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Humorous Worlds:

A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to the Creation of Humour in Comic Narratives

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Glasgow for the degree of Master of Philosophy by Research

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine some of the ways in which humour is created in comic novels. I combine concepts from cognitive stylistics and psychology to address the question: 'How does the construction of narrative worlds contribute to the creation of humour in narratives?' I suggest that the narrative world can be designed to enhance the humour of particular elements which appear in it by encouraging a playful interpretation of those elements. I call the narrative worlds which are constructed to elicit an overall experience of humour *humorous worlds* and outline some of the techniques which writers use to build them, focusing on three aspects:

Disrupted Schemata. In the first chapter, I discuss the elements which are used to build humorous worlds. I outline the ways in which representations of settings, objects, characters and situations which make up humorous worlds can be manipulated to achieve an amusing effect. I demonstrate some of the applications of schema theory in the stylistics of humorous texts, including Cook's *schema disruption* and *schema refreshment* (1994), Gibbs' *soft-assembling* of schemata (2003) and Schank and Abelson's notion of *scripts thrown off normal course* (1977). I link those to McGhee's concept of *fantasy-assimilation* (1972).

Repetition and Variation. I then outline some of the ways in which the disrupted elements are combined. I write about *repetition and variation*, which in humorous narratives operates in two ways (*conceptual/stylistic*) and on two levels (*local/extended*). I discuss the cognitive mechanisms involved in them (by drawing on, for example, Emmott's 1997 *contextual frame theory*) and hypothesise about their amusing effect by basing my work on classic research in psychology (Berlyne 1972, Suls 1972).

Humorous Mode. Finally, I discuss the devices which mark humorous worlds as humorous. I point out that comic narratives need to be labelled as humorous discourse and that the humorous cueing/keying in novels is less explicit than that in jokes. I apply Triezenberg's model of *humour enhancers* (2004) to humorous extracts, analyse narrative strategies in the opening paragraphs of a number of humorous novels and suggest some ways in which a manipulation of *distance* (e.g. Leech and Short 2007) between the writer and the reader can be seen as a humorous cueing strategy.

I argue that while creating humour in narratives requires a skilful stylistic manipulation on the part of the writer, making sense of it demands a considerable cognitive effort from the reader. Through a range of examples from nine humorous novels (by authors including Heller, Fielding, Pratchett, Amis, Roth and Vonnegut) and relevant secondary literature, I illustrate how a cognitive stylistic analysis of humour in narratives has the potential to offer some hypotheses not only about reading comprehension, but also about the pleasure of reading.

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1. Introduction

The main premise behind this study is that the way humour is created in long narrative texts is considerably different from the way it is created in short verbal jokes, on which a number of established theories of verbal humour are based (Raskin 1985, Attardo and Raskin 1991). In this thesis, I emphasise the importance of the wider *narrative context*, or *narrative world*, as an aspect of narrative humour creation by addressing the question 'How does the construction of narrative worlds contribute to the creation of humour in narratives?' I argue that certain narrative worlds are constructed in a way that elicits a general impression of humour and thus enhance the humorous effect of certain elements which appear in them. I refer to those worlds as *humorous worlds*. The aim of this work is to apply insights from stylistics, cognitive science and psychology to analyses of extracts from a range of novels in order to outline a number of techniques which can be used to create such humorous worlds. The humorous novels which are analysed for the purpose of this thesis are:

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams (2002 [first edition published in 1979]);
Lucky Jim by Kingsley Amis (2000 [1954]);
Submarine by Joe Dunthorne (2008);
Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason by Helen Fielding (2004 [1999]);
Catch-22 by Joseph Heller (1994 [1961]);
The World According to Garp by John Irving (2000 [1978]);
Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett (1987);
Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth (2005 [1969]);
and *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (2000 [1969]).

