang.]  
[...]'How am I doing?'  
'Your Negro-osity is uncanny. I had to keep checking to make sure you're still white.'  
(*Job*, 359)

'This is just horrible, Nate. Just horrible. That boat represented a major capital investment for you guys, I'm sure.'  
'Yeah, but mainly we liked to think of it as something that floated and moved us around on the water.' Nate actually had a great capacity for sarcasm, but he usually reserved it for those things and people who he found truly irritating. Jon Thomas Fuller was truly irritating. (*Fluke*, 123-124)

However, it should be noted that in the examples above (with the exception of the last two quotes), as well as in the majority of the humorous exchanges between the characters in general, the interlocutors are friends, or becoming friends. Therefore, they are not seriously trying to humiliate or hurt each other. These caustic remarks among friends seem rather to be little battles of wit, harmless verbal games that serve as a source of amusement. The friendly tongue-in-cheek demeanor of the befriended characters, teasing as a sign of affection, is depicted as a given in all of the novels. Consequently, there are no hard feelings once someone is verbally attacked by another in such a playful way.

#### IV. 2. 4 Moore's comic characters

##### *IV. 2. 4. 1 Character humor*

In all the novels under consideration, each of the protagonists is immediately established as an example of a specific kind of persona. These (partly commonly clichéd) characters are then caricatured into the absurd in the course of the respective stories. The following list is a possibility of a quick and broad typification:

- Sam – the sleek businessman
- Tuck – the awkward daredevil
- Nate – the scientist geek

- Biff – the hormone-driven know-it-all
- Charlie – the disadvantaged pushover

Moore exploits the individual features of each of these (and several other) fictional figures in such a way that they can easily be perceived as humorous characters. They are not only comic due to their sense of humor, expressed by the jokes they make, but also because of their character traits, which entail certain modes of (verbal) behavior. Throughout the books, the men repeatedly put their weaknesses and the downsides of their outlooks on life on public display, which frequently results in amusing scenes. For instance, Nate, an expert on marine biology, does not seem to know a lot about the female usage of subtlety:

‘I have vodka and a shower in my cabin,’ she said.  
 ‘I have a shower in my cabin, too,’ Nate said.  
 Libby just shook her head and trudged up the path to the lodge. Over her shoulder she called, ‘In five minutes there’s going to be a naked woman in my shower. You got one of those?’  
 ‘Oh,’ said Nate. (*Fluke*, 61)

Another example is this exchange between Charlie, who expresses his chronic worrying and meekness, and his sister Jane:

‘Jane,’ said Charlie, ‘I am convinced by the events of the last few weeks that nefarious forces or people – unidentified but no less real – are threatening life as we know it, and in fact, may be bent on unraveling the very fabric of our existence.’  
 [...] [Jane ignores his enumeration of weird incidents because she is used to his anxiety.]  
 ‘Jane! [...] Are you listening at all?’  
 ‘Yes, yes, you saw some guy get hit by a bus so your fabric is unraveling. So?’  
 ‘So, someone is fucking with me?’  
 ‘And why is that news, Charlie? You’ve thought someone was fucking with you since you were eight.’  
 ‘They have been. Probably. But this time it’s real. It could be real.’ (*Job*, 32-33)

Readers will automatically refer to their real-life experiences with and assumptions about the five character types listed above, and compare them to the author’s portrayals as archetypal instances thereof. It is exactly the exaggeration of the respective shortcomings of the men that makes them look like fools on various occasions. However, trying to pass judgment on how exaggerated, or if at all, Moore depicted Joshua as the self-critical and self-sacrificing Messiah appears pointless. After all, the Christ figure is evasive, only vaguely tangible by way of reading scripture. Josh is generally very difficult to relate to the other protagonists as he is the only one who is directly and evidently based on a non-fictional historic human being. As the respect for other people and their beliefs calls for, Moore did not turn the

Jesus-based character into a farcical figure. This is the role of freely-invented Biff.

The author pointed out that it is actually he who allows humor to enter into the tragic account of Christ's life and death. Josh's best friend was created as a

character with a strong voice to tell the story. [Moore] wanted the immediacy of a first person narrator [...] but [the author] didn't want to be limited by the people who were actually named in the Bible [...] The rest was a balancing act, to try to keep the story entertaining and funny, without making the book appear to be an attack book. While [Moore] had distinct issues with the way the Christian religion had been bent to serve the agenda of man, [he] had no issue with the actual teachings of Jesus, so [he] wanted to portray him with respect[.] (<http://old.chrismoore.com/bio.htm>)

The fact that each of the protagonists (with the exception of Josh for whom Biff serves as a substitute) is a humorous character assures a certain level of comedy throughout the entire novels. In her article on humor enhancers, Triezenberg remarks that stock characters facilitate the act of conveying humor because the audience knows what to expect due to its familiarity with such stereotypical figures. This results in a 'pleasant expectation of humor to come[.] [...] Stereotypes thus form a circle of humor enhancement in which the joke makes the stereotype funnier, which makes the joke funnier[.]' (Triezenberg, 414) Triezenberg also stresses the fact that clichéd characters are perceived as funny because by describing them, their traits are blown out of proportion.<sup>86</sup>

#### IV. 2. 4. 2 *The (pliable) lustful male*

Tucker Case is a prime example of a man who is easily manipulated by attractive females because of his strong sexual desires. Naturally, this circumstance is a perfect precondition for various personal dilemmas. When a prostitute in a bar addresses him and suggests having sex with her while he's flying his Learjet, he points out that it would be too dangerous, given the fact that he has had several drinks. Their conversation continues as follows:

'That's [it being dangerous] the point, isn't it?' She smiled.

'No, I mean really dangerous.'

'I have condoms.'

Tucker shrugged. 'I'll get a cab.' (*Island*, 7-8)

It seems comic that, upon just being given a reconfirmation of the already granted sexual intercourse, the pilot changes his mind so quickly. Surely, his common sense is

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Triezenberg, 414

impaired by his alcohol consumption, yet, the woman does not even have to try very hard to convince him. All she has to do is repeat her initial suggestion ('You get me in the mile-high club tonight and I won't charge you. I've always wanted to do it in a plane.' *Island*, 7) using different words. Tuck's weakness does not only amuse the reader because he is so easily talked into something he does not really want to do with such little effort, but also because of the anticipating hint that what follows is one of the 'big missteps [Tuck] had taken in his life' (*Island*, 5). Thus, the reader is already positively affected by the prospect of being able to indulge in malicious joy.

Very much to the pilot's disadvantage, this is only the first time in the course of the novel that his sex drive directs his actions. Doctor Curtis notices Tuck's interest in his wife immediately ('He looks at you like you're some sort of beatific vestal virgin.' *Island*, 171), and the physician is certainly not mistaken. Just seeing Beth Curtis in her Sky Priestess attire for the first time renders the pilot unable to move normally or think clearly:

[S]he was standing there wearing nothing but a red scarf and sequined high heels. Tuck dropped his spoon. Two partially used beans dribbled out of his open mouth [...] Tuck [...] with the glassy-eyed stupifaction [sic!] of a newly converted Moonie. [...] 'What do you think?' 'Uh-huh,' Tuck said, nodding. 'Come here.'

Tuck stood and moved toward her in the mindless shuffle step of a zombie compelled by the promise of living flesh. His brain stopped working, his entire life energy shifted to another part of his body, and it led him across the room to within an inch of her. It wasn't the first time this had happened to him, but before he had always retained the power of speech and most of his motor functions. (*Island*, 276)

When the Sky Priestess successfully seduces the man for the first time, he is already aware that she and her husband are engaging in some sort of foul play by taking advantage of the islanders.<sup>87</sup> Tuck may have become active and tried to rescue the native population from the doctor and his wife at an earlier point if it had not been for the distraction in the shape of Beth Curtis' body. It appears that the man is so overjoyed about being able to perform sexually again, which is contrary to his prior worries based on the severe injuries sustained in the plane crash,<sup>88</sup> that at first, he fails to realize how he is being manipulated and led into blind passivity by the female.

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Island*, 255, 266

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Island*, 12, 99, 204

Before he is finally able to show resistance against the woman,<sup>89</sup> his common sense is repeatedly overpowered by his physical desires for several weeks:

In spite of himself, he was thinking about her naked body grinding away above him. (*Island*, 290)

Tuck said, 'I don't think this is such a good idea,' but there was no conviction in his voice and she pushed him back on the bed. (*Island*, 300)

Tuck's ebbing between the conflictive states of being attracted to the alluring looks of the Sky Priestess and being repulsed by her ever-changing corrupt personality turns him into the female's helpless toy. The reader is amused by this contradictory juxtaposition of the pilot's feelings and his inability to gain the upper hand over a member of the so-called weaker sex.

In contrast to Tuck, Sam is not actually manipulated by the waitress Calliope Kincaid – since the woman does not use her physical appeal to control him in the same way that the Sky Priestess aims to control the pilot – nonetheless, he is still very much affected by her charms. One can measure Calliope's influence on Sam by the mere fact that she makes him (want to) change his ways and recommit to his Native American descent in order to lead a fulfilling life with her and her son.

When the businessman first lays eyes on the young mother he is

poleaxed by desire [and wants her] to the core of his being [...] [H]er effect on him now [is] like a long, oily saxophone note that start[s] somewhere in that lizard part of the brain to the tendons in his groin and back into his stomach to form a knot that nearly double[s] him over. (*Coyote*, 4)

Despite the fact that he feels that getting involved with the woman '*is an accident waiting to happen*' (*Coyote*, 6) and regardless of his initial worries that she and the trickster may be trying to blackmail him,<sup>90</sup> he cannot help it. Very quickly, Sam is completely taken with the attractive female; so much, in fact, that he easily forgets his fears: 'Sam was not in the least bit worried. Not with the prospect of an evening with Calliope to occupy his thoughts. No, for once Sam Hunter was voting the eager ticket over the anxious, taking anticipation over dread.' (*Coyote*, 129)

The insurance broker finds himself saying things that he really does not want to say. His guard is starting to crumble in Calliope's presence:

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Island* 325-327

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 7

‘You don’t have any kids[,]’ Calliope asked.]  
‘No, I’ve never met anyone I wanted to have kids with.’  
Sam wanted to smack himself for saying it. *Remember, tough and adaptable.*  
(*Coyote*, 135)

Yet, Sam is still too proud to admit that she has the upper hand. He tries to talk himself into believing he is still in complete control of himself:

She began to spread the blankets out over the floor.  
Sam stood by, trying to fight the objections that were rising in his mind about the speed at which things were progressing. She just assumed that he would say yes; it made him feel like – well – a slut. Then again, if this beautiful girl wanted to make love with him, who was he to object? Okay, so he was a slut; he was a tough and adaptable slut.  
(*Coyote*, 136-137)

Even after their love-making is abruptly interrupted by Calliope’s violent and jealous ex-boyfriend and father of her child, Sam does not want to leave.<sup>91</sup> When the woman disappears, the natural loner, who is mostly concerned with himself, does not hesitate long before following her to Las Vegas to make sure she does not get hurt – in spite of the fact what kind of consequences such an action could have for himself.

Being presented as a teenager, and then as an adolescent, Biff seems to have the best excuse for being controlled by his raging hormones throughout his entire narration of the adventures with the Messiah. The ever-pubescent man is madly in love with two women, both of which are unreachable for him because of Joshua. First, the readers are informed of his crush on Josh’s mother Mary. As a young boy he actually intends to marry her, which leads to this comic conversation between him and his best friend:

Early on I developed a little-boy love for Joshua’s mother that sent me into fantasies of marriage and family and future.  
‘Your father is old, huh, Josh?’  
‘Not too old.’  
‘When he dies, will you mother marry his brother?’  
‘My father has no brothers. Why?’  
‘No reason. What would you think if your father was shorter than you?’  
‘He isn’t.’  
‘But when your father dies, your mother could marry someone shorter than you, and he would be your father. You would have to do what he says.’  
‘My father [obviously referring to God, not Joseph] will never die. He is eternal.’  
‘So you say. But I think that when I’m a man, and your father dies, I will take your mother as my wife.’ (*Lamb*, 15-16)

The other love of his life is Maggie or Mary of Magdala, who, as soon as she enters the lives of the two friends, puts Josh’s mother into second place:

Soon after we were expected to be betrothed, and by fourteen, married and starting a family. So you see, I was not too young to consider Maggie as a wife. (And I might

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 138-140, 141

always have the fallback position of marrying Joshua's mother when Joseph died).  
(*Lamb*, 42)

He later refers to her as his 'primary wife-to-be' (*Lamb*, 79) and to Mary as his 'emergency backup wife' (*Lamb*, 78). Maggie, too, is not romantically interested in him, for she is in love with Josh (who, naturally, cannot and does not want to have a relationship with her). Frustrated, Biff immediately realizes that he cannot compete with the Messiah.<sup>92</sup> Still, he remains in love with the girl for his whole life,<sup>93</sup> which is rewarded at the end of the book as he can spend his afterlife with her.<sup>94</sup>

Biff is eager to learn about physical love, but until the time has come he knows how to educate himself in that direction. When he and Josh come upon a statue of the naked Venus in Sepphoris, a graven image according to their religion, the Messiah has to drag his best friend away.<sup>95</sup> Biff then points out,

'You could see her breasts.'

'Don't think about it.'

'How can I not think about it? I've never seen a breast without a baby attached to it. They're more – more friendly in pairs like that. [...] Do you think Maggie's breasts will look like that?' (*Lamb*, 53)

One day the Son of God asks him if he has committed the Sin of Onan yet, to which he replies, 'No, but I'm looking forward to it.' (*Lamb*, 71). The following quote reflects Biff's general attitude towards this pastime activity:

Onanism, a sin that requires hundreds of hours of practice to get it right, or at least that's what I told myself. [...] According to the Law, if you had any contact with 'nocturnal emissions' [...], you had to purify yourself by baptism and you weren't allowed to be around people until the next day. Around the age of thirteen I spent a lot of time in and out of our mikveh [a ritual Jewish bath], but I fudged on the solitary part of penance. I mean, it's not like that was going to help the problem. (*Lamb*, 71)

Even though Biff has already lost his heart to two women very early in his life, he does not give away any opportunity to get close to other members of the female sex. His sexual encounters on his journey with Josh are the source of several farcical anecdotes. For instance, there is an episode in which he explains that he gets an erection every time he hears the sound of an ambulance (after he has been resurrected and is living in the twenty-first century) because it sounds exactly like the ululation

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 43, 45, 91-92

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 72, 193

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 497-498

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 52-53



produced by harlots of his time.<sup>96</sup> Another time Biff describes himself as poorly deprived, which leaves him vulnerable to the advances of an elderly woman:

[...] thus curtailing my regular supply of sexual companions. I want to go on record that I had been steadfast in adhering to the rules of the monastery, allowing only those nocturnal emissions as expelled during dreams (although I had gotten pretty good in directing my dreams in that direction [...]). So, that said, I was in a weakened state of resistance when the old woman, leathery and toothless as she might have been, compelled me by threat and intimidation to share with her what the Chinese call the Forbidden Monkey Dance. Five Times. (*Lamb*, 268-269)

While Josh is being taught spiritual knowledge by Melchior, Biff eagerly studies the theory and practice of the Kama Sutra with the help of a prostitute. Generously, the eager student of physical pleasures shares his newly-acquired knowledge of, as he calls it, ‘sacred and ancient teachings’ (*Lamb*, 335) down to the smallest picturesque detail with his best friend.<sup>97</sup> Prior to these experiences, Biff is able to trick the eight concubines of the magus Balthazar into pleasing him in exchange for him telling them how the Messiah performs his miracles – a subject about which he has to lie because really, he does not have a clue.<sup>98</sup>

In contrast to the three previously discussed protagonists, Charlie is not generally governed by his desire for sex. However, five years after his wife’s death, spent in pure abstinence,<sup>99</sup> and motivated by his sister telling him he ‘need[s] someone to have sex with’ (*Job*, 197), his hormones finally get the best of him. After he refuses to get the ‘happy ending’ with his massage at an Asian massage parlor,<sup>100</sup> he falls victim to the luring of a woman of the streets. Being starved for physical closeness and highly attracted to her looks, Charlie suddenly finds himself in a life-threatening situation as the woman, who is quick at pleasing him with her hand, turns out to be one of his enemies in disguise, a ‘sewer harpy’.<sup>101</sup> Later she is referred to as ‘the hand-job harpy’ (*Job*, 424).

There is another character in *Job* who can easily be referred to as lustful, a character who is almost exclusively defined by his desires for the opposite sex: Charlie’s employee Ray Macy. The ‘thirty-nine-year-old bachelor with an unhealthy lack of

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 131

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 334-339

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 190-191

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Job*, 193

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Job*, 220-222

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *Job*, 223-226

boundaries between the Internet and reality' (*Job*, 25) is repeatedly drawn to websites where (supposed) females advertise themselves. The tall and balding ex-policeman<sup>102</sup> prefers Asian woman, pictures of which he frequently browses for on websites such as 'Desperate Filipinas dot-com' (*Job*, 45) during his shift in Charlie's shop. Ray is so eager to find someone online that he does not realize that not all of the girls on this website are actually girls:

Ray was chatting with Eduardo, his new girlfriend at *DesperateFilipina.com*, when Charlie came down the back steps.  
[...] '[...] Charlie, check out my new squeeze.' Ray pulled up a photo on the screen of a heavily made-up but attractive Asian woman.  
'She's pretty, Ray. [...] Dude, her name is *Eduardo*.'  
'I know. It's a Filipino thing, like Edwina.'  
'She has a five-o'clock shadow [a stubble].'  
'You're just being racist. Some races have more facial hair than others. I don't care about that, I just want someone who is honest and caring and attractive.'  
'She has an Adam's apple.' (*Job*, 198-199)

After Charlie has made Ray suspicious of his new girlfriend's gender, he finds himself in a tricky situation, which is rather amusing for the readers:

[Ray] was trying to figure out how to work 'Do you have a penis?' casually into the conversation with his sweetheart Eduardo. After a couple of teasing e-mails, he could stand it no longer and had just typed out, *Eduardo, not that it makes any difference, but I'm thinking of sending you some sexy lingerie as a friendship present, and I wondered if I should make any special accommodations for the panties*.  
Then he waited. And waited. And granted that it was five in the morning in Manila, he was second-guessing himself. Had he been too vague, or had he not been vague enough? (*Job*, 200-201)

The ridiculously gullible man is just trying to see if he has more luck with the 'selection of lonely first-grade teachers with master's degrees in nuclear physics on *UkrainianGirlsLovingYou.com*' (*Job*, 321), when a visually arresting woman enters the store. Ray is immediately overwhelmed and mentally refers to her as 'the love of his life' (*Job*, 321), 'the future Mrs Ray Macy' (*Job*, 322), 'the woman who would be his queen' (*Job*, 323) and 'the lovely brunette goddess of all things Ray' (*Job*, 323).<sup>103</sup> Being desperate and naïve, he thinks he is able to deduce her character from her attractive appearance and the few words she has uttered:

'[...] Sorry. I was working[,' said Ray.]  
'I can see that.' Again the smile.  
She was so understanding, forgiving – and kind, you could just tell that by her eyes. He knew in his heart that he would even sit through a hat movie [old black and white film] for this woman. He would watch *A Room with a View* AND *The English Patient*, back-

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Job*, 44

<sup>103</sup> As the novel is told by a third-person narrator and it is he/she who is referring to the woman by these expressions, the quotes could also be understood as the narrator making fun of the character's quick attachment purely based on looks.

to-back, just to share a pizza with her. And she would stop him from eating his service revolver halfway through the second movie, because that's just how she was: compassionate. (*Job*, 321-322)

Eventually Ray's physical needs are met, as his young co-worker Lily takes pity on him. Charlie walks in on his employees having sex in the back room and confronts them (while they are continuing their current activity). Lily explains that she is merely doing a philanthropic deed, and Ray echoes her replies, exaggerating his desperation and patheticness to the maximum:

'It needed to be done,' Lily said. [...]  
'It did,' Ray agreed breathlessly. [...]  
'He was despondent,' she said. 'I found him giving himself hickies with the shop vac. It's for the greater good, Asher.'  
'Well, stop it,' Charlie said.  
'No, no, no, no, no,' said Ray.  
'It's a charity thing,' Lily said. [...]  
'He was suicidal,' Lily said. 'I may be saving his life.'  
'She is,' Ray said.  
'Shut up, Ray,' Charlie said. 'This is pathetic, desperate pity sex, that's all it is.'  
'He knows that,' Lily said.  
'I don't mind,' said Ray. (*Job*, 350-351)

#### IV. 2. 4. 3 *The (sexually) superior female*

Consistent with the circumstance that Tuck is the most hormone-driven of the protagonists, it is Beth Curtis who is the most powerful and controlling woman in the novels under consideration. She is supervising the entire population of the island; the Sky Priestess reigns supreme by creating fear as well as sexual desire. Before the pilot's arrival on Alualu, the female dictates to the natives as their religious leader<sup>104</sup> and manipulates her husband. Her way of making Sebastian Curtis do her bidding is similar to how she later tricks Tuck:

The High Priestess fired a glare over her shoulder and he [Sebastian Curtis] could feel himself going to slime, changing, melting into the lowest form of sea slug. She could do that to him. Her breasts felt like chilled rocks in his hands. He stepped away. (*Island*, 52)

The Sorcerer [Sebastian Curtis' alter ego for the natives] couldn't believe anyone could walk that slowly and still express so much; it was positively symphonic. (*Island*, 54)

She sat upright in bed and the Sorcerer's eyes fell immediately to her naked breasts. (*Island*, 95)

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Island*, 109, 112-113, 279-280, 283-284

Soon, Tuck also falls victim to her talent for acting and her physical assets. For as long as the woman's spell is working on him, she is in complete control at all times. It is she who decides when and how to have sex.<sup>105</sup> She repeatedly assures her husband that she knows how to handle the pilot<sup>106</sup> and confidently tells her victim, 'You're mine [...]' (*Island*, 329).

Her ability to manipulate men so easily makes the character of Beth Curtis amusing because it makes her victims look like fools. However, this is only one side of her comic function. When the female changes her personality, she also becomes the unwitting target of humor herself in various situations. On first meeting the pilot, she aims to have him side with her (and her husband) by being overly sweet and amiable:

She [Beth Curtis] too was smiling, with the aspect of an angel, the vessel of human kindness. (*Island*, 142)

her 'Little House on the Prairie' purity (*Island*, 142)

keeping a parade smile pointed Tuck's way (*Island*, 170)

These exaggerated comparisons appear especially funny because they stand in contradiction to the woman's real character. Even though the protagonist is very much taken with her appearance, he quickly sees through her charade:

The doctor's wife [...] seemed robotic, like some Stepford/Barbie hybrid with the smooth sexless carriage of a mannequin and a personality pulled out of an Eisenhower-era soap commercial. (*Island*, 156-157)

sporting one of her plastic smiles (*Island*, 157)

She laughed, a polite hostess laugh (*Island*, 248)

He characterizes her as a 'bitch' (*Island*, 202) – which he later specifies more descriptively by calling her a 'nefarious, diabolical, and evil bitch' (*Island*, 286) – and as being 'fucking scary' (*Island*, 256) as well as 'insane' (*Island*, 298). As the following examples show, he surely has a point:

He [Sebastian Curtis] turned to leave and was struck in the back of the head by a high-velocity whiskey tumbler. He turned as he dropped to the floor grasping his head. The High Priestess was standing by the bed wearing nothing but a fine golden chain at her hips and an animal scowl.

'You ever call me stupid again and I'll rip your fucking nuts off.' (*Island*, 96)

She turned and regarded him [Tuck] like an annoying insect. (*Island*, 184)

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Island*, 276, 328-329

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Island*, 170, 286, 304

[T]he tune in her voice struck him [Sebastian Curtis] like an ice pick in the neck.  
(*Island*, 210)

Furthermore, the female enjoys herself when teasing a man in pain<sup>107</sup> and frightens the armed guards on the island by just looking at them.<sup>108</sup> More comic are the incidents of her throwing a temper tantrum when her TV set is not working<sup>109</sup> and of her performing a little lobster puppet show over boiling water with references to James Bond films, the latter bordering on the bizarre.<sup>110</sup>

Several times Beth Curtis' personality changes take place very suddenly. Sometimes this happens at her own will, other times she loses the control over her acting unintentionally:

She skipped around the lab like a little girl. [...]  
Sebastian wanted to stop himself before he ruined her ebullient mood, but he pressed on despite himself. [...]  
'You really don't get it, do you? [...]' She flipped the end of her red scarf over her shoulder. [...]  
She came up behind him, pushed her breasts into his back, and reached around inside his lab coat. [...]  
'That's enough, Beth.'  
'No, it's not.' She ripped open the front of his trousers and fell back on the lab table, pulling him on top of her. (*Island*, 130-132)

She [...] began to shake with a diabolical laugh. She stopped laughing abruptly and said, 'They [the lobsters] should be ready in about ten minutes. Salad, Mr Case?' (*Island*, 255)

The Sky Priestess was losing on all fronts. There was an element here that she was not in control of, and unknown variable that was affecting the Sorcerer's mood. When sex and flattery don't work, what next? Ah, team spirit. 'It makes us the fittest, 'Bastian. It makes us superior.' (*Island*, 305)

She seemed surprised and broke character. [...] A second for composure and she was back at it. [...] She fell out of character again. (*Island*, 326-327)

Having gotten to know her identities as a caring nurse,<sup>111</sup> a parade wife and great hostess<sup>112</sup> – 'her fifties housewife personality' (*Island*, 230) – and as a cold-hearted

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Island*, 193

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Island*, 158

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *Island*, 322

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *Island*, 254-255

<sup>111</sup> Cf. *Island*, 143

<sup>112</sup> Cf. *Island*, 166-179

business woman,<sup>113</sup> Tuck calls her ‘a woman who could have been the model for the new Multiple Personality Barbie’ (*Island*, 200). Beth Curtis is a disturbing character, a megalomaniac, exhibiting ruthless callousness on several occasions. Yet, her outbursts of fury, her inability to stay in character when things are not going according to her plan make her comic, even ludicrous.

Calliope Kincaid is another female character with a strong grip on men, who started being attracted to her when she was in her early teenage years:<sup>114</sup> ‘My name wasn’t always Calliope,’ she interrupted. ‘Sherman [...] started calling me Calliope, after the Greek muse of epic poetry. He said that I inspired men to art and madness. [...]’ (*Coyote*, 61-62) Males try very hard to please the gorgeous woman, even to the point of making fools of themselves:

‘One day I was telling him that I thought cars had replaced guns as phallic symbols for American men, and I thought it was interesting that he had one that was so small and fast. The next day he gave me the Datsun and went out and bought a Lincoln. It was very sweet.’ (*Coyote*, 61)

The waitress is well aware of her effect on the opposite sex, which is why she automatically assumes that Sam will give her a ride after work when he has just met her.<sup>115</sup> What is more, she is not only convinced that the man wants to sleep with her, she also bluntly points out to him that she knows it.<sup>116</sup> First, Calliope’s frankness (about sex) astonishes Sam:

But where was the seduction, the deception, the sweet lies and tender posturing? Where was the hunt, the cat-and-mouse game? Sam just stared at her and thought, *This is entirely too honest.*[...] ‘You want me and I want you. Right?’ Who did she think she was? You can’t just go around blurting out the truth like a prophet with Tourette’s syndrome. (*Coyote*, 137)

Then he realizes, very quickly, that this outspokenness has its positive sides:

‘[...] This first time will be pretty fast.’ ‘Hey.’ Sam thought he might have just been insulted, but on second thought he realized that the girl had just voiced something that he had really been worrying about, without even admitting it to himself. On second thought, she had relieved the pressure on him to perform. (*Coyote*, 137)

Apart from her physical benefits, it is Calliope’s honesty and naivety to which Sam is so attracted. The woman seems to combine the looks of a model with the mind of an

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. *Island*, 196

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 59

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 6

<sup>116</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 62, 136-137, 148

innocent and playful child: 'For Calliope, every event was mystical and every moment magical, a flat tire could be a manifestation of karma, or a lizard might be Jimi Hendrix.' (*Coyote*, 60) Driven by her inquisitive and restless mind, she keeps asking the man the most absurd questions.<sup>117</sup> This contrast between the sexual being Calliope, who controls men via their libido, and the child-like, goofy and, perhaps, somewhat helpless, Calliope, who needs to be protected, provides great attraction to the males.<sup>118</sup> This holds especially true for Sam, who is thrown every time he sees that 'expression of wonderment' (*Coyote*, 62) in her face. Never before has he met someone like her, someone whose room 'looked like it had been decorated by a Buddhist monk from 'Sesame Street[.]'' (*Coyote*, 140-141), which is most likely the result of her unusual upbringing by a mother who frequently changed her religious beliefs.<sup>119</sup>

Even though Beth Curtis and Calliope Kincaid are similar in regard to their (sexual) superiority over men, the latter does not abuse her power for personal gain. Quite the contrary is the case. The waitress admits to her friend that the insurance broker is the first man to whom she feels connected,<sup>120</sup> which must be especially meaningful to her, given that she is such a spiritual person.

#### IV. 2. 4. 4 *The hapless 'Beta Male'*

In personal correspondence, Moore pointed out that 'nearly all of [his] male leads are Beta Males' (e-mail from Christopher Moore, received August 1, 2008, 7:58 PM). Clearly, the five novels under consideration feature main characters who are dominated by strong-willed women to a varying degree. The female manipulation ranges from being apparent in major parts of the story, such as is the case in *Island* and *Coyote* (discussed above), to forming just comparably minor incidents as in *Job*, *Fluke* and *Lamb* (in the latter only Biff is affected and never Joshua). This is proof of a certain weakness of the protagonists, an inability to take their own lives in their hands and allowing someone else to overpower them, even by non-violent means.

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 6, 147-148

<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 268

<sup>119</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 58-58

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 171

However, most of the main characters experience this helplessness exclusively during encounters with females capable of manipulation. In other situations these men are successful in making their own decisions. Whereas the plots of the respective novels are certainly driven by a change of events that causes the men to take a different route in their lives, they do not habitually state the excuse, ‘Someone is fucking with me.’ (*Job*, 28) Yet, this is exactly what distinguishes the thrift store owner Charles Asher from the other protagonists, for he is the ultimate Beta Male whose weak excuse quoted above ‘had evolved over millions of years [as] a standard Beta response to things inexplicable’ (*Job*, 28).<sup>121</sup>

In *Job*, the narrator presents his notion of a typical Beta Male at great length. The readers are provided with a thorough theory of this character type, exemplified by Charlie. The entire chapter four (‘The Beta Male In His Natural Environment’, *Job*, 32-43) is dedicated to characterizing this particular specimen:

While Alpha Males are often gifted with superior physical attributes – size, strength, speed, good looks – selected by evolution over the eons by the strongest surviving and, essentially, getting all the girls, the Beta Male gene has survived not by meeting and overcoming adversity, but by anticipating and avoiding it. [...] The Beta Male is seldom the strongest or fastest, but because he can anticipate danger, he far outnumbers his Alpha Male competition. The world is led by Alpha Males, but the machinery of the world turns on the bearings of the Beta Male. (*Job*, 34)

The quote above speaks quite favorably of the Beta Male. However, since there is hardly any serious physical danger any longer,

the Beta Male imagination has become superfluous in the face of modern society. [...] Consequently, a lot of Beta Males become hypochondriacs, neurotics, paranoids, or develop an addiction to porn or video games. [...] The rich fantasy life of the Beta Male may often spill over into reality, manifesting itself in near-genius levels of self-delusion. (*Job*, 35)

In the main character’s case, the ‘Beta Male imagination may have often turned him toward timidity and even paranoia’ (*Job*, 74). This explains why ‘Beta Males are seldom ever in a position to frighten anyone physically’ (*Job*, 179). As a poor form of compensation, the thrift store owner takes a small pleasure in scaring the elderly Mrs Ling, and only manages to do so with the help of his daughter’s giant dogs.<sup>122</sup> On the subject of physical conflict, it is also said that

[d]irect attacks [...] were difficult for Charlie (as the only true Beta Male martial art was based entirely on the kindness of strangers), so he [used] [...] the awesome power of the Beta Male kung fu of passive aggression. [...] When it appeared that even the

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<sup>121</sup> Throughout the novel, the narrator also comments on the behavior of other (minor character) Beta Males, some of which are Death Merchants like Charlie; cf. *Job*, 100, 204, 240, 307, 332, 432.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Job*, 178-179



most passive-aggressive attempts would not work, Charlie resorted to the ultimate Beta Male attack, which was to tolerate [his opponents'] presence, but to resent the hell out of them and drop snide remarks whenever he had the chance.' (*Job*, 182-183)

Another disadvantage connected to this innate avoidance of danger is that power, money and highly attractive women are clearly out of reach and can only be dreamed about. It is furthermore said that because of the Beta Male's feeling of deprivation and the consequent desperate need to somehow achieve the aforementioned status symbols, a place like Las Vegas has been brought into being.<sup>123</sup> Thus, in summary, the Beta Male in general, and Charlie in particular, is a self-conscious coward who feels mistreated by the rest of the world.

Being representative of this (self-appointed) underprivileged group, Charlie is steady and responsible, which makes for a loyal partner.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, '[l]ike most Beta Males, he [does not] realize that being a good guy [is] not necessarily an attraction to women.' (*Job*, 379) However, having been disappointed by Alpha Males, females usually appreciate a Beta Male

who will adore [them], if for no other reason than gratitude for sex, and will always be there, even past the point where you can stand to have him around[.] [...] Always considerate, the Beta Male thanks a woman after sex, and is often quick with an apology as well. (*Job*, 39-40)

Betas can also be found in the gay community where 'the Beta Male boyfriend is highly prized [...] because you can teach him how to dress yet you can remain relatively certain that he will never develop a fashion sense or be more fabulous than you.' (*Job*, 100) The main character in *Job* also carries the features of a good and caring father in him. Although, due to his extreme cautiousness, he exaggerates adjusting his home to the needs of his newly born daughter Sophie:

Charlie had padded every sharp corner or edge in the apartment with foam rubber and duct tape, put plastic covers on all of the electrical outlets, child-proofed locks on all cabinets, installed new smoke, carbon monoxide, and radon detectors, and activated the V-Chip on the TV so that now he was incapable of watching anything that didn't feature baby animals or learning the alphabet. (*Job*, 41)

#### IV. 2. 4. 5 *The smart aleck*

While none of the main characters under consideration is generally at a loss for a witty retort and the occasional overestimation of himself, it is Biff and Tuck's cockiness

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. *Job*, 35

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *Job*, 39

that catches the reader's attention in particular. Moore himself characterizes Biff as the 'quintessential smartass [...] [who is] [...] braver, stronger, more dedicated, and more depraved than a simple proxy would be.' (<http://old.chrismoore.com/interviews2.htm>) He is further described as a good guy and being the most loyal best friend Joshua could have. Biff is generally not impressed by his friend being the Son of God,<sup>125</sup> yet in order to deal with this circumstance, he develops a twisted sense of humor that goes as far as inventing sarcasm:<sup>126</sup>

It's wildly irritating to have invented something as revolutionary as sarcasm, only to have it abused by amateurs. (*Lamb*, 187)

Parables were never my strong suit. If you want to say something, say it. So, of course, Joshua and Buddhists were the perfect people to hang out with, straight talkers that they were. (*Lamb*, 250)

'[...] The three of us knew as soon as we saw you that you were a being unlike any other. [...]' [Gaspar about Joshua]  
'What gave it away,' I [Biff] said, 'the angels on the roof of the stable?' (*Lamb*, 288)

'[...] am I [Biff] correct in assuming that these pits, when someone is not living in them, are used for tanning hides?'  
'Yes, it is work that only Untouchables may do.'  
'That would account for the lovely smell. I assume you use urine in the tanning process, right?' (*Lamb*, 305)

[Joshua and Biff were told to bring Melchior a grain of rice and did so.]  
Melchior sniffed at the rice grains, then picked one up and held it between his bony fingertips.  
'It's raw.'  
'Yes, it is.'  
'We can't eat it raw.'  
'Well, I would have served it up steaming with a grain of salt and a molecule of green onion if I'd known you wanted it that way.' (*Lamb*, 327)

Frequently, the boy shows no respect towards the divine that he encounters constantly due to being the Messiah's steady companion. For instance, he cheekily questions his best friend's interpretation of a godly sign when Joshua believes God has sent him a message through a lizard. Biff tells him, 'I'm not so sure you should take that seriously, Josh. Reptiles don't tend to have a great record for getting the message right. Like for instance, oh, let's see, that Adam and Eve thing.' (*Lamb*, 76)

Furthermore, he paraphrases the general gist of Josh's sermons as follows:

*You should be nice to people, even creeps.  
And if you:*

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 40

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Lamb* 55-56, 301; [http://www.bookbrowse.com/author\\_interviews/full/index.cfm?author\\_number=756](http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=756)

- a) believed that Joshua was the Son of God (and)
- b) he had come to save you from sin (and)
- c) acknowledged the Holy Spirit within you [...] (and)
- d) didn't blaspheme the Holy Ghost (see c),

*then you would:*

- e) live forever
- f) someplace nice
- g) probably heaven.

*However, if you:*

- h) sinned (and/or)
- i) were a hypocrite (and/or)
- j) valued things over people (and)
- k) didn't do a, b, c, and d,

*then you were:*

- l) fucked (*Lamb*, 417-418)

Joshua's loudmouthed friend also does not treat the angel Raziel with the expected awe. (Presumably, this is mainly based on the circumstance that he is held captive in a hotel room by Raziel.) Biff calls the other 'worthless bag of dog shit' (*Lamb*, 4), 'smug bastard' (*Lamb*, 9), 'heavenly scum' (*Lamb*, 47) and, almost poetic, 'fabulously feeble-minded bundle of feathers' (*Lamb*, 88). He also refers to the golden light surrounding the angel as 'stupidity leaking out of [him]' (*Lamb*, 94). On Josh's father the boy comments as follows, 'Joseph had regained his composure by now. [His son had just led a fourteen-foot-long snake into the house.] Evidently, once you accept that your wife slept with God, extraordinary events seem sort of commonplace.' (*Lamb*, 24) Always loyal to his best friend, Biff also confronts God in a cocky prayer, basically telling him to 'throw the kid a bone' (*Lamb*, 75) when Josh is having trouble dealing with the fact that he is the chosen one.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the main character describes God as lacking a sense of humor as well as speaking skills and likens him to 'stickiness'.<sup>128</sup>

It is exactly this bluntness and incapability of self-restraint that earned the boy, who is really called Levi,<sup>129</sup> the nickname Biff, 'which comes from [his people's] slang word for a smack upside the head, something that [his] mother said [he] required at least daily from an early age.' (*Lamb*, 10) He can never keep his smart aleck comments to himself, even if a situation calls for a more diplomatic approach. For example, to an angry innkeeper who (ironically) asks Josh if he has been born in a barn because he forgot to shut the door, Biff points out, 'He was. [...] Angels on the roof, though.'