1.1. Narrative humour

1.1.1. Local jokes

Short verbal jokes which inform a number of linguistic theories of humour – referred to as, for example, 'short single-joke texts' (Raskin 1985) or 'formulaic jokes' (Nash 1985) – rely on certain mechanisms which make them inherently humorous regardless of the context in which they appear. There exist a range of different types of such jokes (gag, epigram, crack and pun are just a few mentioned in Alexander 1997), but in this thesis they will be subsumed under one category, where the common denominator is their potential to be intrinsically humorous. They will be referred to as *local jokes*, since their humour is contained within and restricted to the short form in which they appear. The following extract should illustrate the concept of a local joke, as it is a line that we could imagine being amusing in itself:

> [1]
> 'They are normal people,' I said furiously, nodding in illustration out at the street where unfortunately a nun in a brown habit was pushing two babies along in a pram.
> (Fielding 2004: 7)

The humour lies in our recognition that the 'normal people' to whom the narrator is referring are perhaps quite far from 'normal'. The line triggers our knowledge of real-life 'normal people', 'nuns' and 'pushing a pram' to arrive at a humorous conclusion, that is, the nun might be a mother, and therefore certainly not what we consider a 'normal person'. It is a joke which relies on the incongruity between motherhood and nunhood – a puzzle which we can solve with the

use of our knowledge of the real world.[1] Intrinsically humorous lines like these can appear in various contexts, where they should be able to retain their humorous potential.

Example [1] was taken from Helen Fielding's humorous novel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. I chose it to demonstrate that local jokes can be found in a variety of texts, including, as one would expect, comic narratives. What I want to stress, however, is that finding such an intrinsically humorous line in Fielding's novel was not easy, as they are quite sparse. In fact, reader's familiar with the *Bridget Jones* novel might argue that Example [1] is *not* inherently humorous, as stems at least partly from what we know about the first person narrator – Bridget Jones' life is a series of amusing mishaps, and [1] is one of them. The fact that the humorous value of an 'intrinsically' funny line can be debated in this way supports the main premise behind this thesis: the humour in *Bridget Jones*, like the humour in the other humorous narratives analysed here, is usually created in other ways, which do not involve extensive use of inherently funny local jokes. John Irving, a writer of predominantly humorous fiction, illustrates this point with the following exchange between the characters in his novel *The World According to Garp.* Garp, a writer, asks his wife to review his latest humorous short story:

> [2]
>
> 'It's *funny*, isn't it?' Garp asked.
>
> 'Oh, it's *funny*,' she said, 'but it's funny like *jokes* are funny. It's all one-liners.'
>
> (Irving 2000: 330)

Irving seems to be implying that there are forms of humour that can be found in humorous narratives which are not 'one-liners', or local jokes. In this thesis, I concentrate on some of those non-local types of humour, that is, jokes which have *not* been designed to be amusing regardless of the context in which they appear. Narratives, I argue, often contain jokes which are not funny

[1] Joke-comprehension mechanisms will be elaborated on in the Literature Review, and Example [1] will be analysed in Chapter 3.

out of context, as they are parts of a larger framework that can only be appreciated when the text is regarded as a whole.

1.1.2. Extended jokes

The larger humorous framework in a comic novel is what I call a *humorous world*, that is, a narrative world which has been designed to elicit an overall experience of humour in the reader. A humorous world is a narrative world based on humorous themes which run through the whole of the narrative (those will be referred to as *extended jokes*), which the reader is encouraged to process in a playful, non-serious frame of mind. I intend to show that a proportion of individual instances of narrative humour (that is, lines which appear particularly amusing when we are reading the book) are not nearly as humorous when they are taken out of their context. That is because they are *parts of extended jokes* – their appreciation relies on our ability to look for humorous meanings beyond the short form to which they are constricted. Here is an example of a part of an extended joke from *Bridget Jones*:

> [3]
>
> **5 a.m.** Am never, never going to drink again as long as live.
>
> (Fielding 2004: 38)

While there may be readers who are amused by this line out of its context (perhaps if they recognise it as something they might have said in the past), there is little doubt that it is not as intrinsically humorous as Example [1]. As far as the structure is concerned, there is nothing transparently puzzle-like about it, and it offers no clear humorous resolution. Moreover, its comprehension depends on different types of knowledge: rather than on our knowledge of the

real world, like in a local joke, it relies on our knowledge of the narrative world of the novel.[2] In order to see the humour in it, we must recognise it as a part of an extended joke that runs through the whole of the narrative, which can be summed up as 'Bridget Jones keeps failing to exert any control over her life.' To acknowledge this, we need to have accumulated sufficient knowledge about Bridget's life: she drinks a lot; she often ends up in unfortunate, but funny situations; she is prone to making resolutions, which are not usually put into practice; she tends to be overly dramatic. These are only a few of the stores of knowledge which we need to access to appreciate Example [3] as humorous, and even they do not fully justify its humour – it is not, after all, a puzzle that can be solved to an obvious amusing effect. These sorts of instances of narrative humour are most effective when they are in their context, because it is the context which we will draw from to achieve a humorous interpretation.