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 75

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 51, 366, 127

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 10

(Lamb, 350) When he and Josh are staying with Gaspar, it becomes even more evident that he does not possess the composure and patience that is requested of a Buddhist such as their host:

[Gaspar keeps hitting the boys with a bamboo rod during their meditation. Joshua explains to Biff,] ‘He’s not hitting you to punish you, he’s hitting you to keep you in the moment.’  
‘Well, I’m in the moment now, and at the moment I’d like to beat the crap out of him.’  
‘You don’t mean that.’  
‘Oh, what? I’m supposed to *be* the crap I beat out of him?’  
[...]  
It’s very difficult to stay angry when a room full of bald guys in orange robes start giggling. Buddhism. (Lamb, 265)

‘When will we leave, master?’ I asked.  
‘When it is time,’ said Gaspar.  
‘And how will we know it is time to leave?’  
‘When the time for staying has come to an end.’  
‘And we will know this because you will finally give us a straight and concrete answer to a question instead of being obtuse and spooky?’ I asked. (Lamb, 282)

During a meal with the Pharisees, a precarious situation since their agenda is to expose Joshua as a being guilty of blasphemy, Biff is unable to hold his tongue once again:

Joshua chewed his bread slowly, then said, ‘Why wash the outside of the urn, if there’s decay on the inside?’  
‘Yeah, like you rotting hypocrites!’ I added, with more enthusiasm than was probably called for.  
‘Quit helping!’ Josh said.  
‘Sorry. Nice wine. Manischewitz?’ (Lamb, 405)

The Messiah’s companion is also partial to rather crude sexual allusions, especially if they serve to point out his manliness: ‘I’ve always had the gift of tongues [actually this phrase refers to his new ability to speak and understand every language], ask any girl I’ve known.’ (Lamb, 3) To the question if he has injured himself because he is rubbing his shoulder, Biff replies, ‘No, [...] but sometimes I strain a shoulder muscle just shaking this monster off.’ (Lamb, 406) A further know-it-all feature of this character is the fact that he sometimes overestimates his own knowledge. This is the case when he attempts to impress others with his Latin. He confuses words and says things like ‘*Semper fido*’ (Lamb, 80) (instead of ‘*fidelis*’ – ‘always loyal’; Biff’s version is translated as ‘always dog’, Lamb, 80). When he meets a prostitute but has no money, he tells Josh,

‘I got the feeling she likes me. I think maybe she’ll do me pro bono, if you know what I mean?’ I elbowed [Joshua] in the ribs and winked.  
‘You mean *for the public good*. You forget your Latin? “Pro bono” means “for the public good.”’

‘Oh. I thought it meant something else. She’s not going to do me for that.’  
‘No, probably not,’ said Josh. (*Lamb*, 331-332)

Similar to Biff, Tuck does not generally recognize authority:

Tuck had taught himself deadly accuracy with the spitball blowgun at a time when he was supposed to be learning algebra. In contradiction to what his teacher had told him, he had never needed to know algebra in later life, but mastery of the spitball was going to come in handy, although this skill had not ended up on his permanent record, as had, presumably, his failure of algebra. (*Island*, 307)

Tuck keyed the mike button on the steering yoke. ‘Honolulu Tower, this is United Flight One requesting immediate clearance for emergency takeoff on Runway Two.’  
‘There’s no such thing as an emergency takeoff,’ the controller said. Tuck could tell he was close to losing it.  
‘Well, Tower, I’m taking off on Two, and if you’ve got anything headed that way, I’d say you’ve got an emergency on your hands, wouldn’t you?’ (*Island*, 380)

Furthermore, the pilot does not hesitate to wisecrack, even if the situation calls for a more cautious form of behavior. He challenges the guards who are to monitor him and even their boss, Beth Curtis:

The guards didn’t answer. They watched him.  
‘Japanese, huh? I’ve never been to Japan. I hear a Big Mac goes for twelve bucks.’ He waited for a response but got none. The Japanese stood impassive, silent, small beads of sweat shining through their crew cuts.  
‘Sorry, guys, I’d love to hang around with you chatterboxes, but I’m due for a dinner with the doc and his wife.’  
Tuck limped to the guards and offered each an arm in escort. ‘Shall we go?’  
The guards turned and lead him across the compound to one of the bungalows on the beach. (*Island*, 165)

The guard removed the key and walked off the plane without saying a word.  
‘Nice chatting with you,’ Tuck said. (*Island*, 196)

‘What happened to you, Beth? How in the hell did you get from “Here, Cupcake” to the Murdering Bitch Goddess of the Shark People?’ He immediately regretted saying it. Not because it wasn’t true, but because he’d given away the fact that he knew it was. He braced himself for the rage. (*Island*, 326)

However, out of all the characters of *Island*, the pilot seems to be the one who enjoys his own sense of humor the most:

Occasionally, [Tuck and a taxi driver] passed a tin house with stone wheels leaning against the walls. [...]  
‘What are those millstone-looking things?’ Tuck asked the driver.  
‘*Fei*,’ the driver said. ‘Stone money, Very valuable.’ [...]  
‘What do your pay phones look like?’ Tuck asked with a grin.  
The driver didn’t find it funny. (*Island*, 65)

#### IV. 2. 4. 6 *The trickster*

*Coyote* features more than one trickster character, however, the eponymous Old Man Coyote is the most powerful of them. Pokey introduces this figure of Crow lore, his and his nephew Sam's spirit helper, to the boy as 'the trickster' right in the beginning of the novel.<sup>130</sup> Coyote is then repeatedly referred to as such throughout the course of the story. He is a highly ambiguous character who is the originator of his protégés' struggles ('I think he gave me this medicine to make me crazy and want to drink.' Pokey about Coyote in *Coyote*, 33) but at the same time also the cure for them ('Pokey, when everything is right with you, but you are so afraid that something *might* go wrong that it ruins your balance, then you are Coyote Blue. At these times I will bring you back into balance.' Coyote to Pokey in *Coyote*, 35). Moore points out that '[t]he idea of a god that specifically exists as an avatar of irony intrigued [him].' (Moore in Crenshaw) This characterization of the Coyote figure makes it clear that the author used him to add another layer of humor, that of irony, to his novel. Sam, too, experiences the irony that comes naturally with the trickster. At first, Old Man Coyote makes it impossible for the businessman to proceed with his regular life and causes him numerous problems. Yet, in the end, the main character's life has changed for the better because of the decisions he was forced to make and the risks he had to take due to Coyote's relentless ways.

What allows the trickster to deceive others so smoothly is his ability to shift shape.<sup>131</sup> In human disguise, Old Man Coyote appears to the teenager Sam as a fat traveling salesman with several spare chins, clad in a powder-blue suit. He introduces himself as 'Lloyd Commerce' and gushes about commodities, which is how he lures the protagonist into the white man's world.<sup>132</sup> When he re-emerges in Sam's life several years later, he presents himself as 'a young Indian man dressed in black buckskins fringed with red feathers' (*Coyote*, 4). This second human form is the one the trickster uses to appear in public throughout the main part of the book. He is also able to turn himself into a woman<sup>133</sup> and take the shape of various animals.<sup>134</sup> As a coyote (who is

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 33

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Crenshaw

<sup>132</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 70-77

<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 277-278, 280-285

<sup>134</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 90-91, 174, 190-191, 143, 144-145, 181, 312

first mistaken for a wolf and a dog), he finds various ways to discredit Sam among his neighbors, who believe that the man is his owner, in a slapstick fashion:

‘Nine A.M.: Mrs Feldstein calls to report that a wolf has just urinated on her wisterias. [...] Nine oh-five: Mrs Feldstein reports that the wolf is forcibly having sex with her Persian cat. [...] Nine ten: Mrs Feldstein reports that the wolf ate the Persian after having his way with it. [...] Ten fourteen: Mrs Narada reports that her cat has been attacked by a large dog. [...] Then one of [the security guards] calls in that a big dog has just bitten holes in the tires of his golf cart and run off. [...] Eleven forty-one: large dog craps in Dr Yamata’s Aston Martin. Twelve oh-three: dog eats two, count ‘em, two of Mrs Wittingham’s Siamese cats. [...] From twelve thirty to one we had mass sightings and frequent urinations [...] then one of my guys spotted the dog and followed it to your building, where it disappeared for a minute and reappeared on your deck.’ (*Coyote*, 42-43)

One of the features that makes this character a comic figure is his strong sex drive. According to Crenshaw, ‘Moore presents the trickster narrative [*Coyote Blue*] with a slap-stick [sic!], obstreperous humor that dwells on Coyote’s sexual antics [...].’ (Crenshaw) For example, the trickster fulfills his voyeuristic desires by posing as a horsefly, a hedgehog and a raven in the showers for women at a YWCA.<sup>135</sup> After Coyote has just re-entered Sam’s life, the insurance broker finds his spirit helper having his way with the secretary in front of his office.<sup>136</sup> It is hinted at the fact that this may have happened a second time, but without Sam having any visual proof of it.<sup>137</sup> Other of his practical jokes concerning sex include sending a picture of his penis to all of Sam’s clients through the company fax machine<sup>138</sup> and also temporarily removing said organ in order to pose as an old woman among a group of attractive females to seduce them.<sup>139</sup>

There are six short narratives that tell of Old Man Coyote’s farces in the style of aboriginal trickster tales,<sup>140</sup> some of which reveal more of his negative character traits. In ‘Coyote Makes the World’, he creates the Crow tribe and the buffalo.<sup>141</sup> When being asked what the people should do if the animals ever die out, his reply depicts his selfishness and lack of understanding for the needs of others. Of course, this is done in an amusing tone: ‘Then [after the death of all the buffalo] I guess the people are

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 143-145

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 88-89

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 177

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 177-179

<sup>139</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 277-278

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Crenshaw

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 48-51

fucked. I'm tired and dirty and cold from standing in all that water. I'm going to invent the sweat bath and warm up.' (*Coyote*, 49) Later on, he even tricks the ducks that helped him into entering the sweat lodge and then eats them.<sup>142</sup> 'Coyote Loses His Ass' exposes the spirit helper has an addicted gambler who first loses all his horses, his lodge, his wife, his clothes and even his buttocks because he cannot stop betting.<sup>143</sup> When his wife points out to him that 'there's a twelve-step program for gambling' (*Coyote*, 215), he proves that he has not learned anything when he answers, 'Twelve steps. [...] I'll bet I can do it in six.' (*Coyote*, 215) This circumstance leads to a catastrophe in Las Vegas, of course. Behind Sam's back, Old Man Coyote uses his credit cards to withdraw twenty thousand dollars from a cash machine (he thinks he is winning the money by entering the right PIN code) and loses all of it at gambling tables.<sup>144</sup> In order to get more money to bet with, Coyote then sells Sam's Mercedes with a navigation system and an expensive hi-fi system for the ridiculous sum of five thousand dollars, which he quickly loses at the same casino also.<sup>145</sup> The fact that Coyote mistook the ATM for a betting machine and sold the car considerably under its value is an example of another of his character traits, his naivety. Despite his ability to trick others, he is quite lost in Sam's world. When his protégé points out that the trickster has been tricked during the car deal, Coyote proves to be blissfully ignorant once more:

'So you sold my car for five grand?'  
 'Yep.' [...]  
 'And where is that money?'  
 'The shaman [Coyote means the dealer at the gambling table] had strong cheating medicine.'  
 'That's the kind of thinking that got Manhattan sold for a box of beads.'  
 'So they still tell that story? It was one of my best tricks. They gave us many beads for that island. They didn't know that you can't own land.' (*Coyote*, 250)

When Sam travels to the underworld to revive Calliope, he meets Anubis, who is the God of the Underworld and also Coyote's brother.<sup>146</sup> The canine-like god says about the trickster,

'And my brother [...] grew up in a wild land, with the powers of a god and no sense of duty or justice. All he cares about is the stories people tell about him. And he never remembers his brother, who has saved him so many times. He never visits. [...]' (*Coyote*, 324)

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 51

<sup>143</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 213-215

<sup>144</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 217-225

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 232-233, 238-240

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 322-326



Sam further learns that Old Man Coyote only got involved in his life again so there would be more stories to tell about his antics, for as long as people tell stories about him, he will not be forgotten like his brother.<sup>147</sup> However, Anubis also tells him that Coyote believes that his people ‘need a good bad example. It gives them pride in doing the right thing.’ (*Coyote*, 325) Even though the majority of the trickster’s actions and comments indicate his egotism, the last quote, along with the fact that he risks and loses his life to help Sam and his friends against the bikers,<sup>148</sup> which can also be assumed to be the reason why Calliope is permitted to return from the underworld and come back to life,<sup>149</sup> allows to speculate that there is a good side to this character as well. It is exactly this ambiguity that makes Old Man Coyote an amusing figure. In some respects, he is like a child, enjoying playing pranks and, being full of naivety and ignorance, not thinking about their consequences for other people. Another aspect of the humor this character brings with him is the malicious joy the readers can indulge in whenever one of his victims, especially Sam, is tricked.

Other characters in this novel may be regarded as small-scale trickster as well since, like the protagonist Sam, they do not use their real names: Aaron Aaron changed his name ‘so his insurance firm would be the first listed in the yellow pages.’ (*Coyote*, 25) Calliope Kincaid also took on a new first name and Minty Fresh uses his initials M.F. in order to hide the humiliation of being named after a toothpaste.<sup>150</sup> Sam, who is an expert shape-shifter himself,<sup>151</sup> can be seen as the other important a trickster figure besides Old Man Coyote.<sup>152</sup> In the secondary literature, it is pointed out that the man ‘retains the trickster ability to don the mask that allows him to function in both the old and the new worlds, a survival strategy that does not trouble him but, instead, is an ability in which he revels.’ (Crenshaw)

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 325

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 331-332

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 335

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Crenshaw

<sup>151</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 3, 16

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Crenshaw

#### IV. 2. 4. 7 *The eccentric mind*

In the setting of Moore's comic stories, the absurd behavior of the majority of the fictional figures is taken for granted. However, there are four characters in particular who display the kind of demeanor that is actually labeled crazy by the respective protagonists, their acquaintances and the narrators of the novels. Living mostly in worlds of their own, they serve to perplex and/or amuse the main characters, which, of course, serves the ultimate goal of entertaining the readers.

*Fluke* features two very dissimilar social misfits. There is Elizabeth Robinson, 'a wealthy woman Clay and Nate affectionately refer[red] to as the 'Old Broad'' (*Fluke*, 23), who had donated the living and working quarters to the research crew. She is described as generous and kindhearted, but also as eccentric<sup>153</sup> and 'a total loon.' (*Fluke*, 52) The latter labels stem from the circumstance that '[t]he old broad live[s] on a volcano and believe[s] that the whales talk[ed] to her.' (*Fluke*, 51) The elderly woman's residence is indeed unusual:

There were cats and crystals everywhere. [...] The house could have been designed by Gauguin and landscaped by Rousseau. It was small, just five rooms and a carport, but it sat on twenty acres of fruit-salad jungle: banana trees, mango, [...] and other tropical flowers. [...] The Old Broad's telescope and 'big-eye' binoculars [for watching the ocean] stood on steel and concrete mountings[.] (*Fluke*, 150)

When Clay visits Elizabeth Robinson to tell her that Nate is missing, she replies matter-of-factly, 'Oh, that. Yes, I heard about that. Nate's fine, Clay. The whale told me.' (*Fluke*, 152) The man is irritated by the peculiar remark in such a time of crisis, and the woman wants to make sure she is not misunderstood. Their conversation continues as follows:

'Elizabeth! You're not listening to me. This is not about the whales singing to you through the trees. Nate is gone!'  
'Don't you shout at me, Clay Demodocus. I'm trying to comfort you. And it wasn't a song through the trees. What do you think? I'm some old woman? The whale called on the phone.' (*Fluke*, 152-153)

As it turns out, the whales really had called the elderly woman on the phone as they are a fusion of animal and submarine with an in-built communication system.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, given her extraordinary history, it seems only logical that 'she'd said a lot of crazy-sounding stuff' (*Fluke*, 293) in the past. Towards the end of the novel,

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 52, 152

<sup>154</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 146, 171-179, 182-187, 295-296, 365

Elizabeth tells Clay that years ago she had to watch her husband, a sonar man who worked on submarines, being kidnapped by a man and something non-human (a whaley boy) and forced into a whale via its back orifice. Of course, none of the officials believed her when she reported the incident. The reason why she financed the researchers' work and kept surveying the ocean is because she hoped it would help find her long-lost spouse.<sup>155</sup>

Unlike the Old Broad, who appears crazier than she actually is and who does not pose a threat to anybody, Gilbert Box is not only odd but also an insidious adversary of the main character and his co-workers. The 'skeletal' (*Fluke*, 56) man with a 'gaunt face' (*Fluke*, 56) usually wears 'a straw hat whose brim [is] so wide it could [have] afford[ed] shade for three additional people and [...] a pair of enormous wrap-around sunglasses suitable for welding or as a shield from nuclear flash' (*Fluke*, 56) and carries 'a white sun umbrella that he [is] never seen without.' (*Fluke*, 56) Due to his appearance, Gilbert Box is likened to 'Death out for his after-dinner stroll before a busy night of e-mailing heart attacks and tumors to a few million lucky winners.' (*Fluke*, 56) On two other accounts, as he is standing in the bow of his boat, he is said to look like 'a skeletal statue of Washington crossing the Lethe' (*Fluke*, 77) and to be 'looming there like doom in an Easter bonnet.' (*Fluke*, 92) One comparison, however, has gained the most popularity within the entire Hawaiian marine biologist community: Based on Box's aversion to sunlight and water, Nate has nicknamed him 'the Count' after the Sesame Street vampire.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to his bizarre exterior, Gilbert Box is also portrayed as a shady character in regard to his research projects and his attitude towards dealing with his professional competitors. It is suspected that the Count, who is working in consulting, provides data from his studies to the highest bidder and does not hesitate to alter his findings in order to serve the agenda of funding.<sup>157</sup> Box's attempts to sabotage his opponents include questioning the accuracy of Nate's data in public while the latter is giving a speech at the local whale research center and informing the officials of the missing permit flag on Nate's boat while he and his friends are desperately looking for Clay

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<sup>155</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 289-293

<sup>156</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 70, 56

<sup>157</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 70

who just sank underwater.<sup>158</sup> Yet, the most unscrupulous of the Count's deeds is his behavior at the service that is held in Nate's honor after he has disappeared:

He wasn't wearing his hat for once, but he still wore his giant wraparound sunglasses, and without the balance of the giant hat, the glasses atop his angular frame made him appear insectlike, a particularly pale praying mantis in khakis. He adjusted the microphone, cleared his throat with great pomp, and said, 'I never liked Nathan Quinn...' And everyone waited for the 'but', but it never came. (*Fluke*, 273)

Even though his viciousness is highly exaggerated, his attacks on the protagonist and his friends are all rendered ineffective. This circumstance, combined with his farcical looks, makes Gilbert Box a comic character.

In *Job*, there is an unusual homeless person who is known in the entire city as 'the Emperor (of San Francisco)'. The battered elderly man roams the streets with his Boston terrier called Bummer and a golden retriever that goes by the name of Lazarus, who he refers to as his troops.<sup>159</sup> As the self-proclaimed ruler of San Francisco, he 'carr[ies] the weight of the city' (*Job*, 61), feeling deeply responsible for its inhabitants.<sup>160</sup> Consistent with his (imaginary) reigning function, the Emperor's idiolect can be described as magniloquent and aristocratic. For instance, he refers to an upside down garbage can that is trapping his dog as a 'galvanized prison' (*Job*, 63) and to clothes as 'sartorial splendor' (*Job*, 409). His remark to Charlie about the gigantic hellhounds is 'I see you have experienced the multifarious ways in which a man's life is enriched by the company of a good brace of hounds.' (*Job*, 188) When the protagonist offers the elderly man a cane to aid his bad knee, he replies, 'I am not a worshiper of the material, you know. [...] I am a firm believer that desire is the source of most of human suffering, you're aware, and no culprit is more heinous than desire for material gain.' (*Job*, 64) Eventually, he accepts the 'fine piece of craftsmanship' (*Job*, 64). As his thoughts on possessions indicate, the Emperor has a highly philosophical nature. He shares the following profound insights with one of his dogs:

'Sometimes [...] a man must muster all of his courage to simply sit still. How much humanity has been spoiled for the confusion of movement with progress, my friend? How much?' (*Job*, 282)

'[I]f we had even half the courage of our small comrade [Bummer, the terrier], we would go into that drain and find him. But what are we without him, our courage, my

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 69-70, 92

<sup>159</sup> Cf. *Job*, 60-63

<sup>160</sup> Cf. *Job*, 61-62, 282-283, 382, 433

friend? Steady and righteous as we may be, my friend, but without courage to risk ourselves for our brother, we are but politicians – blustering whores to rhetoric.’  
(*Job*, 383-384)

After talking to the Emperor, whom Charlie calls ‘Your Majesty’,<sup>161</sup> for a while, the younger man automatically starts copying the ‘formal speech patterns, as if somehow he had been transported to a royal court where a nobleman was distinguished by bread crumbs in his beard and the royal guard were not above licking their balls.’ (*Job*, 64) The clash between the homeless man’s refined register and his humble lifestyle clearly allows categorizing him as a comic character. As ‘completely barking-at-the-moon batshit’ (*Job*, 283) the Emperor with his megalomaniac tendencies may be, he is portrayed as a harmless and, in fact, very good-natured and modest, thus likeable figure.

Bartholomew, the village idiot in *Lamb*, who ‘[gives] up his position to follow Joshua’ (*Lamb*, 364), shares certain characteristics with the Emperor.<sup>162</sup> He, too, does not reside in a normal abode and does not have a job, but ‘[spends] most of his time begging near the town square[.]’ (*Lamb*, 30) In a conversation with the temporarily depressed Biff, the beggar points out the advantages of his humble life, which the boy quickly dismisses:

‘You think too much. Thinking will bring you nothing but suffering. Be simple.’  
‘What?’ It was the most coherent thing I [Biff]’d ever heard him say.  
‘Do you ever see me cry? I have nothing, so I am a slave to nothing. I have nothing to do, so nothing makes me its slave.’  
‘What do you know?’ I snapped. ‘You live in the dirt. You are unclean! You do nothing. [...] – you’re an idiot.’ (*Lamb*, 43)

Similar to eccentric character in *Job*, the village idiot is content with his life on the streets and does not consider himself to be in such an unfavorable position as the other people think. In fact, he strongly believes in a philosophy that suggests this sort of lifestyle,<sup>163</sup> and tries to explain its deeper meaning to the biased youth:

‘No, I’m not [an idiot], I’m Greek. A Cynic.’  
[...]  
‘What’s a Cynic?’  
‘A philosopher. I am a student of Diogenes. You know Diogenes?’

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. *Job*, 63, 409, 410

<sup>162</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 29-30, 43, 364

<sup>163</sup> It is unclear if the Emperor and Bart have voluntarily chosen to lead their lives according to their philosophies or if they have adapted their attitudes as a consequence of being homeless and unemployed, as a positive way of dealing with their frugal conditions. In either case, both characters are presented as genuinely at ease with their lifestyles, so the question of whether their mindsets caused them to live on the streets or vice versa does not affect their function as humorous characters.

‘No, but how much could he have taught you? Your only friends are dogs.’  
 ‘Diogenes went about Athens with a lamp in broad daylight, holding it in people’s faces, saying he was looking for an honest man.’  
 ‘So, he was like the prophet of the idiots?’  
 ‘No, no, no.’ Bart picked up a small terrier and was gesturing with him to make his point. The dog seemed to enjoy it. ‘They were all fooled by their culture. Diogenes taught that all affectations of modern life were false, that a man must live simply, outdoors, carry nothing, make no art, no poetry, no religion...’  
 ‘Like a dog,’ I said.  
 ‘Yes!’ Bart described a flourish in the air with the rat dog. (*Lamb*, 43-44)

Due to Bartholomew’s unusual choice of a canine to visually aid his elaboration, Biff’s skepticism towards the beggar’s enlightenment is not completely unjustified. In the past, the village idiot has displayed other peculiar attributes and activities that make his environment question his general mental abilities, not to mention his personal hygiene. For instance, Biff mentions that ‘Bartholomew the idiot [...] [is] going to teach [him] to fling [his] own dung and run headlong into walls’ (*Lamb*, 30), and he is also said to ‘[be] foul and drool[ed] a lot’ (*Lamb*, 30). While traveling, ‘Bartholomew and his stench [ride] on one camel while Joshua and [Biff] share the other.’ (*Lamb*, 362) Furthermore, the Cynic has a very close relationship with his canines, and has even adopted some of their mannerisms:

Bartholomew rolled with his dogs down by the riverbank. (*Lamb*, 364)

Bartholomew [...] was on foot along with his pack of doggie followers (whom he had disturbingly begun to refer to as his ‘disciples’)[.] (*Lamb*, 377)

[Bart just explained his philosophy to Biff.]  
 The idiot had been hiding a deep wisdom all these years.  
 ‘I’m trying to lick my own balls,’ Bart said.  
 Maybe not. (*Lamb*, 44)

The idiot proves to be wise not only in the area of spiritualism and philosophy, but he is also knowing of practical mundane applications:

‘What’s a jockstrap?’ Joshua asked.  
 ‘It’s an Essene thing, Bartholomew answered. ‘They wear them on their manhood, very tightly, to control their sinful urges.’ (*Lamb*, 363)

Naturally, given his behavior and hygiene, this seems to be the only information concerning sexual matters that Bart possesses first-hand. Consequently, as John the Baptist accuses the beggar of being a ‘slut’, as he does indiscriminately with every single person he meets,<sup>164</sup> the following exchange takes place:

‘Yeah, John, Bartholomew’s been getting laid a lot,’ [Biff] said, evangelizing for sarcasm.

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 367

‘Almost,’ Bart said.  
‘I mean with another human being, Bart.’  
‘Oh. Sorry. Never mind.’ (*Lamb*, 367)

#### IV. 2. 5 Characters as representations of common stereotypes

##### *IV. 2. 5. 1 National stereotypes*

In the novels under consideration, there are numerous stereotypes based on someone’s home country or home region within the USA. Moore presents mostly minor characters (with the exception of Tuck in *Island*) as comic figures by letting them behave or talk in a specific way that allows the readers to easily associate them, due to a common national cliché, with their respective countries. (The function of the majority of these characters is solely to add more humor to the narration. They generally do not have an impact worthy of mention on the development of the plots.) Yet, to the mindful reader it is clear that the author does not intend to aggravate, or that he even shares, these stereotypical views of the targeted nationalities. The clichés themselves are ridiculed by means of a hyperbole: exaggerating the exaggeration. This holds true for all the examples discussed in this as well as the following sub-chapters on the matter of stereotypes; be it that they are connected to someone’s nationality, ethnicity, personal interests and way of life or gender.

*Coyote* features a Japanese family on their vacation in the United States. The children’s behavior reflects that of business people rather than that of their age group:

His [Kiro’s] children worried him.

During this trip Kiro’s son, Tommy, who was fourteen, and his daughter, Michiko, who was twelve, had both decided that they wanted to attend American universities and live in the United States. Tommy wanted to run General Motors and Michiko wanted to be a patent attorney. As he drove, Kiro listened to his children discussing their plans in English; they paused only when Kiro pointed out some natural wonder, at which time they would dutifully acknowledge the interruption before returning to their conversation. It had been the same at the Custer Battlefield, The Grand Canyon, and even Disneyland, where the children marveled at the machinations of commerce and missed those of magic.

*My children are monsters*, Kiro thought. (*Coyote*, 162)

The quotation above clearly plays with the cliché of the Japanese being experts in business and always on the look-out for expanding their commercial influence. This is done in an exaggerated comic way, which makes it impossible to take it at face value.

However, this stereotype takes a harsh turn for the macabre when the tourist family discovers a half-unconscious Indian (Pokey, Sam's uncle) lying on the ground. The son Tommy finds a letter from Lee Iacocca, the CEO of Chrysler, addressed to the Native American, in which the president of the car corporation explains that he cannot name their new line of trucks after the Crow tribe (as suggested by Pokey).<sup>165</sup> Tommy points out that '[i]f he knows Lee Iacocca he will be good to have as a contact, Father.' (*Coyote*, 165) In the letter, it states that the CEO enclosed a blanket 'in thanks for bringing this matter to [his] attention' (*Coyote*, 165), which – an unfortunate fact from the past, rather than a stereotype – carried the smallpox virus. To his son's comment the father replies, 'Not if he dies[.]' (*Coyote*, 165) which is acknowledged with the words 'Oh, right.' (*Coyote*, 165) by the boy. Previously, when the sick aboriginal has just been found lying on the ground, the racist notion that Native American are lazy and do not fulfill their duties (imposed by the whites) is ironically used against the non-aboriginals. The following quote portrays the Japanese minor in question as ignorant and even cold-hearted:

[...] a tattered figure lay prostrate in the dirt.  
 'Look, father,' Michiko said. 'They have hired an Indian to take tickets and he has fallen asleep on the job.' (*Coyote*, 163)

Other clichés about the Japanese are presented in the novel *Job*. For instance, there is a pet shop in Japantown with the name 'House of Pleasant Fish and Gerbil' (*Job*, 120). During Charlie's visit to the 'Happy Relax Good Time Oriental Massage Parlor' (*Job*, 222) he has to point out repeatedly that he does not want 'a happy ending' (a sexual favor) to go with his massage.<sup>166</sup> His masseuse called 'Lotus Flower' (*Job*, 220) speaks very little English, which is why she uses a rather inappropriate standard reply to Charlie's complaints:

'I haven't slept well in two weeks,' he said.  
 'That nice.' [...]  
 '[...] I'm afraid I did something that could put everyone I know in danger, and I can't make myself do what needs to be done to fix it. People could die.'  
 'That nice,' said Lotus Flower, kneading his biceps. (*Job*, 221)

The Japanese women working at the parlor also substitute the 'v' sound with a 'b'. They tell Charlie that he is '[b]ery tense' (*Job*, 221) and that a massage can make him 'bery relax' (*Job*, 220).

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 164-165

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *Job*, 222



Also in *Job*, Moore presents a female duo that is constantly discussing what Charlie does wrong as he is trying to raise his daughter on his own and giving supposedly useful advice. There is Mrs Ling, whose speech is strongly defined by the stereotypical Chinese way of ‘limiting herself to English verbs in the present tense only’ (*Job*, 96), without making use of the third person -s. (However, this equally holds true for Mrs Korjev, cf. below.) She also has the clichéd problem of not being able to pronounce the letter ‘r’, which results in such silly utterances as: ‘He say no poke [pork] [...] Who give poke [pork] to baby?’ (*Job*, 97) The narrator points out that ‘[n]ot once was the letter *r* heard in Mrs Ling’s pronunciation of *irresponsible*.’ (*Job*, 98) Another linguistic problem occurs when the woman confuses the term for a non-Jewish woman (‘shiksa’) with another word: ‘He say it [the little girl eating pork] turn her into shih tzu. Shih tzu is dog. What kind father think little girl turn into dog?’ (*Job*, 97) Conversely, the Chinese woman also uses the linguistic ignorance of others to amuse herself: ‘[Charlie] knew how to say exactly three things in Mandarin: *Good day; light starch, please; and I am an ignorant white devil*, all taught to him by Mrs Ling. He believed the last to translate to ‘top of the morning to you.’’ (*Job*, 100) A further comic element of Mrs Ling, which reflects the common stereotype that people of her nationality will eat everything that moves, is the fact that she is not exactly discriminating when it comes to food:

Mrs Ling was shaking the Habitrail cage. They certainly were sound little sleepers, these hamsters. She liked ham. (*Job*, 143)

[...] Mrs Ling, staring at the hellhounds. [...] Having recovered from the initial shock, she was doing the math in her head – a rapid-fire abacus clicking off the weight and volume of each pony-sized canine, and dividing him into chops, steaks, ribs, and packages of stew meat. [...]

You not be late, okay?’ said Mrs Ling. ‘I want to go to Sears and look at chest freezer today. You have power saw I can borrow.’ (*Job*, 179)

The other part of the duo is Mrs Korjev. The Russian is ‘possessed of an atavistic compulsion toward ursine simile’ (*Job*, 97). In other words, she frequently adds the words ‘like bear’ whenever she can, regardless of the fact that this analogy is not quite common in the English language: ‘He is angry when he leave today. Like bear,’ said Mrs Korjev[.] (*Job*, 97)/‘I’m sorry, I am having to crap like bear.’ (*Job*, 141-142) However, presumably by chance rather than due to her language awareness, her favorite comparison fits on one occasion: ‘Pork is good for child. Make her grow strong,’ said Mrs Korjev, who then quickly added, ‘like bear.’’ (*Job*, 97) When the

Russian discovers the giant dogs that are to ensure the safety of Charlie's daughter, the father ridicules the Russian's catch phrase:

'Is giant dog in there.'  
'Yes, there are.'  
'But not like normal giant dog. They are like extra-giant, black animal, they are—'  
'Like bear?' Charlie suggested.  
'No, I wasn't going to say "bear", Mr Smart-Alec. Not like bear. Like wolf, only bigger, stronger—'  
'Like bear?'" Charlie ventured.  
'You make your mother ashamed when you are mean, Charlie Asher.'  
'Not like bear?'" Charlie asked.  
[...]  
'How they like steaks done?'  
'I think frozen will be fine, they eat like—'  
Mrs Korjev raised a finger in warning [...]  
'—like horses. They eat like horses,' Charlie said. (*Job*, 177-178)

To present further national clichés about the Russians and Chinese, respectively, Moore uses the subject of red flowers. Both women appreciate geraniums, especially their color, but it means something quite different to each of them:

She [Mrs Korjev] had always been angry that the Communists had co-opted that color, for otherwise it would have evoked an unbridled happiness in her. Then again, the Russian soul, conditioned by a thousand years of angst, really wasn't equipped for unbridled happiness, so it was probably for the best. (*Job*, 98-99)

[I]n her [Mrs Ling's] cosmology that color represented good fortune, prosperity, and long life. The very gates of the temples were painted that same color red, and so the red flowers represented one of the many paths to *wu* – eternity, enlightenment – essentially, the universe is a flower. She also thought they would taste pretty good in soup. (*Job*, 99)

Since Charlie's daughter Sophie is growing up under the care of the two women, she is bound to absorb elements of both their mindsets – even though she is too young to understand what they mean:

'We're different than other people?' Sophie said.  
'That's right, honey, [...] And you know why that is, right?'  
'Because we're Chinese and the White Devils can't be trusted?'  
'No, not because we're Chinese.'  
'Because we are Russian, and in our hearts are [sic!] much sorrow?'  
'No, there is not much sorrow in our hearts.'  
'Because we are strong, like bear?' (*Job*, 187-188)

There are not only negative stereotypes featured in Moore's novels. For instance, *Fluke*'s main character 'Nate had been born and raised in British Columbia, and Canadians hate, above all things, to offend. It was part of the national consciousness. 'Be polite' was an unwritten, unspoken rule, but ingrained into the psyche of an entire country.' (*Fluke*, 48) However, there is a distinction made between the typically suave

attitude of the majority of Canadians and the behavior of some of the country's Francophones as well as all its hockey fanatics:

[...] parts of Quebec, where people maintained the 'dismissive to the point of confrontation, with subsequent surrender' mind-set [sic!] of the French; and hockey, in which any Canadian may, with impunity, slam, pummel, elbow, smack, punch, body-check, and beat the shit out of, with sticks, any other human being, punctuated by profanities, name-calling, questioning parentage, and accusations of bestiality, usually – coincidentally – in French. (*Fluke*, 48)

In *Island*, Moore mocks the commonplace preconception of Texans/cowboys by exaggerating their supposed characteristics. For example, he describes a textbook specimen: 'A rodeo cowboy at the urinals hitched up his Wranglers, pulled his hat down, and made a bowlegged beeline for the door[.]' (*Island*, 30) The stereotypical depiction is not only presented visually, in describing the behavior and the attire, but also linguistically. When Mary Jean Dobbins, Tuck's (former) employer, confronts the pilot about his accident, her agitation causes the woman to slip into her native idiom:

'**Sweetie**, to a Texas way **a thinkin'** the only way you could **a** screwed up worse is if you'd throwed a kid down a well after **fessing up to being on the grassy knoll stompin'** yellow roses in between shootin' the President. You **ain't gonna** fly, drive, walk, crawl, or spit if I have anything to say about it. [...] **Y'all** heal up now, **honey.**' (*Island*, 19; bold markings mine)

The omission of the final consonant of the suffix '-ing', the abbreviation of the words 'of' and 'have' to 'a' and the contracted form 'gonna' for 'going to' are common features of general informal (American-)English speech rather than specific to a certain domestic region of the USA. However, the marked past tense form, the use of 'ain't' as a replacement for 'are not/aren't' as well as the expressions 'sweetie', 'honey' (in this context), 'y'all' and 'fessing up to being on the grassy knoll stompin'' are more frequently (yet not exclusively) found in the colloquial language of Southerners. Another instance of portraying Mary Jean Dobbins as a business cowgirl is the title Moore has given the chapter in which Tuck calls her at home to get some help: 'Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch' (*Island*, 362). In this chapter, the regionally connotated phrase 'mad as a cowpoke [cowboy] wearing bob-wire [barb-wire] pants' (*Island*, 362) can also be found.

Furthermore, the vocabulary of the main character, who grew up near San Diego, California but has spent most of his life in Texas, where he was trained as a pilot,<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. *Island*, 36-38

includes several words and phrases associated with the Lone Star State. For example, since he ‘always [goes] Texan when he [is] being friendly’ (*Island*, 43), he uses a parade cowboy jargon expression when trying to make a new acquaintance in a bar: ‘What are you drinkin’, **pardner?**’ (*Island*, 43; bold marking mine) He also uses the exclamation ‘“*Eee-haa!*” [...] [,] a bad habit he’d picked up in Texas cowboy bars’ (*Island*, 226). Being asked ‘How’s it hanging?’ (*Island*, 235), Tuck replies with, ‘It hangs with magnificent splendor’ (*Island*, 235), which is ‘his programmed response to the truck drivers and cowboys who used that expression’ (*Island*, 235). Besides Texas, there is another Southern state that becomes the target of ridicule. When Tuck is being asked about his family, Moore makes use of the well-worn notion of inbreeding:

‘My mother and my uncle are my only real family. They married after my father was killed. I wasn’t pleased.’

‘You’re kidding. I thought they only did that in West Virginia. Aren’t you from California?’