1.2. This work

1.2.1. Texts

The concept of humorous worlds is a model of narrative humour based on the nine comic novels analysed for the purpose of this thesis. It has to be stressed, however, that while the model is relevant to my chosen texts, it may not apply to all narrative discourse which contains humour.

A few remarks need to be made about my choice of texts, as their range is something that potentially distinguishes this work from other studies of narrative humour (see the Literature Review for a more comprehensive overview). Firstly, like Ermida (2008), I concentrate on 'a specific literary genre, namely comic narratives' but not 'literary narratives where sporadic and peripheral humorous elements also emerge,' which is the case for Attardo (2001) (cited in

[2] Emmott's *text-specific knowledge* (1997) and Werth's *text worlds* (1999) are relevant here. They will be outlined in the Literature Review and referred to in the following chapters.

Ermida 2008: 172).[3] This is not to say that none of my chosen novels have serious elements in them, but rather that upon reading them we are able to conclude 'that was a funny book with some serious parts in it,' and not the opposite. Secondly, unlike Ermida (2008), Holcomb (1992), Chlopicki (1997) and many others, I focus on novels, not short stories. One of the reasons for this is that I am less concerned with the exact pattern in which humour is organised in the entire text (which is easier to identify in a short piece of writing), and more with particular instances of narrative humour and their relationship with the wider narrative context. Finally, I chose a total of nine novels which range from what can be seen as 'high' literature to what is definitely popular fiction, and this wealth of texts distinguishes my work from other research which is similar in terms of approach (e.g. Triezenberg 2004, Larkin Galiñanes 2002).

1.2.2. Structure

Narrative extracts are used in this thesis to help illustrate some of the techniques used by writers to construct humorous worlds, and to hypothesise about the potential effect those techniques may have on readers. The discussion is organised as follows:

Chapter 2: *Literature Review*

The Literature Review is divided into three parts; one concerned with relevant aspects of humour studies as a whole, one related to specifically linguistic models of humour, and one focused on those theories within cognitive stylistics which will be drawn on in this thesis.

[3] I take 'literary' to be associated with written fictional narratives in general, and not – as it is sometimes understood as – what can be classified as 'high' literature. In fact, some of my narratives are likely to be seen as 'popular fiction'.

Chapter 3: *Disrupted Schemata*

This chapter is focused on the elements which make up a humorous world. Special attention is given to the role which general, or schematic, knowledge plays in narrative humour processing. It is argued that humorous worlds are built in large proportion from *disrupted elements*, which rely on a different kind of incongruity from the type usually associated with verbal humour.

Chapter 4: *Repetition and Variation*

Once the nature of humorous building blocks is discussed, I then suggest *repetition and variation* as an effective technique which enables those elements to be combined to form a humorous world. I mention *stylistic repetition and variation* as a device that can enhance humour in a narrative text, but mainly concentrate on *conceptual repetition and variation*, that is, a way of presenting a disrupted element across the body of the novel.

Chapter 5: *Humorous Mode*

In the previous chapters, I have outlined some techniques used in humorous written narratives. It is, of course, a fact that similar devices can be found in non-humorous novels as well. The final chapter aims to address this issue. I argue that narratives use their own set of cues to mark them as humorous discourse and prepare the readers for humour reception by getting them into the *humorous mode*. Manipulations of *distance* are discussed in this respect.

The discussion of humorous worlds is supported with extracts from my chosen humorous novels. Although care was taken to preserve at least some of the humour in them, a number of

the examples may not appear particularly amusing out of context. That is because many of them are elements of extended jokes and, as such, they are at their funniest when regarded as part of the humorous worlds to which they belong.

2. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is to provide an overview of relevant theories within three areas which are equally valid to the subject of this thesis: *humour studies* (Section 2.1.), *linguistics of humour* (2.2.) and *cognitive stylistics* (2.3.). All these discussions combine references to research in linguistics with that in psychology, as linguistics and psychology are the two broad domains which most strongly inform my study. While this thesis offers a predominantly linguistic perspective on the subject of narrative humour, I am also making hypothetical claims about the reader's experience of humorous narratives, which I back up with reference to research in psychology.