‘She married my father’s brother, not her brother. [...]’ (*Island*, 316)

Finally, a quite bizarre national stereotype, which is not found in our contemporary world, is presented when the narrator of *Lamb* explains the customs of the Romans of his time. He elaborates on the way they smell. The circumstance that he relates his view to the modern-day readers’ association of pizza with Italy allows for a connection through time that bridges the gap of about 2,000 years:

We smelled the Roman before we saw him [...] [,] The Romans covered themselves with olive oil before they bathed, so if the wind was right or if it was an especially hot day you could smell a Roman coming at thirty paces. Between the olive oil they bathed with and the garlic and dried paste of anchovies they ate with their barley, when the legions marched into battle it must have smelled like an invasion of pizza people. If they’d had pizzas back then, which they didn’t. (*Lamb*, 67)

#### IV. 2. 5. 2 Ethnic stereotypes

As the story of *Coyote* centers around Sam’s Native American roots, it naturally suggests itself to present various clichés about the aboriginal people. Moore makes use of the white man’s ignorant perception of the way the natives assign names and talk. An old and battered vehicle is referred to as ‘Black Cloud Follows’ (*Coyote*, 11-12). ‘It had been Wiley, a white man, who had named the car in the first place. It was not the Crow way to name cars or animals[.]’ (*Coyote*, 12) Another example is the following quote:

*From the mud he [Old Man Coyote] made some tall and beautiful people. [...] 'I will call them Absarokee, which means "Children of the Large-Beaked Bird." Someday some dumb white guys will come here and get the translation all wrong and call them Crow.'* (Coyote, 48)

The Native Americans even make fun of descriptive names themselves. For instance, Sam is jokingly called 'Squats Behind the Bush' (Coyote, 56) in his naming ceremony. Furthermore, the main character and his childhood friends use the white man's prejudices about them for their own amusement: "Oooooo, brave warrior, heap big pissed off," Samson chided in pidgin – *speaking Tonto*, they called it.' (Coyote, 105) Pokey recites the following lines, which allude to the simplified reproductions of a shaman's chanting found in countless films created by whites:

*'Heya, heya, heya, an arrow.  
Heya, heya, heya, another arrow.  
Heya, heya, heya, another arrow.  
Heya, heya, heya, the last arrow.  
Heya, heya, heya, an eagle skull.  
Heya, heya, heya, some brown stuff.'*

'Some brown stuff?' Harlan said.

'Well, I don't know what it is,' Pokey said. 'It looks like brown stuff to me.'  
(Coyote, 316)

Another Hollywood and TV-induced misconception, or idealization, is ridiculed in the quote below:

'The gate will be a bitch,' Billy said. They [Sam and his childhood friend Billy] looked at the fifteen-foot iron spears suspended between two stone pillars. [...] They scrambled up the bars, then hung over spearpoints and dropped to the asphalt. [...] They both landed on their butts. [...] 'How come the Indians in the movies can do this shit in complete stealth?' 'Vocational training,' Samson said. (Coyote, 195-196)

The short chapters that tell of Coyote's mischievous past deeds are in the fashion of aboriginal lore. In this example, the staple elements of these folk stories are mocked in a harmless way:

*[...] so he [Old Man Coyote] called four ducks to help him find land. [...] The first three returned with nothing, but the fourth duck, because four is the sacred number and that is the way things go in these stories, returned with some mud from the bottom.* (Coyote, 48)

On this subject, Crenshaw points out that

the comic elements in the novel, which are in no way degrading to Native Americans but which seem quite faithful to the spirit of the Native American trickster tales, undoubtedly make the novel seem less threatening to those who might find an "Indian" novel written by a "white guy" terribly offensive. (Crenshaw)

Eventually, the roles are reversed and the white man becomes the overt target of ridicule. When Sam is on the run after what he thinks was a fatal confrontation with a racist policeman, someone mistakes him for a Mexican. This leads to some amusing thoughts by Sam:

[...] A guy [...] picks up guys to do yard work, but he only takes Mexicans. Says whites are too lazy.  
'Are they?' Samson asked. He figured that after persecuting blacks, hiding money, stealing land, breaking treaties, and keeping themselves pure, maybe the whites were just tired. (*Coyote*, 117)

In the quote above, Moore uses sarcasm (even though, at the time Sam takes these words at face value due to his inexperience) as a more sophisticated and subtle way of pointing out injustices. This makes it especially clear that the stereotypes about Native Americans found in the book are intended to be exposed as preposterous and racist via the medium of humor. Ultimately, they make the prejudiced non-Native Americans appear in a bad light and not the target population of their misconceptions.

In *Job*, humor is similarly used to call attention to racist clichés. When the protagonist Charlie upsets the Afro-American Minty Fresh, the latter reverts to the kind of language more common among people with less education and a more restricted vocabulary: 'You're tied the fuck up, motherfucker, I don't need to lull you into shit. You've been fucking with the fabric of human existence and someone needed to shut your ass down.' (*Job*, 87) However, with the exception quoted above, Minty's language does not differ noticeably from that of the other characters. He is by no means presented as a gangster or thug, which is a common prejudice colored people have to face. Overlooking this, Charlie tries to impress his friend by speaking the kind of register that is stereotypically associated with African-Americans. Using the expressions he has learned from the CD '*Talk Like a Playa in Ten Days or Less – Stone Thug Edition*' (*Job*, 359), he describes attractive women as having 'the badonkadonk out back and some fine ba-joopbadangs up front[.]' (*Job*, 359) In order to gain the acknowledgement of his interlocutor, he adds the following and produces a clichéd gesture: '[K]now what I'm sayin', dog? Buss a rock wid a playa?' He offered his fist for Minty to buss him a rock, but alas, the mint one left him hangin'.' (*Job*, 359) Later on, as Charlie prepares himself for battling his female enemies, he says, 'I'll buss a cap in da hoe's ass[.]' (*Job*, 406) Not agreeing with the racist stereo-

typing at all, Minty tells him to stop talking like that on both occasions.<sup>168</sup>

A further ethnic group that is the subject of clichés are the Jews. In *Lamb*, the narrator and protagonist Biff alludes to some stereotypical notions about his people. These are not negative but rather neutral. Their comic effect stems from the fact that they refer to some of the most obvious elements of Judaism, with which even people who know very little about the religion are usually familiar:

‘Aha,’ I said, ‘someone beat the soldier to death with a stone willie. Obviously the work of a Greek or a Samaritan – no Jew would touch such a thing.’ (*Lamb*, 82)

‘Not a Jew,’ I said helpfully, pointing to about a yard of foreskin. (*Lamb*, 275)

It’s hard for me, a Jew, to stay in the moment. Without the past, where is the guilt? And without the future, where is the dread? And without the guilt and dread, who am I? (*Lamb*, 251)

Another time the main character insults his people without being aware of it:

‘We lived here, then we lived in Egypt, now we live here again,’ Joshua said. ‘It was a long way.’

‘You lie, it takes forty years to get to Egypt.’

‘Not anymore, it’s closer now.’

‘It says in the Torah. My abba read it to me. “The Israelites traveled in the desert for forty years.”’

‘The Israelites were lost.’

‘For forty years?’ I laughed. ‘The Israelites must be stupid.’

‘We are the Israelites.’

‘We are?’

‘Yes.’ (*Lamb*, 12)

On a different occasion, Biff ridicules a Jewish tradition. However, he does not do this to mock the Jews as a whole, just a rather obnoxious representative of them:

‘You performed a healing on the Sabbath?’ the oldest of them [a group of Pharisees] asked. He was white-bearded and wore his prayer shawl and phylacteries wrapped about his upper arms and forehead. (What a jamoke. Sure, we all had phylacteries, every man got them when he turned thirteen, but you pretended that they were lost after a few weeks, you didn’t wear them. You might as well wear a sign that said: ‘Hi, I’m a pious geek.’ The one he wore on his forehead was a little leather box, about the size of a fist, that held parchments inscribed with prayers and looked – well – as if someone had strapped a little leather box to his head. Need I say more?) (*Lamb*, 392-393)

As kids, Joshua and Biff engage in such games as ‘stone the adulteress’ (*Lamb*, 19). A further amusing and non-offensive reference to Judaism is the invented quote ‘Torah! Torah! Torah!’ (*Lamb*, 227), which is titled the ‘WAR CRY OF THE KAMIKAZE RABBIS’ (*Lamb*, 227).

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Job*, 359, 406

IV. 2. 5. 3 *Stereotypes about sub-cultures and  
stigmatized groups*

The character Kimi is introduced as ‘a thin blonde in a flowered dress with a swing to her walk like a welcome home parade’ (*Island*, 72). Very soon Tuck finds out that Kimi is not quite the attractive woman he first thought her to be:

She wasn’t a natural blonde. Her skin was dark and she had the high cheekbones and angular features of a Filipino. Long false eyelashes, bright red lipstick, but lines in the face that were a little too harsh, a jawline that was a little too square. The dress was tight around the chest and there was nothing there but muscle. [...] She needed a shave. (*Island*, 73-74)

Making the acquaintance of the cross-dressing navigator, who wears a talking bat like a medallion at his<sup>169</sup> throat,<sup>170</sup> leaves the pilot feeling thoroughly awkward. (‘He was horrified. Thirty seconds ago he’d been having lustful thoughts about a guy!’ *Island*, 74) Besides Kimi’s unconventional appearance, his manner of talking (and gesturing) is also modeled on clichés concerning transvestites and homosexuals:<sup>171</sup>

‘Oh, baby,’ she said, hand to her chest as if trying to catch her breath. ‘You scare little Kimi. Why you sneakin’ up like that?’ (*Island*, 73)

‘You look like you need a date. Kimi love you good long time, twenny bucks. Whatever you need, Kimi can do.’

[...]

‘Kimi can get boat. You like it in boat? Kimi take you round the world in a boat?’ He giggled and patted Roberto’s [the bat’s] little upside-down head. ‘That funny, huh?’ (*Island*, 74)

‘Okay, bye-bye.’ Kimi said. ‘Say bye-bye to cheap sweaty American, Roberto.’ (*Island*, 76)

On Alualu, Kimi is referred to as ‘girl-man’ by the natives.<sup>172</sup>

In *Fluke*, the main character’s third ex-wife<sup>173</sup> Libby turned lesbian after a bizarre whale researching excursion she carried out with her co-worker and current lover

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<sup>169</sup> Since Kimi is referred to as a man by the narrator in the novel, the same has been done in this thesis.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. *Island*, 73-74

<sup>171</sup> Classifying Kimi’s gender proves to be complicated. The character is a man (biological sex) and the narrator uses the male possessive pronoun ‘his’ (e.g. cf. *Island*, 161, 162) when referring to him. The navigator uses his name ‘Kimi’ when talking about himself, and does not reveal his chosen gender to the readers by using a female pronoun. However, later he says, ‘I am lesbian now.’ (*Island*, 264), which implies that Kimi sees himself as a woman. As far as the character’s sexuality is concerned, it has to be pointed out that he first makes advances to Tuck (cf. *Island* 73-74), but later finds his true love in Sepie, a female islander (cf. *Island*, 263-265). The navigator points out, ‘She [Sepie] tired of having many mans and so am I.’ (*Island*, 263)

<sup>172</sup> Cf. *Island*, 162, 163, 185, 200, 222, 233, 239, 278

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 63



Margaret Painborne.<sup>174</sup> The women had decided to tag the animals while they were mating, since this is one of the two occasions on which determining the sex of a whale is possible. Unfortunately, their boat got between a female and two male cetaceans, which resulted in the latter ‘let[ting] loose with great gushing goutts of sticky whale semen, filling the boat, covering the equipment, the scientists, washing the gunwales, swamping the motor, generally leaving everything but the gal whale completely and disgustingly jizzed.’ (*Fluke*, 67) Consequently, this experience left Libby feeling that she was ‘done with penises forever’ (*Fluke*, 67-68). The woman and her girlfriend ‘work[ed] together with a couple of very butch [another stereotype concerning lesbians] young women studying cow/calf behavior and social vocalization. [...] [I]t appeared to have a gender-based agenda.’ (*Fluke*, 57)

Whereas Nate’s former wife does not conform to any typical clichés about lesbians, her partner Margaret does. For instance, she appears generally suspicious of the opposite sex and acts defensive when a man is around:<sup>175</sup>

Margaret had interposed herself completely between Nate and Libby, making a barrier of her own body (behavior she’d obviously picked up from the cow/calf studies – a humpback mother did the same thing when boats or amorous males approached her calf.) (*Fluke*, 62)

The woman also points out what she considers to be sexist behavior in Nate’s study (even though it deals with whales who sing, an activity that the researchers suspect is only done by the males<sup>176</sup>):

‘Your study seems to focus on the perspective of the male animals, without consideration for the female’s role in the behavior. Could you speak to that?’  
*Jeez, what a surprise*, thought Nate. (*Fluke*, 70)

Margaret also fulfills a further stereotype in terms of her appearance, which does not correspond to the common male idea of an attractive woman. She is described as ‘short and round, with long gray hair that she [keeps] perpetually tied back in a braid.’ (*Fluke*, 57) Jane, the homosexual sister of the protagonist in *Job*, is a character who repeatedly displays a typical wardrobe cliché by wearing her brother’s expensive suits.<sup>177</sup> Charlie tells her that this makes her look like David Bowie,<sup>178</sup> to which she replies, ‘You are so sweet. Bowie is the only man I’ve ever found attractive.’ (*Job*,

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 65-67

<sup>175</sup> Of course, this sort of behavior may also have something to do with the fact that Nate and Libby used to be spouses.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 71

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Job*, 145, 149, 251

<sup>178</sup> Cf. *Job*, 145

145) When the woman ‘gesture[s] to the splendor of her suit’ (Job, 149), she is likened to ‘a game-show model giving the big prize package on *Let’s Get Androgynous*[.]’ (Job, 149) She also seems to have the habit of changing her partners fast, as she ‘[is] on her third yoga-instructor girlfriend in six months’ (Job, 149).

A completely different character type is Yiffer. The man is annoyingly laid-back and presented as wearing ‘only a pair of orange surf shorts and layer upon layer of tan muscle’ (Coyote, 131) when Sam first meets him. The protagonist’s initial exchange of words with him features the surfer’s stereotypical catch phrase ‘dude’:<sup>179</sup>

[Yiffer] engaged a complex handshake that left Sam feeling as if his fingers had been braided together. ‘Dude,’ Yiffer said, shaking out his wild tangle of straw-colored hair as if the word had been stuck there. Feeling like a chameleon that has been dropped into a coffee can and is risking hemorrhage by trying to turn silver, Sam searched for the appropriate greeting and ended up echoing, ‘Dude.’ (Coyote, 130)

Their further conversation portrays Yiffer as a rather unambitious fellow, a man content with the simple joys of life and not the type to worry about anything:

‘So, what do you do?’ Yiffer asked with a toss of his head.  
‘I’m an insurance broker. And you?’  
‘I surf.’  
‘And?’  
‘And what?’ Yiffer said.  
Sam thought he could hear the sound of the ocean whistling through Yiffer’s ears as if through a seashell. (Coyote, 132)

‘Bitchin’.’ Yiffer grabbed a serving spoon [...] and dug into the ice cream, shoveling a baseball-sized clump into his mouth. [...] ‘Oh, shit, man,’ Yiffer said as he dropped the spoon and bent over, grabbing the bridge of his nose. ‘Major ice cream headache. Ouch!’ (Coyote, 150)

Naturally, this lifestyle does not allow for a big budget. Calliope points out that he lives with her sometimes, ‘[m]ostly when he doesn’t have gas money for his van.’ (Coyote, 133)

In *Fluke*, there is a character who bears several similarities to Yiffer. For instance, he appears ‘in surfer shorts and flip-flops, sporting a giant tangle of blond dreadlocks and about six hundred nose rings’ (Fluke, 24), surfs and is muscular.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, like Yiffer, he goes by a rather unusual moniker: Kona. This, however, is not his real name:

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 131  
<sup>180</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 25, 26

‘Your application says that your name is Pelke – ah, Pelekekona Ke–‘ Clay threw his hands up in surrender.  
‘I be called Pelekekona Keohokalole – da warrior kine – Lion of Zion, brah.’  
[...]  
‘It says on your driver’s license that your name is Preston Applebaum and you’re from New Jersey.’ (*Fluke*, 31-32)

Despite what his official documents state, Kona is quite the expert of Rastafarian jargon. His pronunciation, pidgin grammar and vocabulary appear rather authentic of a Hawaiian native. For example, he frequently uses the words ‘brah’ (for ‘brother’) and ‘mon’ (for ‘man’) and other expressions typically associated with the Rastafarian movement and the stoner sub-culture:

‘Oh, Jah’s sweet mercy [...] This is bit of fuckery most heinous for sure, mon.’ (*Fluke*, 24)

‘So you ichiban big whale kahuna, like Clay say, hey?’  
‘Yeah,’ Nate said. ‘I’m the number-one whale kahuna. You’re fired.’  
‘Bummah, mon,’ the kid said. [...] ‘Jah’s love to ye, brah. Cool runnings,’ he sang over his shoulder. (*Fluke*, 25)

‘Irie, science dreadies! We be research jammin’ now!’ (*Fluke*, 78)

He also has special reggae-register expressions for addressing the good-looking pale research assistant Amy and other women:

‘You do a lot of sailing?’ Amy asked, nodding to the Nautica logo [on Kona’s windbreaker]. She intended the remark as a dig, a return for Kona’s saying, ‘And who be this snowy biscuit?’ when they’d first met. At the time Amy had just introduced herself, but in retrospect she realized that she should probably have taken some offense to being called both snowy and a biscuit – *those things were objectifying, right?*  
‘Shark bait kit, me Snowy Biscuit,’ Kona answered, meaning that the windbreaker had come from a tourist. (*Fluke*, 41)

‘Leave him alone,’ Amy said. ‘He’s too cute to be bad.’  
‘Truth,’ said Kona. ‘Sistah Biscuit speak nothin’ but the truth. I be massive cute.’ (*Fluke*, 46)

‘Irie, Boss Nate. Who’s the biscuit auntie suckin’ face with ya?’ (Like many authentic Hawaiians, Kona called any woman a generation older ‘auntie’, even if he was horning after her.) (*Fluke*, 63)

Nate concludes that Kona’s way of speaking is ‘some mix of Rasta talk, pidgin, surfspeak and ... well, bullshit’ (*Fluke*, 25). However, the adolescent is also capable of talking more understandably, rather like the rest of the US-Americans in the novel. During his job interview, when he elaborates on his growing up in New Jersey and his past, the surfer ‘los[es] his Rastafarian laid-back-ness’ (*Fluke*, 32). Furthermore, ‘[i]n the three days since Quinn ha[s] disappeared, Kona ha[s] forgotten to speak brophonics and Rasta talk almost completely, and now he just sound[s] like a kid from

New Jersey with a ‘whoa, dude’ surfer accent’ (*Fluke*, 148). Apart from his language usage, Kona is also a follower of the clichéd Rastafarian pastime of smoking marihuana:

There was pot and steel drums in his [Kona’s] voice, bemusement and youth and two joints’ worth of separation from the rest of reality. (*Fluke*, 24)

‘We fix this fuckery, then we fire up a spliff and think over it, brah.’ (*Fluke*, 27)

‘Irie, Clay, me dready. I be bringing films and herb for the evening to welcome to Jah’s mercy, mon. Peace.’

Kona stood there, [...] a film can held high above his head [...]. He was looking up to it as if it held the elixir of life.

[...]

‘And this lonely stash can to fill with the sacred herb,’ Kona said. ‘I’ll find me papers, and we can take the ship home to Zion, mon.’

‘You can’t give him [Kona] money and an empty film can, Nate. He sees it as a religious duty to fill it up.’ (*Fluke*, 36-37)

having spent most of his time from the age of thirteen knocking the edge off his mental acuity by the concerted application of the most epic smokage that Jah could provide (*Fluke*, 210)

The novel *Job* features Lily, a teenager who is fascinated with everything to do with death and the occult. Her character combines stereotypes about adolescents as well as about goth devotees. The ‘sixteen [year-old], pale and a little bottom heavy’ (*Job*, 23) girl, whose ‘grown-woman form [is] still in flux between baby fat and baby bearing’ (*Job*, 25), changes her hair color and style frequently<sup>181</sup> and tries to hide under dark make-up<sup>182</sup> and a belligerent attitude. Most of the time, she chooses to treat adults, her boss and her co-worker, with indifference and/or sarcasm:

‘I – think – I – just – killed – a – guy,’ he [Charlie] gasped.

‘Excellent,’ Lily said, ignoring equally his message and his demeanor. ‘We’re going to need change for the register.’ (*Job*, 25)

‘Ray, why the fuck do you have a Geiger counter?’

‘Lily, why do you have a nose stud shaped like a bat?’

Lily ignored the question and picked up the ceramic frog [...] (*Job*, 66)

Like a typical teenager, the girl is easily willing to skip school.<sup>183</sup> The character also plays the role of the little angry girl, another cliché about adolescents, perfectly.

Consequently, her idiom is rather harsh and includes various crude expressions: ‘He [Charlie] grabbed her by the shoulders, but she spun out of his grasp. ‘Ouch! Fuck. Back off, Asher, you sado freak, that’s a new tattoo.’ She punched him in the arm,

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. *Job*, 25, 27

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *Job*, 27

<sup>183</sup> Cf. *Job*, 25

hard[.]’ (*Job*, 26) Since Lily feels that ‘French better expresses the profound *noirness* of [her] existence’ (*Job*, 26), she started ‘peppering her speech with French phrases’ (*Job*, 26). Like a stereotypical minor, she also tends to become rather melodramatic when upset:

‘[...] Of all of life’s many disappointments, I’d have to say that this is the crowning disappointment.’  
‘You’re sixteen,’ Charlie said[.] [...]  
‘[...] I’m only sixteen for two more months, then what? In the blink of an eye my beauty becomes but a feast for worms, and I, a forgotten sigh in a sea of nothingness.’  
(*Job*, 121)

‘Don’t fuck with me, Asher. If you keep talking like that I’ll get another piercing, take X until I’m dehydrated like a mummy, talk on my cell phone until the battery is dead, then find some skinny, pale guy and suck him until he cries.’ (*Job*, 127)

Her boss Charlie points out that, due to her temper problem, she rather ‘alienate[s] customers’ (*Job*, 26) than actually works in his interest. He further describes her as ‘some creepiness child prodigy’ (*Job*, 26) and is quite used to having conflicts with the moody girl (‘familiarity of arguing with Lily’ *Job*, 27). The teenager is judgmental<sup>184</sup> and generally discontent with the world, a ‘world where everyone [is] stupid and life [is] meaningless and the mere act of living [is] futile’ (*Job*, 65). This attitude is also reflected on one of her t-shirts that reads ‘Hell Is Other People’ (*Job*, 81). She is especially devastated ‘when it dawn[s] on her that she [is] going to have to figure out this college-career thing, because [...] she had not been chosen as a dark minion of destruction’ (*Job*, 65-66). Even worse, Death has chosen her timid boss to be his servant instead of her.<sup>185</sup>

#### IV. 2. 5. 4 Sexist and gender clichés

Even though they are quantitatively less noticeable than the stereotypes about other groups, there are a few clichés about women to be found in Moore’s novels. For instance, *Fluke* features the following allusion to typical female restroom behavior:

Nate thought for a moment that they [two women] might have to dash off to the bathroom together, which in his experience was what women did right before they made any major decisions, like about which shoes to buy or whether or not they were ever going to sleep with him again. (*Fluke*, 239)

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. *Job*, 81

<sup>185</sup> Cf. *Job*, 67, 88, 121

In *Lamb*, the narrator explains how the mothers of his friends and his own are boasting about their children, which is another common stereotype. Unfortunately, there is nothing worth bragging about when Biff's conception is concerned:

John's birth had been a miracle, announced by the angel. Elizabeth, John's mother, talked about it all through supper, as if it had happened yesterday instead of thirteen years ago. When the old woman paused to take a breath, Joshua's mother started in about the divine announcement of her own son's birth. Occasionally my mother, feeling the need to exhibit some maternal pride that she didn't really feel, would chime in as well.

'You know, Biff wasn't announced by an angel, but locusts ate our garden and Alphaeus [her husband] had gas for a month around the time he would have been conceived. I think it might have been a sign. That certainly didn't happen with my other boys.' (*Lamb*, 100)

The following quote displays a question that is supposedly found in most women's linguistic repertoire and usually gets men into trouble when they try to answer it:

The statue of Kali [a goddess for whom humans and animal are sacrificed] [...] wore a necklace of human skulls and a girdle made of severed human hands[.] [...] [More descriptions of her gruesome exterior follow.] [T]he fourth [hand] was posed downward, in a manner presenting the goddess's hand-girded hips, as if asking the eternal question, 'Does this outfit make me look fat?' (*Lamb*, 305)

On one occasion a cliché that originally targets the females has the reversed effect of mocking the males by pointing out their lack of trust in the rather mundane skills of the opposite gender: 'It was a man thing, being inherently uncomfortable with the thought of a woman operating a boat or a television remote control.' (*Fluke*, 10)

#### IV. 3 ANALYSIS OF PREVALENT TOPICS

##### IV. 3. 1 Absurdity

In Moore's novels, absurdity can be found on various levels. For instance, in the discussion of the fictional figures, several instances of individual farcical behavior have been made apparent. In addition to that, the general plots of the books are equally bizarre. Each of the main characters is either cast into a new grotesque world or has to witness how his once familiar environment, or rather perception thereof, is altering due to recent changes in his life. This results in the protagonists having to deal with and overcome their existential crises in surroundings alien to them.

A further layer of absurdity is presented in the form of separate ludicrous situations. These are for the most part not essential to the stories, but provide the readers with additional humorous elements and, in some cases, more idiosyncratic details about the individual figures. For example, the vicious female character in *Island* is introduced as follows: ‘The High Priestess of the Shark People ate Cheetos and watched afternoon talk shows over the satellite feed.’ (*Island*, 21) The clash between the woman’s role and her current activity is immediately obvious. (Since this is the character’s first appearance in the novel, the readers are not aware that she is just pretending to be a spiritual leader and is in reality not only unimpressed by, but even disrespectful of, the islanders’ aboriginal beliefs.) This discrepancy is what places the situation in the realm of the absurd.<sup>186</sup> Other bizarre situations can be found in the repeated ghostly appearances by the late pilot Vincent Bennidetti, the founder of the cargo cult on Alualu.<sup>187</sup> Vinnie materializes out of nowhere to save Tuck’s life on more than one occasion and to help him rescue the Shark People. Each time he then vanishes just as quickly as he appeared into thin air again.<sup>188</sup> Equally absurd as the reappearing ghost is the fact that Roberto, Kimi’s pet fruit bat,<sup>189</sup> talks to Tucker several times. Their first conversation goes as follows:

Roberto tilted his head and said, ‘Back off on these people [the Curtises], Tuck. You push them too hard, they’ll pull your plug. Just keep your eyes open.’  
Tuck moved away from the bat with stiff jerking steps out of the line dance of the undead. The bat had said something. It was a tiny voice, high but raspy, the voice of a chain-smoking Topo Gigio [a character on a puppet show for children in the 1960s], but it was clear. ‘You didn’t talk,’ Tucker said.  
‘Okay,’ said Roberto. ‘Thanks for the mango.’  
Roberto took off[.] (*Island*, 169)

On other occasions the animal helps Tuck find out that the Curtises killed his recent acquaintance, the curious reporter Pardee, and gives him navigational information.<sup>190</sup> Thus, both the bat and Vincent function as the helpless protagonist’s paranormal allies. It is Roberto who ends the novel on an ironic note: ‘‘Boy, I’m glad all that supernatural stuff is over,’ the bat said.’ (*Island*, 403)

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<sup>186</sup> At a later point, the ridiculous connection between her duties as a priestess and her favorite TV programs is revealed. Beth Curtis explains to her husband that it is almost impossible to perform as the Sky Priestess without her soap operas, since they help her ‘find [her] emotional moment[.]’ (*Island*, 210)

<sup>187</sup> Cf. *Island* 106-107, 109-112, 114-119

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *Island* 10, 58-59, 84-85, 243-246, 328-329, 349, 351-353, 382, 401-403

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *Island*, 74

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *Island*, 260, 348-349

Of course, most of the trickster's antics in *Coyote* can be considered farcical. A further absurd incident is described in the form of the infant 'Grubb, [who] upon seeing white plastic bundles piled haphazardly on the motel-room floor, crawl[s] doggedly to, and whizz[es] gleefully on, twenty thousand dollars' worth of methamphetamine.'

(*Coyote*, 229) It is also peculiar that a 'house of pleasure' (*Coyote*, 260) financially supports and provides food to an auto repair shop run by Buddhist monks.<sup>191</sup> Besides the fantastic underwater world with its whaley boys created by the Goo, *Fluke* furthermore offers smaller examples of absurdity. At the beginning of the novel, Nate is overwhelmed by a highly unusual discovery he makes:

The whale fluked, raising its tail high in the air, and there, instead of the distinct pattern of black-and-white markings by which all humpbacks were identified, were – spelled out in foot-high black letters across the white – the words BITE ME! (*Fluke*, 11)

*Job* incorporates the most absurd self-contained situations. For example, one of the instructions that Charlie reads in the '*The Great Big Book of Death*' (*Job*, 125) states that '[i]n order to hold off the Forces of Darkness, [he] will need a number two pencil and a calendar, preferably one without pictures of kitties on it.' (*Job*, 125-126) The man displays unusual parenting behavior when he reads his infant child to sleep with Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.<sup>192</sup> Quite absurd is also the fact that he later decides to buy his daughter 'a three-inch-long Madagascar hissing cockroach' (*Job*, 148), whose species is known for their incredible resistance, due to the fact that all of the girl's other pets died quickly.<sup>193</sup> Of course, Sophie's hellhounds also fall into the realm of the bizarre. The voracious canines devour anything, ranging from lemon dishwasher gel, frozen steaks, car seat covers, bug spray, an electric mixer, a car alternator, an answering machine and mini-propane cylinders.<sup>194</sup>

#### IV. 3. 2 The macabre<sup>195</sup>

Since the protagonist of *Job* is faced with death on a regular basis, it is naturally this novel that features the most instances of dark humor and other macabre jokes. Trying to become more acquainted with his new profession, Charlie 'scoured the Internet for

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 255-260

<sup>192</sup> Cf. *Job*, 51

<sup>193</sup> Cf. *Job*, 148-149

<sup>194</sup> Cf. *Job*, 176, 178, 181, 188-190

<sup>195</sup> Whereas the chapter 'Absurdity' deals with bizarre situations in general, the focus of this one is purely on jokes and situations concerning death and (the dismemberment of) the body.



information on death, and [...] found that there were a lot of people who wanted to dress like the dead, get naked with the dead, look at pictures of the naked and the dead, or sell pills to give erections to the dead[.]’ (*Job*, 146) After having his new job explained to him, the main character asks, ‘So I’m like a Santa’s Helper of Death?’ (*Job*, 89) Charlie’s little daughter Sophie also has a strong connection to death. As the girl is learning to talk, her father discovers that whenever she points at a human being or an animal and says ‘kitty’, they drop dead.<sup>196</sup> She is also seen ‘gleefully pounding away on the tray of her high chair with a stiff hamster.’ (*Job*, 141) The description of the Death Merchant’s handbook also combines the comic with a serious matter:

The cover was shiny, like a children’s picture book, with a colorful illustration of a grinning skeleton with tiny people impaled on his fingertips, and all of them appeared to be having the time of their lives, as if they were enjoying a carnival ride that just happened to involve having a gaping hole being punched through the chest. It was festive – lots of flowers and candy in primary colors, done in the style of Mexican folk art. *The Great Big Book of Death*, was the title, spelled out across the top of the cover in cheerful, human femur font letters. (*Job*, 30-31)

Other examples of dark humor include referring to the character Minty Green as ‘Mint Green Death’ (*Job*, 87), using the euphemism ‘[to take] the big Ambien [a sleeping pill brand]’ (*Job*, 120) and the title of the chapter that deals with the death of Charlie’s mother: ‘Yo Momma So Dead That...’ (*Job*, 249). Furthermore, the readers are told that most funeral homes are carpeted so that no one slips on tear-spotted floors<sup>197</sup> and that ‘[i]f you’re going to get hit by a bus in San Francisco, you want to go with the forty-one, because you can pretty much figure on there being a nice bridge view.’ (*Job*, 21) Another grotesque element in *Job* are the taxidermy animals in the fashion of Frankenstein, the ‘squirrel people’, that are brought back to life by Charlie’s later girlfriend Audrey.<sup>198</sup> Among them is a squirrel ‘wearing a pink ball gown from the eighteenth century[,] [...] dressed for the court of Louis XVI’ (*Job*, 283), a being with a crocodile head, raptor claws and webbed waterbird feet, sporting a tuxedo<sup>199</sup> and ‘an iguana dressed like a musketeer’ (*Job*, 326) with ‘the hands of a raccoon [...] [and] a big-feathered hat’ (*Job*, 371).

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<sup>196</sup> Cf. *Job*, 164-165

<sup>197</sup> Cf. *Job*, 12

<sup>198</sup> Cf. *Job*, 378

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *Job*, 295-296

Macabre humor is also displayed in other novels. In *Lamb*, Biff repeatedly shows his disrespect for people who have a different belief than his own. He does not hesitate to prove his jester qualities by improvising the following rude dirges:

*'La-la-la. Oh, we are really, really sad that your mom is dead. Too bad you're a Sadducee and don't believe in an afterlife and your mom is just going to be worm food, la-la. Makes you think that you might want to reconsider, huh? Fa-la-la-la-la-wacka-wacka.'* [...] *'Fa-la-la-la, don't feel bad – she was old and had no teeth left, la-la-la. Come on, people, you know the words!'* (*Lamb*, 34)

*'La-la-la. Hey Roman guy, too bad about your getting stabbed. La-la-la. It's probably not a message from God or nothing. La-la-la. Telling you that maybe you should have gone home, la, la, la. Instead of oppressing the chosen people who God hisownself has said that he likes better than you. Fa, la, la, la. [...]'* *La-la-la, didn't we tell you that you shouldn't eat pork, la-la. Although looking at the wounds in your chest, a dietary change might not have made a big difference. Boom shaka-laka-laka-laka, boom shaka-laka-lak. Come on, you know the words!'* (*Lamb*, 80-81)

*Island* starts with Tucker finding himself hanging upside down in a tree and being greeted by the cannibal Sarapul with the word 'Yum'.<sup>200</sup> Whereas the protagonist survives this first encounter with the native, it is not so clear if the same holds true for the Curtises, who, at the end of the book, are also described as hanging in a tree and facing the man-eater uttering 'Yum'.<sup>201</sup> Referring to the human harvesting for which the couple uses the islanders, Tuck comments that they have 'opened up Kidneys 'R' Us and started making a mint.' (*Island*, 289) Also macabre are the actions the main character decides to take after having been repeatedly awoken by the crowing of roosters:

What joy to feel the *thwack* of a seven iron on red feathers, the satisfying impact of balanced metal on poultry (suddenly silenced and somewhat tenderized for your trouble). He saw himself wading into a bucket of roosters, swinging his seven iron madly [...], dealing death and destruction like the Colonel's own avenging angel. Welcome to Tucker Case's chicken death camp, my little feathered friends. Now, kindly prepare to have your nuggets knocked off. (*Island*, 183)

In *Fluke*, Clay learns about his mother's passing in a very bizarre way. After her death, Clay's brothers decided to ship her from Greece to their wealthier sibling, so he could arrange the funeral and say goodbye to her himself.<sup>202</sup>

And so the two brothers, having inherited their mother's weakness for alcohol and their father's bad judgment, packed the remains of mother Demodocus in an olive barrel, filled the barrel with the preserving brine, and shipped it off to their rich younger brother's house in San Diego. The problem was, in their grief (or perhaps it was their stupor) they forgot to send a letter, leave a message, or, for that matter, put a packing label on the barrel, so months later, when Clay returned to find the barrel on his porch, he broke into it thinking he was about to enjoy a delicious snack of kalamata olives

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. *Island*, 3

<sup>201</sup> Cf. *Island*, 399

<sup>202</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 149

from home. It was not the way to find out about his mother's death, and it engendered in Clay very strong views about loyalty and the bearing of bad news. (*Fluke*, 149-150)

#### IV. 3. 3 Crude language and sex

Old Man Coyote points out that '[g]reat heroes have great horniness.' (*Coyote*, 96)

This may account for the circumstance that allusions to intercourse and crude expressions, examples of which have already appeared in previous chapters of this thesis, abound in Moore's books. Jokes and puns concerning sex are, in fact, a defining element of the author's humorous style and also an essential part of portraying the personalities of his characters, predominantly of his male protagonists (the heroes). Vulgarity appears frequently in the conversations between the figures, for instance:

'The question is,' Jake said, glaring at Dusty, 'what the fuck is a missionary doctor in Bongo Bongo land doing with a Lear 45?'

'God's work?' Dusty said innocently.

Jake snatched back his beer. 'Oh blow me, Huey.' (*Island*, 26-27)

Another example is one of the 'essential Spanish phrases' (*Coyote*, 121) Sam learns when working with Mexican dishwashers and cooks, namely 'Your sister fucks donkeys in Tijuana[.]' (*Coyote*, 121) As a teenager, the boy and his friends crudely refer to the policeman Enos Windtree as 'Anus'.<sup>203</sup> Besides achieving a comic effect based on the concentration of these profanities, they may also serve to depict the characters' language as authentic and natural, since such expressions are often found in informal speech situations between people of the non-fictional world.