2.1. Humour Studies

Humour is an area of research which has attracted attention from various academic disciplines. One of the ways to navigate through the vast body of work on humour is to divide it into three major groups of theories, which will be referred to as the *social-behavioural theories*, associated with superiority and disparagement, the *psycho-physiological theories*, which relate to suppression and release, and the *cognitive-perceptual theories*, which focus on incongruity as the source of humour.

2.1.1. Social-behavioural theories

Social-behavioural theories concentrate on humour which derives from the speaker's sense of *superiority* over the object of humour, where the object is traditionally another person. As far as the chronology of humour studies is concerned, this class is the oldest one, with its origins traced back to Antiquity. The tradition is continued by Hazlitt (amongst others), who claims that 'we grow tired of everything but turning others into ridicule and congratulating ourselves on

their defects' (1926 [1819]: 25). The early twentieth century is represented by Bergson (1911), whose view that humour relies on emotional detachment from the object which is being disparaged is represented in the following:

> To produce the whole of its effect […], the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple.
> (Ibid.: 4b)

Bergson's idea will be questioned in this thesis (see, for example, Section 3.2.4.), as will be elements of the other classic theories. This is to do with the fact that some of them are not, in their entirety, very applicable to my object of study, that is, modern Anglophone literary texts and their present-day readers.

More contemporary social-behavioural theories – which are perhaps more suited to the subject of this work – aim to investigate the relationship between participants in a humorous interaction (what is sometimes referred to as 'a joking relationship') and between the participants and the object of humour. Due to the interest in the social aspect of humorous interaction, these theories are especially productive in the fields of social anthropology (Apte 1985) and social psychology (La Fave 1972, Zillman and Cantor 1996). Moreover, due to the emphasis on the situational context of humorous utterances, there has been considerable interest from the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis (e.g. Norrick 2003). This pragmatic approach has a variety of applications, as it provides insights into the role of humour in interpersonal communication in a range of environments, from workplace (e.g. Holmes 2000) to family (e.g. Everts 2003) to medical (e.g. Bennett 2003).

2.1.2. Psycho-physiological theories

While social-behavioural theories are, at least traditionally, focused on the speaker, psycho-physiological theories shift the emphasis to the hearer. They see humour as deriving from a sense of psychological *relief* which follows a release of some form of tension. One of the earliest forms of this approach can be linked to Bergson, who discusses 'living energy' as the driving force behind laughter (1911: 22a) and compares the liberating logic of humour to that of dreaming (Ibid.: 57a). Freud develops those and proposes his theory of 'psychical expenditure', where some form of energy (often the energy needed to suppress forbidden emotions such as aggression or sexual desire) is said to be saved and subsequently released together with laughter (1989: 145). This release satisfies the longing for freedom from the constraints imposed on the individual by the society, and therefore is seen as a source of pleasure.

Since the adequacy of the release theory has been debated (see Keith-Spiegel 1972 for an overview), the contemporary psycho-physiological school has changed its direction, and it is the revised approach (mainly Berlyne's 1960 notion of *arousal jag*) that will be referred to in the following chapters of this thesis. The term *relief* can nevertheless still be found in psychology (Berlyne 1972), and *liberation* is sometimes used to describe the applications of humour in modern psychotherapy (Mindess 2010).

2.1.3. Cognitive-perceptual theories

Cognitive-perceptual theories are perhaps the most widely represented and discussed among the three. Their interest is in the humorous object and the experience of it, as they focus on humour which derives from the hearer's reaction to unexpected *incongruity*. An overview of relevant literature can be found in Clark (1970), who condenses Schopenhauer's work on humour into the following:

> If an event/state of affairs etc. amuses someone, then he sees it as involving the incongruous subsumption of one or more instances under a single concept.
>
> (Clark 1970: 25)

This idea of *incongruous subsumption* continues to thrive among philosophers, cognitive psychologists and linguists, none of whom questions the importance of incongruity in the object of humour. The processing mechanisms behind its appreciation, however, have been an object of debate. It is not clear whether the pleasure relies simply on the experience of incongruity in the humorous object *itself* (a view held by certain philosophers and sociologists, e.g. Morreall 1987, Mulkay 1988), or whether the pleasure results only from the hearer's *resolution* of the incongruity he or she is presented with (a view popular within psychology and linguistics).