Whereas the examples above are to be understood as crass insults, there are numerous comments made by the characters which refer to what may be perceived as more pleasurable aspects of sexuality. Believing that Tuck is dead, Sarapul, the cannibal, suggests to the others, 'Let's eat him.' (*Island*, 129) Kimi, the former prostitute, misunderstands him completely, and replies, 'He no like that [...] Not even for free.' (*Island*, 130) Since Beth Curtis, the Sky Priestess, uses her physical assets to get whatever she wants, she is frequently reduced to her body. Tuck, trying to log onto Dr. Curtis' computer, concludes that the password 'would be something that the doc would be sitting here thinking about. It would be on his mind.' (*Island*, 333) After

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 104

‘BETHS TITS’ turned out to be incorrect, he succeeds by entering ‘BETHS BREASTS’.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, Vincent refers to the woman as a ‘dame doing the bump and grind on [his] runway’ (*Island*, 352) and ‘a boneable feast’ (*Island*, 353). As the following quotation taken from a narration about the creation of a group of islands proves, the trickster named Maui is as intrigued by the female body as Coyote: ‘[There] was one [island] that was made up of two big volcanoes, sitting there together like the friendly, lopsided bosoms of the sea. Between them was a deep valley that Maui gave his name, and its nickname became ‘The Cleavage Island’ [...].’ (*Fluke*, 13)

Moore’s novels also feature references to more unusual sexual practices and fetishes. For instance, Old Man Coyote tells Sam about the exciting conditions of the act of mating of another species: ‘You should feel what it is like to pleasure a falcon. You lock talons with her in the sky and do it while you both are falling like meteors. You would like it; they never complain if you come too fast.’ (*Coyote*, 96) Once Josh and Biff are staying with Balthazar, they make the acquaintance of his female companions. Several of them bear names unmistakably related to intercourse, such as ‘Tiny Feet of the Divine Dance of Joyous Orgasm’ (‘Joy’) and ‘Feminine Keeper of the Three Tunnels of Excessive Friendliness’ (*Lamb*, 177). When the demon Catch is chasing Joy and Biff, the boy, irritated by the female’s tactics, asks her, ‘You peed on the demon?’ (*Lamb*, 223) She replies, ‘He had no right to complain. Before I came here I knew a man in Hunan who’d pay good money for that.’ (*Lamb*, 223) On another occasion, as Joshua is preparing his speech for the Sermon on the Mount, Biff suggests the following to be said about adultery:

‘Verily I say unto you, that should a man put oil upon a woman’s naked body, and make her go upon all fours and bark like a dog, while knowing her, if you know what I mean, then he has committed adultery, and surely if a woman do the same thing right back, well she has jumped on the adultery donkey cart herownself. And if a woman should pretend to be a powerful queen, and a man a lowly slave boy, and if she should call him humiliating names and make him lick upon her body, then surely they have sinned like big dogs – and woe unto the man if he pretends to be a powerful queen, and –’ (*Lamb*, 423-424)

Of course, there are also instances when the subjects of sex and sexual organs are less pleasant for the all the people involved: ‘That’s how field research was. Moments of frantic activity followed by periods of waiting. (Nate’s first ex-wife had once

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Island*, 333

commented that their sex life could be described in exactly the same way[.] [...]’ (*Fluke*, 6) A less drastic, but still improper, comment is made by Old Man Coyote as he is telling a monk who just pointed out that ‘[I]life is suffering’ (*Coyote*, 257) to ‘get laid’ (*Coyote*, 257). This is also the kind of advice Amy gives to her tense co-workers,<sup>205</sup> which one of them refers to as ‘reverse harassment’ (*Fluke*, 19). A situation that is more objectionable occurs when a whaley boy called Bernhard exposes his ‘thin, fourteen-inch-long pink penis’ (*Fluke*, 206) and waves at Nate with it.<sup>206</sup> Moments later Bernhard is told to ‘get that thing out of the coffeepot[.]’ (*Fluke*, 209)

Even though the protagonist in *Job* is not portrayed as an overly lustful male, it is this book that makes the most references to intercourse. They include all the categories listed above (the use of crude language in informal speech, sex-related discussions and the mention of fetishes<sup>207</sup>), as well as insults targeting below the belt. Since Charlie is convinced that the world is trying to ‘fuck’ with him, which he repeatedly mentions, and the conversations between the characters are often highly emotional, the said word and its various morphological variants appear with a high frequency.<sup>208</sup> In the chapter titled ‘The Call of Booty’ (*Job*, 191), Ray explains to Charlie what ‘[f]uck puppets’ (*Job*, 191) are:

‘[...] Every one of them has an apartment that some older executive guy is paying for – just like he paid for the health-club membership and the fake tits. They spend their days getting facials and manicures, and their nights under some suit out of his suit. [...] They just exist to be his perfect piece of ass. [...] I think *fuck puppets* is more accurate [than ‘mistresses’], because when they get too old to hold the attention of their guy, they’ve got nothing more going. They’ll be done, like marionettes with no one at the strings.’ (*Job*, 192-193)

In *Job*, even buildings are described in a way that likens them to male sexual organs:

The house was an Italianate Victorian on the hill just below the Coit Tower, the great granite column built in honor of the San Francisco firemen who had lost their lives in the line of duty. Although it’s said to have been designed with a fire-hose nozzle in mind, almost no one who sees the tower can resist the urge to comment on its resemblance to a giant penis. Madeline Alby’s house, a flat-roofed white rectangle with ornate scrolling trim and a crowning cornice of carved cherubs, looked like a wedding cake balanced on the tower’s scrotum.

[...] Charlie trudged up the nut sack of San Francisco[.]’ (*Job*, 150-151)

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<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 19

<sup>206</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 206

<sup>207</sup> Cf. the chapter ‘The macabre’

<sup>208</sup> Cf. *Job*, 26, 28, 33, 56, 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 74, 75, 85, 109, 116, 127, 139, 147, 162, 165, 168, 186, 227, 239, 240, 285, 286, 287, 288, 347, 358, 412, 413

Since Charlie has not been intimate with a woman after his wife's death five years ago,<sup>209</sup> his sister mocks him, saying that 'there's probably some order of nuns that would do [him] now, just as a holy act of mercy. Or penance.' (*Job*, 196) She suggests 'The Sisters of Perpetual Nookiless Suffering' (*Job*, 196) and 'The Holy Order of Saint Bonny of the BJ, patron saint of Web porn and incurable wankers.'<sup>210</sup> (*Job*, 196) However, in the end, the protagonist is recompensed by being given a 'ten-inch schlong' (*Job*, 434).

#### IV. 3. 4 Religion

Even though religion only plays a significant role in two of the analyzed novels, it is criticized and ridiculed in each of them. One of the topics that occurs repeatedly is missionary work/conversion. In making the cargo cult of Alualu's aboriginal people a central element of the book *Island*, and in fact the reason why the islanders are so easily tricked by the dubious missionary couple Curtis, Christopher Moore is clearly exposing the negative aspects of this religion. A more joking and oversimplified form of criticism is applied when the narrator of *Fluke* points out that Maui's designation 'The Cleavage Island' (cf. above) '[only] stayed until some missionaries came along and renamed it 'The Valley Island' (because if there's anything missionaries do well, it's seek out and destroy fun.)' (*Fluke*, 13) Adeline, a minor character in *Coyote*, experiences problems that arise from having converted to another religion. The Crow woman, who 'had come to Christianity the same way she had come to sex and smoking: through peer pressure' (*Coyote*, 166), feels uneasy about the old ways of her former belief. When Pokey insincerely wonders out loud whether there is a screech owl, a bad omen according to Crow lore, in the distance, the woman panics, most definitely in fear of a vengeful ghost wanting to punish her for having neglected her ancestors' beliefs.<sup>211</sup> Not quite fully comprehending her new religion, she then starts 'praying to Jesus to forgive Pokey for his sins, but adding to her prayer a request for Jesus to beat the shit out of Pokey if He had the time.' (*Coyote*, 15) Adeline later finds herself in a bigger dilemma when an owl, sitting in front of her window, will not leave:

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. *Job*, 196

<sup>210</sup> These quotes can also be understood as a joke targeting religion, cf. the following chapter.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 14-15

She was tempted to pray to Jesus to make the owl go away, but if she did that, she would be admitting that she believed in the old ways and she'd go to Hell. [...] [S]he was afraid to pass by the owl. According to the priest, God knew everything. The sunglasses and weird hairdo wouldn't fool God. God knew she was afraid, so He knew she still had faith in the old ways, so she was going to Hell as sure as if she'd been out all morning worshipping golden calves and graven images. 'I got bad medicine from being Crow,' she thought. 'And I'm going to Hell for being Christian. [...]' (*Coyote*, 167)

Obviously, the woman imagined Christianity to be more uncomplicated than it turns out to be:

When her sisters talked about the Bible it was all the Sermon on the Mount and the Song of Solomon, Proverbs and Psalms; never smitings and plagues. And her sisters had never mentioned that God was a racist. He sure hated those Philistines. Adeline had a cousin in Philadelphia; she wore a little too much eye shadow, but that didn't seem a sin you should get smote and circumcised for... (*Coyote*, 317-318)

As a consequence, she is quick with abandoning Jesus and the Bible in exchange for a medicine that cures an infinite number of ailments including '[getting] rid of unwanted owls' (*Coyote*, 321), presented to her by the trickster in disguise.<sup>212</sup>

Given the setting of *Lamb*, the opportunities for snide comments and satirical illustrations targeting religion appear to be endless. Moore uses these in various ways, such as portraying Raziël, an angel of the highest rank, as a comic character. Being fascinated with TV, he is unaware of the fact that soap operas feature actors and actresses and do not depict the real lives of people.<sup>213</sup> Consequently, Raziël mistakes the magazine *Soap Opera Digest* for a divine document that can miraculously foretell what is going to happen on his favorite shows.<sup>214</sup> Yet worse than his inability to distinguish between reality and TV, the archangel is furthermore exposed as highly incompetent as far as his divine duties are concerned. Intending to inform them of the forthcoming birth of the Messiah, Raziël appears to Biff and Josh when the latter is already ten years old.<sup>215</sup> Having witnessed several of the archangel's lapses, Biff wonders if the divine being even managed to destroy the right cities<sup>216</sup> and reports the following:

It seems that he did a stint, centuries ago, as the Angel of Death, but was relieved of his duties because he was not particularly good at them. He admits that he's a sucker for a hard-luck story (perhaps that explains his fascination with soap operas). Anyway, when you read in the Torah about Noah living to be nine hundred and Moses living to be a

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<sup>212</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 320-321

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 13, 47

<sup>214</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 48-49, 88, 108

<sup>215</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 41

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 49

hundred and forty, well, guess who led the chorus line in the 'Off This Mortal Coil' shuffle? [...] (Can you believe that Noah was able to postpone death for eight hundred years by telling the angel that he was behind in his paperwork? [...]) (*Lamb*, 257)

It seems that the angel is not only a figure of ridicule on earth, but also regarded as an outlandish individual in heaven. After Raziel has referred to Biff as 'asshole', one of his colleagues informs him that it is exactly this kind of language that makes him have to work with human beings as a form of punishment.<sup>217</sup>

Similar to Raziel's situation, Josh's position is occasionally undermined by his inappropriate behavior as well. On the way home from the marketplace, 'he [is] hugging his coffee beans and mumbling to himself[.]' (*Lamb*, 190) The Messiah's behavior is equally secular when he gets drunk at a wedding reception and uses the expression 'dumbest sons of bitches on earth' (*Lamb*, 449) when referring to his own disciples.<sup>218</sup> '[T]he Prince of Peace [also repeatedly] cold-cock[s] [Biff].' (*Lamb*, 128) Another weird mannerism of Joshua is having 'taken to poking one of [the leprous Untouchables] in the arm with his finger anytime anyone said the word 'Untouchable[.]' [...] because he just hated passing up the opportunity for palpable irony.' (*Lamb*, 310) Biff does not hesitate to take advantage of his friend's compulsion:

'He [the meditating Melchior] dead?' I asked.  
'Can't tell.'  
'Poke him.'  
'No, he's my teacher, a holy man. I'm not poking him.'  
'He's Untouchable.'  
Joshua couldn't resist the irony, he poked him. Instantly the yogi opened his eyes[.]  
(*Lamb*, 327)

In another situation the Messiah's authority is not recognized, however, this time it is not his fault. Trying to preach in the outer court of a temple, he is constantly interrupted by merchants going around their business:

Each time he would get started, a vendor would come by barking, 'Get your doves. Get your sacrificial doves. Pure as the driven snow. Everybody needs one.' Then Joshua would begin again and the next vendor would come by.  
'Unleavened bread! Get your unleavened bread! Only one shekel. Piping hot matzo, just like Moses ate on the way out of Egypt, only fresher.'  
[...]  
'Your denariis changed to shekels, while you wait! [...]'  
[...]  
'Bitter herbs! Get your bitter herbs!' cried a vendor.  
'Dammit all!' Joshua cried in frustration. (*Lamb*, 463-464)

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<sup>217</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 2

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 383, 449



Christ is also humiliated when a hardly glorious divine sign arrives in the form of the face of his mother appearing in elephant excrement.<sup>219</sup>

In contrast to Biff and Joshua, several characters in Moore's other books are openly either unaffected by, or even completely opposed to, religion. Frequently, the subject of spirituality is ridiculed by relating it to mundane matters such as sports or sex. For instance, the protagonist Tuck

didn't understand religion. It was like heroin and golf: He knew a lot of people who did it, but he didn't understand why. His father watched sports every Sunday, and his mother had worked in real estate. He grew up thinking that church was something that simply interfered with games and weekend open houses. (*Island*, 23)

Responding to the question whether he ever thinks about God, Tucker's friend Jake blasphemes that indeed he 'think[s] about a big old pissed-off Sistine Chapel finger-pointin' motherfucker' (*Island*, 32) to counteract a premature ending when he is having intercourse.<sup>220</sup> When a passer-by is appalled that one of Charlie's dogs is called Mohammed, the stranger asks him how he feels about the fact that he has named his dog Jesus.<sup>221</sup> The main character, who agrees to being a 'godless infidel' (*Job*, 186), responds,

'Well, then I'm sorry, I didn't realize you'd lost your dog.'  
'I have not lost my dog.'  
'Really? I saw these flyers all over town with "Have You Found Jesus?" on them. It must be another dog named Jesus. Was there a reward? A reward helps, you know.'  
(*Job*, 185)

As his boss is proudly presenting a boar's head as the newest addition to his taxidermy collection, Sam 'consider[s] genuflecting to appeal to the latent Irish Catholic in Aaron [.]' (*Coyote*, 26) Yet, at the head of disrespectful behavior is the trickster Old Man Coyote, who is a god himself:

Coyote [...] turned to Sam. '[...] You whine like an old woman. I got you your house back!'  
'I wouldn't have lost it if you had left me alone. Be logical.'  
'What gods do you know that are logical. Name two.' (*Coyote*, 170)

He also indulges in one of Sam's computer games whose object is to shoot nuns, bishops and cardinals, as well as fight saints.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, the trickster recalls meeting Jesus: 'Hairy face, made a big deal about dying and coming back to life – one

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<sup>219</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 345-356

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *Island*, 32

<sup>221</sup> Cf. *Job*, 185

<sup>222</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 168-170

time. Ha. He was funny. He tried to teach me how to walk on water. I can do pretty good in the wintertime.’ (*Coyote*, 272)

Even though most of Moore’s mockery focuses on Christianity, there are also several comic remarks targeting other religions. For instance, when Charlie is asked if he has studied any of the Eastern religions, he replies that he is just familiar with ‘Discovery Channel stuff – you know, Buddha, Shiva, Gandalf – the biggies.’ (*Job*, 101) After Sam descended into the Underworld, he meets Anubis, whose ‘leg [begins] to bounce with pleasure’ (*Coyote*, 323) as the man scratches the canine-resembling god behind the ears. The following quotes serve as further examples:

When Calliope blossomed at thirteen and began to attract too much attention from neopagan males, her mother turned to Islam, changed her daughter’s name [...], and equipped her with a veil.’ (*Coyote*, 39)

At first I [Biff] arranged the [meditating] monks in a large pile, trying to keep the elbows and knees out of the eyes and yarbles, out of respect and in the spirit of the infinitely compassionate Buddha and stuff. (*Lamb*, 273)

Everyone is happier if they have someone to look down on, as well as someone to look up to, especially if they resent both. This is [...] the basis for capitalism, democracy, and most religions. (*Job*, 143)

#### IV. 3. 5 High and popular culture

Christopher Moore’s novels feature a plethora of jokes and witticisms referring to products of high culture as well as matters of mainstream appeal. Examples of the first kind can be detected in the form of several allusions to esteemed works of literature and their characters. For instance, the past of *Island*’s protagonist parallels the plot of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: After the death of Tuck’s father, who was killed by his brother, his uncle married his mother and took over the family business ‘Denmark Silverware’. Out of grief over her own father’s passing, the main character’s girlfriend called Zoophilia overdosed on Prozac and drowned in a hot tub. Tuck was then talked into leaving his home state by two rich girls whose fathers own ‘Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern Petroleum’.<sup>223</sup> Another reference to the same world-famous author is made when Sebastian Curtis is likened to ‘a Shakespearean actor finally finished with the young prince and lover roles, seasoned and ready to play Caesar, Lear, or more

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<sup>223</sup> Cf. *Island*, 37-38

appropriately, Prospero, the banished wizard of *The Tempest*.' (*Island*, 250) This intertextuality for humorous effects is furthermore exhibited (especially in the novel *Fluke*) by drawing upon other well-known texts. In addition to being examples from both children's and adult literature, the following quotes also display references to the three main genres of prose, poetry and drama:

'You have any idea what he [Kona] said?' Nate asked. [...]  
'I think it's from the "Jabberwocky,"' Clay replied. (*Fluke*, 36)

She [Nate's ex-wife Libby] paused meaningfully and pivoted thoughtfully – like Hercule Poirot in flip-flops. [...] (She was just a deerstalker, a calabash, and a cocaine habit short of being Sherlock Holmes here.) (*Fluke*, 213-214)

[As Nate is led to the mysterious Colonel he jokes,] 'Ooooh, the great and powerful Oz will see you now[.]' (*Fluke*, 268)

'[...] It [the choice of name] was a toss-up between Captain Nemo from *Twenty Thousand Leagues* and Colonel Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*. I finally decided to go with just "the Colonel." It's more ominous.' (*Fluke*, 270)

'[...] I [Beth Curtis] was pushing thirty and all single women my age were walking around with [...] a biological clock ticking so loud you thought it was the crocodile from *Peter Pan*. [...]' (*Island*, 284)

[Charlie shouts at a dark feathery shadow from the underworld,] 'Aren't you just supposed to sit above the door and *nevermore* and be poetic and stuff?!' (*Job*, 62)

[chapter title:] A Streetcar named Confusion (*Job*, 82)

[Sam] launched into the presentation like a pit bull/Willy Loman [the main character of Arthur Miller's play *Death of A Salesman*] crossbreed. (*Coyote*, 20)

Several of the literary characters listed above have become more famous due to film adaptations. The fields of literature and motion picture appear to blend even more in other examples, such as the references to James Bond in *Island*.<sup>224</sup> Charlie is said to have spy abilities, but '[n]ot the 'James Bond, Aston Martin with missiles, boning the beautiful Russian rocket scientist on an ermine-skin bedspread' sort of spy – more the 'bad comb-over, deep-cover bureaucrat fishing coffee-sodden documents out of Dumpster' spy.' (*Job*, 104) The thrift shop owner is also described as dangerous, 'not so much in the 'Jet Li entire body is a deadly weapon' way but more in the 'drunk on the riding mower making a Luke Skywalker assault on the toolshed' sort of way.' (*Job*, 105) When Tuck is talking to an FBI agent about the precarious situation on Alualu, he mentions an espionage novel writer, two fictional characters and an action movie star together:

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. *Island*, 254-255, 262

[...] I want surgical strikes and satellite views and a steaming shitload of every sort of Tom Clancy geegaw you got. I want fucking Jack Ryan, James Bond, and a half-dozen Van Damme motherfuckers who can jump through their own asses and rip your heart out while it's still beating. [...]' (*Island*, 360)

There are also popular culture references to be found that allude solely to characters from films or television series. For instance, one of the whaley boys mocks Nate, who first thinks the bizarre species is extraterrestrial, by quoting E.T.'s famous line 'Phone home.'<sup>225</sup> '[U]sing a greeting he'd heard in a Tarzan movie[,] (*Island*, 217) Tuck salutes the tribesmen of Alualu with 'Jambo' (*Island*, 217). The pilot also likens one of the Japanese guards to 'Stripe, the evil little monster from the movie *Gremlins*.' (*Island*, 281) In *Job*, Charlie names his daughter's goldfish after TV lawyers such as Matlock and Perry Mason and Minty Fresh is compared to a Klingon warrior after having bumped into the doorway with his forehead.<sup>226</sup> Elmer Fudd, Marvin the Martian, Wiley E. Coyote, Spider-Man and the Teletubbies are also mentioned for comic purposes.<sup>227</sup> Other children's entertainment references include the chapter title 'Booty and the Beasts' (*Fluke*, 297) and Tuck's understanding of a mouse pad being 'Disney's brand of sanitary napkin' (*Island*, 332).