At the heart of the latter (the incongruity-*resolution* school) lies Suls' (1972) influential psychological 'Two-stage humor-appreciation model', in which he argues that unless a cognitive rule is found which makes the incongruous element fit in with the rest of the text, incongruity results in puzzlement, not humour. Linguists can be seen to share this view – incongruity which is unresolved is sometimes called 'nonsensical humour' and dismissed (see Attardo 2001). It has been suggested, however, that hypotheses about the hearer's role in humour perception are beyond the scope of formal linguistic analysis, as, in Raskin's words, 'any psychological claims are metaphorical extensions of linguistics' (Aymone 2007: interview with Victor Raskin). While the question of whether humorous incongruity requires resolution is too broad to be discussed in this thesis, I will, as I mentioned before, attempt to challenge Raskin's claim about the relationship between linguistics and psychology.

2.2. Linguistic theories of humour

I have indicated that most of the modern linguistic theories of humour tend to be classified as cognitive-perceptual, that is, focused on incongruity. While they do not necessarily mention *resolution* of incongruity as the source of humour, they nevertheless draw on the idea of a dissonance between dissimilar concepts in the object of humour – incongruity itself. The ones which are especially influential within linguistics and therefore will be discussed in more detail are Raskin's *Semantic Script Theory of Humor* (SSTH) and its development, Attardo and Raskin's *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (GTVH). Those semantic models of humorous language will be referred to as the 'traditional' linguistic theories of humour. More specialised theories of joke comprehension, such as Coulson's *Frame-Shifting* and Giora's *Graded Salience Hypothesis* will also be mentioned on account of their emphasis on language and cognition.

2.2.1. Semantic Script Theory of Humor

The Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) is a semantic approach to incongruity found in verbal jokes (see *local jokes* in the Introduction). Its objective is to 'formulate the necessary and sufficient conditions, in purely semantic terms, for a text to be funny' (Raskin 1985: xiii), and as such is predominantly concerned with the illocutionary force of a joke, with not much emphasis on the perlocutionary effect it might have on the hearer. The key term in the theory is a *semantic script*, which is to be understood as a chunk of semantic information evoked by a word (similar to *scripts*, *frames* or *schemata* used in psychology and Artificial Intelligence). The basic premise is that:

> A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions are satisfied:
>
> (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts;

(ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense. (Raskin 1985: 99)

As far as the 'special sense' is concerned, jokes are said to 'evoke one of the relatively few binary categories which are essential to human life' (Ibid.: 113), such as good vs. bad, true vs. false or, on the most general level, real vs. unreal. A joke 'describes a certain 'real' situation and evokes another 'unreal' situation which does not take place and which is fully or partially incompatible with the former' (Ibid.: 108). Humour lies in this opposition, but also in the element that prompts the switch from one script to the other (a *trigger*).

2.2.2. General Theory of Verbal Humor

Raskin's semantic theory of jokes was later developed into a more comprehensive model intended to be applicable to all verbal humour, both local jokes and humour found in longer texts. Despite the widened scope, the authors of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) nevertheless present their focus as local jokes, mainly as a result of criticisms from reviewers (Attardo and Raskin 1991: 333-4). They entitle their paper 'A joke similarity and joke representation model' as a way of 'playing it safe' (Ibid.), but argue that the theory can be applied to various forms of verbal humour other than 'semantic' or 'simple' jokes. For the purpose of this argument, GTVH will be treated as it appears in the title of the article, that is, as a model which applies to local jokes.

The GTVH identifies six parameters of joke difference known as *knowledge resources* (KRs) which are said to inform the joke. Each KR represents a number of choices which have to be made for the joke to be conceived. A typical joke will include a certain choice of script opposition (SO), a logical mechanism (LM), a situation (SI), a target (TA), a narrative strategy (NS), and language (LA). The same joke can take on different forms depending on the choices

made within each KR, and the application of the theory relies mainly on identifying each KR for the joke which is analysed. The KRs will not be referred to in this thesis again, but a general discussion of the application of GTVH to long narrative texts will follow (Section 2.2.4.).

2.2.3. Models of joke comprehension

Even though both SSTH and GTVH are cognitive models of humorous language (that is, they make hypotheses about our language processing), the hearer's cognitive mechanisms are not their main focus as they put more emphasis on the humorous stimulus itself. This niche is filled by the Graded Salience Hypothesis (Giora 1991, 2003), which makes assumptions about the way in which the human cognitive processing mechanisms influence our perception of a certain kind of language – one which is non-literal, such as metaphors, idioms, and jokes. Giora attributes joke comprehension to the working of our 'salience-prone minds', which cause a special temporal ordering of lexical access:

> […] more salient meanings – coded meanings foremost on our mind due to conventionality, frequency, familiarity, or prototypicality – are accessed faster than and reach sufficient levels of activation before less salient ones.
> (Giora 2003: 10)

This idea is especially relevant to short jokes in which the single word which triggers the humorous interpretation, or script (cf. Raskin's *trigger*) has a double meaning, but the concept of salience is likely to be applicable to humorous language in general.

The Frame-Shifting Theory (Coulson 2001) has a similar objective to the Graded Salience Hypothesis, as it also deals with both jokes and other constructions which gain 'nonobvious meanings' as a result of speaker productivity, referred to as *semantic leaps*. Those semantic

leaps are results of a process of incorporating incongruity into a new frame in the search for meaning: 'the operation of a semantic reanalysis process that reorganizes existing information into a new frame' (Ibid.: 34). What is more, the theory is supplemented by empirical research in neuropsychology. Using the measurement of event-related brain potentials (ERPs), Coulson was able to show that incongruous joke-endings are more difficult to integrate than non-joke endings (1997), and Coulson and Kutas (1998) found that joke endings required a longer reading time than endings which were unexpected, but not incongruous. That suggests that the 'semantic reanalysis prompted by the integration of joke ending exerts a greater processing cost than [an unexpected but congruent word]' (Coulson 2001: 79).

SSTH, GTVH, Graded Salience and Frame-Shifting are only a few linguistic models, chosen to be discussed here due to their emphasis (to varying degrees) on the cognitive aspect of verbal humour or, as it was shown, local jokes. The fact that cognitive linguistics seems to be so preoccupied with a short local joke signals that one way to approach the subject of verbal humour is to limit the discussion to humorous texts of a manageable length and complexity.

2.2.4. Models of narrative humour

I have emphasised that a number of linguistic theories of verbal humour are based on short, simple jokes. This is not to say that there exist no models of humour in relation to longer and more complex texts, but that some of them are derived from the earlier, joke-based ones. SSTH and GTVH have been especially prolific in this way, and there are in fact a number of models designed as adaptations of either of them (outlined below), ranging from approaches to comic short stories to analyses of humour in novels. The humour found in narrative texts will be referred to as *narrative humour* in this thesis.

(a) Joke-based models applied to longer texts

Models which, even partly, draw on the SSTH can be seen to follow Raskin's objective and aim to 'formulate the necessary and sufficient conditions, in purely semantic terms, for a text to be funny' (Raskin 1985: xiii). Amongst other things, they look for the ways in which script opposition is introduced on a larger scale. In his reading of comic short stories, Holcomb (1992) identifies instances of humour as joke-like constructions based on script opposition, which he terms *nodal points of humour*. His view that 'the scripts that characterize a node as humorous are the same as those that make the nodes coherent with the rest of the narrative' (Ibid.: 233) signals, on a semantic level, the importance of the larger context of the narrative in humour creation. Chlopicki (1997) proposes the terms *macroscripts* and *meta-scripts* and Ermida (2008) *supra-scripts* and *character frames* (among others) to account for the repetition of particular humorous themes throughout the course of the short story. It should be noted that the models are much more comprehensive, but their emphasis on the illocutionary force of humorous texts means that only some elements are applicable to the approach of the present study.

While the SSTH-inspired models focus mainly on the necessary conditions for a text to be humorous, the application of GTVH to complex texts (Attardo 1998, 2001) draws on this to provide a way of analysing the structure of narratives of any length. Attardo suggests 'locating, via standard semantic analysis (as in the SSTH), all the humorous elements of a text' (1998: 232). Those elements or *(jab) lines*, which are in fact equivalents of jokes, can then be analysed by describing them through the KR criteria, as is done with jokes. This can help to draw parallels and identify relationships between all the lines in a text. Attardo's notions of *strands* (lines which are somehow related, for example share one of the same KRs), *bridges* (occurrences of two related lines far from each other), and *combs* (occurrences of several lines close to each other) form a useful terminology for describing the structure of any text which features at least

a few instances of humour. It does not, however, take into account any of the potential effects such strategic repetition of lines can have on the reader.