Moore also makes use of real-life celebrities, such as entertainers, to whom he momentarily compares one of his characters. For instance, 'the scarf, in conjunction with the sunglasses, made Roberto [the fruit bat] look a little like Diana Ross. They say there is a finite number of faces in the world...' (*Island*, 76-77) God's voice sounds like James Earl Jones, Tuck moves like Fred Astaire, Charlie's hairless newborn daughter is compared to the singer Sinéad O'Connor and Lily contorts her eyebrows in the fashion of the 'Groucho Marx conspiracy bounce' (*Job*, 213).<sup>228</sup> When Nate mentions that '[b]ehavior [research] always draws more than survey' and that '[he and his team are] the sexy ones', 'Amy snort[s], 'Oh, yeah, you guys are the Mae Wests of the nerd world.'" (*Fluke*, 56) Celebrities from the music industry are strongly represented in the following quotes:

Under the four headlights [the car] sported two chrome bumper bullets that looked like unexploded torpedos or triple G-cup Madonna death boobs. (*Job*, 356)

Calliope had been correct in guessing that this particular lizard had, indeed, been a rock star in a previous life, and if she had sung a chorus of 'L.A. Woman' or 'Light my Fire' the lizard would have been delighted, but how could she have known? (*Coyote*, 60)

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. *Fluke*, 200-201

<sup>226</sup> Cf. *Job*, 45, 384

<sup>227</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 130, *Fluke*, 90, *Job*, 424, *Lamb*, 13, *Job*, 33

<sup>228</sup> Cf. *Lamb* 369-370, *Island*, 300, *Job*, 6

‘You know I was thinking – we’ve got an Indian, a policeman, and an insurance broker. We’re only a construction worker away from the Village People.’ (*Coyote*, 179-180)

[The angel] Gabriel disappeared once for sixty years and they found him on earth hiding in the body of a man named Miles Davis[.] (*Lamb*, 31)

Historical figures such as Charles Baudelaire and Sigmund Freud are referred to as well.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, one of the most important current political leaders is ridiculed twice – without the explicit mention of his name – in *Job*:

[...] certain American presidents, who believe there is no stiffer like the one you get from bombing a few thousand foreigners. (*Job*, 276)

‘So, [...] there are thousands of humans walking around without souls?’  
‘Millions, probably,’ Charlie said.  
‘Maybe that explains the last election,’ she [Audrey] said[.] (*Job*, 385)

In addition to references to internationally well-known (fictional) figures, the author’s humor is strongly defined by his nationality and its – in some cases exclusive – popular culture. An obvious focus on Moore’s home country is especially perceivable in regard to jocular comments about television content. Talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey’s latest diet and current weight, as illustrated in a tabloid paper, serve as an interesting discussion topic amongst the islanders of Alualu on two occasions.<sup>230</sup> Also in *Island*, one of the characters mentions having seen how dangerous sharks can be on the *Discovery Channel*. His dialog partner points out that perhaps the sharks around the island have not seen the program, hence are ignorant of their aggressive nature and thus harmless.<sup>231</sup> Exactly the same joke with a coyote and *PBS (Public Broadcasting Service)* also appears in *Coyote*.<sup>232</sup> Comic remarks are also made about the show *Twilight Zone* and commercials for a soda called Tang.<sup>233</sup> American television advertising is furthermore referred to in the following quote: ‘[W]atching the dog mouth [of Anubis] forming human speech was [...] [strange]. It looked like the creature was trying to yak up a chicken bone. [...] This was too goofy, like an Alpo [a dog food brand] commercial filmed in Hell.’ (*Coyote*, 323) A widespread rumor about the supposedly indefinite shelf life of a famous US-American snack product, due to its chemical ingredients, is reflected in these lines: ‘[Minty Fresh] checked the date on the Twinkies: July 1956. Good. They had another thirty years of guaranteed

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<sup>229</sup> Cf. *Job*, 418, *Island*, 327

<sup>230</sup> Cf. *Island*, 13, 125

<sup>231</sup> Cf. *Island*, 168

<sup>232</sup> Cf. *Coyote*, 46

<sup>233</sup> Cf. *Job*, 317, 318, *Island*, 178

freshness.’ (*Coyote*, 243) Other culture references specific to Moore’s home country used for humorous effects include the founder of the fast food chain *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, Colonel Sanders, the children’s book writer and cartoonist Dr. Seuss and the human interest story and celebrity magazine *People*.<sup>234</sup>

Another sub-category of Moore’s cultural humor consists of allusions to various factors of every day life. The following quotes, for instance, target popular (American) notions<sup>235</sup> regarding the code of conduct of certain professions:

Tuck [...] said, ‘You play golf here [on the island]?’  
‘I *am* a physician, Mr Case. Even in the Pacific we have Wednesdays.’ (*Island*, 160)

‘Special Agent Myers unbuttoned the top button of his shirt.  
‘You allowed to do that?’ Tuck asked.  
‘Casual Fridays,’ the special agent said. (*Island*, 359)

I hate handing my camel over to the camel-park kids. [...] I’m always sure that I’m never going to see it again, or it’s going to come back with a tooth missing or an eye poked out.<sup>236</sup> (*Lamb*, 379)

Furthermore, there are taunting remarks about less desired jobs to be found:

‘I’m not lazy,’ the bum said. ‘I earned a degree in philosophy.’  
‘I’ll give you a dollar,’ Samson said.  
‘I’m having trouble finding work in my field.’ (*Coyote*, 118)

The woman playing next to [Coyote] staggered back and wandered away, carrying visions of her children wearing paper hats and saying, ‘I was going to go to college, but my mother went to Vegas instead. Would you like fries with that?’ (*Coyote*, 223)

[After the break-in to the research complex of Nate’s team, the man expresses his helplessness by saying,] ‘I’m thinking about getting a job at Starbucks[.]’ (*Fluke*, 58)

Related to the mocking of the coffee chain Starbucks are Coyote’s thoughts on espresso bars, which, ‘*even in those days* [set in ancient times, before there were human beings][,] [...] *were full of pretentious pseudointellectual animal people who sat around in open-toed moccasins and whined about how unfair the world was, which it wasn’t.*’ (*Coyote*, 83) Further comic situations concerning cultural circumstances can be found, as for example Biff equating the number of harlots an inn in his time had with the stars of a modern hotel as an indicator of quality.<sup>237</sup> The ridiculous overuse of linguistic political correctness is mocked when Josh’s best friend assumes that people these days refer to lepers as ‘parts-dropping-off challenged’

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<sup>234</sup> Cf. *Island*, 183, *Job*, 269, *Island*, 287

<sup>235</sup> Cf. the chapters on stereotypes of this thesis.

<sup>236</sup> This quote alludes to the valet-parking services of many establishments in the USA.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. *Lamb*, 130

(*Lamb*, 289). By pointing out that, despite being black and seven feet tall, he is not in the NBA, Minty Fresh comments on the conventional appearance of a professional basketball player.<sup>238</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

According to the writer and literature critic David Lodge, '[c]omedy in fiction would appear to have two primary sources, though they are intimately connected: situation (which entails character – a situation that is comic for one character wouldn't necessarily be so for another) and style.' (Lodge, 111) As the discussion of the novels has shown, Christopher Moore's works meet these prerequisites for humor. The author creates characters with certain flaws and places them in situations that exploit their individual weaknesses or eccentricities. For example, true to his personality, the lustful male displays the most ridiculous and amusing behavior when coupled with a strong and sexually confident female. Not only would Josh (*Lamb*) or the Emperor of San Francisco (*Job*) never find themselves in circumstances of sexual bribery and manipulation such as Tuck (*Island*), even if they made the acquaintance of the Sky Priestess (*Island*) they would certainly not account for the same kind of schadenfreude the readers experience when learning about the pilot's internal conflict between his libido and conscience. Thus, if it were not for their specific shortcomings, the protagonists would not be in the dilemmas with which they are faced in Moore's books. In regard to style, the narrative voice of the American novelist relates the fictional events in colloquial language, which is not only natural and fitting for the subject matters, but also allows for the clashes between registers and jargons that serve as a further source of comedy. Other stylistic aspects that generate amusement for the readers include the use of sarcasm, situational irony and absurdity, jokes about taboo topics such as death (dark humor), sex and religion as well as the exaggeration of common stereotypes.

When asked to categorize his humor as a writer of fiction, Moore replied that he 'just [tries] to come up with stuff that's funny[.]' (e-mail from Christopher Moore, received August 1, 2008, 7:58PM) Thus, his main intention as a writer is eliciting laughter

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<sup>238</sup> Cf. *Job*, 99-100

from his audience. Yet, he more specifically stressed how his figures' witty retorts are not planned in detail but come to the author's mind during the act of writing: '[M]ost of the humor in dialog happens on the page – is character generated (and revealing) rather than written to play.' (e-mail from Christopher Moore, received August 5, 2008, 2:06AM) Given the important role the writer assigns to his figures in regard to the creation of comedy, a more detailed examination of Moore's characters and their relationships between and with each other suggests itself as a promising focus for future analysis. Even within the broadly set scope of this thesis, it has become apparent that their use of various sub-categories of humor serves functions such as establishing affiliation but also expressing power and excluding others.

To conclude, two general findings should be pointed out. The strong presence of the US-American culture is not only visible in the references to its high and popular culture. Its influence can also be easily detected in the selection of the character types and stereotypes the author uses, e.g. cowboys and surfers. As stressed by the secondary literature, the reader has to share the author's cultural background and/or knowledge in order to be able to understand and appreciate numerous of the jokes. The second overall result of the analysis concerns the effect humor has on the quality of the five novels under consideration. If one strictly considers the plots of the books, the grave blows of fate and life-threatening experiences of the protagonists suggest a classification of the narratives as tragic. Yet, the contribution of the humorous elements to the ambience goes beyond the occasional comic relief. In fact, the humor of Moore's characters enables them to face their obstacles bravely – in good humor at that – which leads the reader to the realization that no matter how desperate circumstances may appear, they are certainly easier to deal with if one does not take life too seriously.



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## **Abstract** (English)

In this diploma thesis, the humor employed by the contemporary American writer Christopher Moore is studied. In order to investigate the subject thoroughly, five of his novels, spanning more than a decade as far as their production and publication years are concerned, are analyzed in terms of their comic features. The primary literature in question includes *Coyote Blue* (1994), *Island of the Sequined Love Nun* (1997), *Lamb – The Gospel According to Biff, Christ’s Childhood Pal* (2002), *Fluke Or, I Know Why the Winged Whale Sings* (2003) and *A Dirty Job* (2006).

Before shifting the focus on these books in particular, the author is introduced in an initial section of the thesis in order to give an impression of his oeuvre to date. This chapter comprises a biography of the novelist, his self-conception as a writer, a discussion of his presence on the internet (especially on his homepage), his general public image and a brief account of the mostly positive reception of his works. These biographic sub-chapters highlight Moore’s popularity in North America and his interest of keeping in constant contact with his readership and fans via the medium of the world wide web. They also indicate the importance the author assigns to humor, both when writing fiction as well as when presenting himself to the public in interviews and through online communication.

Additionally to the concept and the history of the term ‘humor’, various methods of categorizing the phenomenon are discussed in the following brief survey. A concise outline of humor theory covers the body of thought of the Greeks on the subject and describes the consequent development of the research area through the period of the Latins and the Renaissance up to modern times, presenting the more recent incongruity (Kant and Schopenhauer), hostility (Hobbes) and release theories (Freud), semiotic and text theories (e.g. Koestler, Dorfles, Schmidt and Wenzel) as well as the Semantic Script Theory (SSTH) and its further developed version, the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) by Raskin. The theoretical section, the focus of which has been laid on the key notions and terms that are relevant to the analysis of the novels under consideration, concludes with the discussion of register humor, puns, canned and conversational jokes as special types of humor.

Given the subject matter chosen and covering three-fourths of the diploma thesis, the analysis of the primary literature forms its core. In the short introductory narratological analysis, the physical movement of the main characters – an aspect of high importance according to Moore – and the general structural features of the five novels are examined. Highlighting similarities across the books, the subsequent extensive sub-chapter on character analysis includes a comprehensive comparison of the protagonists, arguments for labeling them as ‘picaresque saints’ (a term from the field of the Theater of the Absurd, referring to characters who are a mixture of villain and hero) and a consideration of the function of their use of humor, the latter contributing greatly to their characterization. In the successive section, the character humor employed by the writer is analyzed. This is first done broadly across the narratives, then in more detail by the means of categories suitable for the respective fictional figures. The persona types to be found are ‘the (pliable) lustful male’, ‘the (sexually) superior female’, ‘the hapless ‘Beta Male’’, ‘the smart aleck’, ‘the trickster’ and ‘the eccentric mind’. Subsequently, the use of characters as representations of common stereotypes associated with their nationalities, ethnicities and affiliations with specific sub-cultures or stigmatized groups as well as examples of sexist and gender clichés are examined. The final section focuses the discussion on prevalent topics found in the primary literature. These encompass absurdity, the macabre, crude language and sex, religion, high and popular culture.

The thesis concludes by stressing the importance of Moore’s flawed comic characters for the creation of narrative humor. In addition to the personalities of the fictional figures and the exaggeration of stereotypes, sarcasm, situational irony and jokes about taboo topics as well as the presence of absurdity increase the comic effect of the novels. The analysis has also shown how decisively the author’s US-American background is reflected in the kind of humor he employs in his writing. A further finding is the realization that the ever-present joking tone, which defines Moore’s style significantly, transforms the tragic plots of the five books into works of humorous fiction, and furthermore argues for never taking even the grimmest of circumstances too seriously.

## Abstract (German)

Diese Diplomarbeit behandelt den Humor des zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Schriftstellers Christopher Moore. Um dieses Thema ausführlich zu untersuchen, werden die komischen Elemente fünf seiner Romane, deren Produktion und Publikationsjahre mehr als ein Jahrzehnt umfassen, analysiert. Die hier behandelte Primärliteratur beinhaltet *Coyote Blue* (1994; *Blues für Vollmond und Kojote*), *Island of the Sequined Love Nun* (1997; *Himmelsgöttin*), *Lamb – The Gospel According to Biff, Christ’s Childhood Pal* (2002; *Die Bibel nach Biff: Die wilden Jugendjahre von Jesus, erzählt von seinem besten Freund*), *Fluke Or, I Know Why the Winged Whale Sings* (2003; *Flossen weg!*) und *A Dirty Job* (2006; *Ein todsicherer Job*).

Bevor der Fokus auf diese Bücher im besonderen gerichtet wird, erfolgt eine Vorstellung des Autors in einem einführenden Teil der Arbeit, um einen Eindruck seines Schaffens bis dato zu geben. Dieses Kapitel besteht aus der Biografie des Romanschreibers, seiner Selbstwahrnehmung als Schriftsteller, einer Beschreibung seiner Präsenz im Internet (besonders auf seiner Homepage), seines öffentlichen Images im Allgemeinen und einer kurzen Darstellung der zum größten Teil positiven Rezeption seiner Werke. Diese biografischen Unterkapitel unterstreichen Moores Beliebtheit in Nordamerika und sein Interesse den ständigen Kontakt zu seiner Leserschaft und seinen Fans über das Internet zu pflegen. Sie zeigen weiters die Wichtigkeit, die der Autor dem Humor während des eigenen Schreibprozesses, aber auch wenn er sich der Öffentlichkeit in Interviews und durch das World Wide Web präsentiert, zuschreibt, auf.

Zusätzlich zu dem Konzept von und der Geschichte des Ausdrucks ‘Humor’ behandelt der folgende prägnante Abriss verschiedene Methoden das Phänomen zu kategorisieren. Der knappe Überblick der Humorthorie (humor theory) verfolgt das Gedankengut der Griechen, der Lateiner und der Renaissance bis hin zur Neuzeit, und stellt die Inkongruenz- (incongruity; Kant und Schopenhauer), Überlegenheits- und Aggressions- (hostility; Hobbes) und Befreiungs- und Entlastungstheorien (release theories; Freud), Semiotik- und Texttheorien (semiotic and text theories; z.B. Koestler, Dorfles, Schmidt und Wenzel) wie auch die Semantische Skript-Theorie (Semantic Script Theory oder SSTH) und ihre ausgearbeitete Version, die Allgemeine Theorie Verbalen Humors (General Theory of Verbal Humor oder GTVH) von

Raskin, vor. Dieser theoretische Teil, dessen Schwerpunkt auf die Hauptgedanken und Bezeichnungen, die für die Untersuchung der erwähnten Romane relevant sind, gelegt wurde, endet mit der Erwähnung von Jargonhumor (register humor), Wortspielen (puns), vorgefertigten und spontanen Witzen (canned and conversational jokes).

Die Analyse der Primärliteratur stellt den Kern der Diplomarbeit dar. In der kurzen einleitenden narratologischen Analyse werden die körperlichen Bewegungen der Hauptcharaktere – Moore zufolge ein wichtiger Punkt – und die allgemeinen strukturellen Merkmale der fünf Romane untersucht. Die Parallelen zwischen den Büchern werden in dem anschließenden Unterkapitel über Figurenanalyse deutlich. Dieses beinhaltet einen generellen Vergleich der Protagonisten, Argumente, diese als 'pikareske Heilige' ('picaresque saints') einzuordnen und eine Betrachtung der Funktion ihrer Verwendung von Humor, welche in einem großen Maße ihrer Charakterisierung dient. In dem folgenden Abschnitt wird der Figurenhumor (character humor) besprochen. Dies geschieht zunächst allgemein, alle Geschichten betreffend, dann detaillierter durch das Anführen passender Kategorien für die entsprechenden Romanfiguren. Die Typen werden eingeteilt in 'der (fügsame) lüsternde Mann' ('the (pliable) lustful male'), 'die (sexuell) überlegene Frau' ('the (sexually) superior female'), 'der unglückselige 'Beta-Mann'' ('the hapless 'Beta Male''), 'der Besserwisser' ('the smart aleck'), 'der Schwindler' ('the trickster') und 'das exzentrische Gemüt' ('the eccentric mind'). Anschließend werden die Verwendung von Charakteren als Repräsentationen weitverbreiteter Stereotypen, die in Verbindung mit der Zugehörigkeit zu einer bestimmten Nationalität, Ethnizität und Subkultur oder ausgegrenzten Gruppe existieren, wie auch Beispiele sexistischer und geschlechts-typischer Klichschees untersucht. Der abschließende Abschnitt beschäftigt sich mit den in der Primärliteratur häufig angesprochenen Themen, als da wären Absurdität, das Makabre, vulgäre Sprache und Sex, Religion, Hoch- und Populärkultur.

Die Arbeit endet mit der Betonung der wichtigen Rolle, die Moores komische Figuren für die Erzeugung narrativen Humors spielen. Zusätzlich zu den Persönlichkeiten der fiktionalen Figuren und der Übertreibung von Stereotypen verstärken die Verwendung von Sarkasmus, Situationsironie und Witze über Tabuthemen wie auch das Vorhandensein von Absurdität den komischen Effekt der Romane. Die Analyse hat

außerdem deutlich gemacht, wie stark sich der US-amerikanische Hintergrund des Autors in seinem Humor widerspiegelt. Eine weitere Erkenntnis ist, dass der stets witzelnde und für Moores Stil prägende Ton die tragischen Handlungen der fünf Bücher in Werke humoristischer Fiktion transformiert, und dieser des weiteren dafür argumentiert, selbst die widrigsten aller Umstände im Leben nicht zu ernst zu nehmen.