(b) Humour enhancers

The SSTH- and GTVH-inspired models of narrative humour provide insights into the illocutionary force and the structural aspect of complex texts. Such a rigorous semantic approach is certainly appropriate from the point of view of linguistics as a formal discipline. From the point of view of literary studies (or even literary linguistics, as I will argue), however, such treatment of literary texts must be seen as insufficient. A considerable influence on this thesis has been Katrina Triezenberg's (2004, 2008) work on humour in literature, in which she argues that the complexity of literary humour cannot be reduced to a simple list of criteria. While script opposition and jab lines are undoubtedly present in literature, their full comic potential is realised only when it is *enhanced* by the rest of the text:

> In the same way that salt enhances the taste of food, thereby making it more enjoyable, the literary artist utilizes a number of techniques to enhance the reader's experience of humor.
>
> (Triezenberg 2004: 412)

These *humour enhancers*[4] are techniques which are not necessarily funny in themselves, but which prepare, condition, 'warm up' the readers for the full experience of humour. With such an emphasis on the reader's perception, enhancers escape the formal semantic analysis associated with incongruity-based verbal humour. Below is Triezenberg's list of humour enhancers in its original order:

[4] Originally called 'humor enhancers' in Triezenberg's work, but I am adopting the British spelling in this thesis.

Diction. Certain stylistic techniques (e.g. alliteration) can be seen as more 'enjoyable' or 'artistically pleasing' than others – those are likely to enhance humour. A strategic choice of words 'provokes and/or reinforces the activation of scripts pertinent to the jokes being told' (2004: 413).

Shared stereotypes. Stock characters in literature bring about an anticipation of humour and they also allow writers to reduce the amount of description and scene-setting and make the joke 'compact and elegant' (2008: 538). Moreover, readers enjoy a sense of understanding, and 'stereotypes are a cheap way to invoke [a] feeling of knowingness in one's readers' (2004: 415).

Cultural factors. The reader needs to possess sufficient cultural knowledge to be able to recognise the humour-bearing incongruity, without which the humour will be lost.

Familiarity. It can be funny in itself (e.g. good impersonations), but mainly 'the audience is relieved of the mental effort of taking in an entirely new idea – which leaves them relaxed and more apt to recognize humor when it comes along' (2008: 538).

Repetition and variation. Repetition itself can be seen as script opposition, as the same thing happening over and over is unreal and exaggerated with reference to real life (normal vs. abnormal). What is more, the same joke can gain humour on repetition as the reader knows what is coming, and is therefore anticipating humour. Triezenberg argues that when repetition is combined with skilful variation, 'we're laughing in sheer admiration for the construction of the text' (2004: 417).

While the list is by no means definitive, it signals the importance of creating the right *context* for humour perception. Humour enhancers will be considered some of the building blocks of humorous narrative worlds, and they will be referred to at various stages in this thesis.

(c) Other models of narrative humour

The theory of humour enhancers is significant because it explicitly points out the areas where traditional linguistic theories of verbal humour fall short in the analysis of narrative humour. It is not, however, the only model of narrative humour with an approach that is relevant to the subject of this thesis.

Nash (1985) proposes the term *humorous expansion* for the humour which is present in complex texts as distinguished from *witty compression* found in short jokes and puns. *Humorous expansion* has three modes, or qualities: *generic*, *linguistic*, and *interactional*, where *generic* refers to the cultural context, *linguistic* to style, and *interactional* to the relationship between the producer and the audience (approached from a predominantly pragmatic perspective). Importantly, none of these qualities relies on a straightforward incongruity, as, like humour enhancers, they do not need to be humorous in themselves. Rather, they ensure that 'textual humour expands in ways more subtle and comprehensive, sustaining itself through devices that converge and react upon each other' (Ibid.: 20).

Palmer's perspective on humorous texts (1988, 1994) makes a radical shift from the traditional linguistic theories by focusing on humour comprehension and emphasising its cultural and sociological aspects. Unlike the authors of the SSTH and GTVH, he is not interested in the 'how' of humour, but rather in the 'why' – 'why do we find this funny?' rather than 'how is humour constructed?'. That is why one of his main interests is failed humour – according to him, 'any theory of humour, jokes and comedy which does not have the principle of potential failure built into it, as one of its fundamental axioms, is a defective theory' (1994: 147). What is more, he acknowledges that 'the comic moment [...] is only comprehensible in the light of the general structure of the narrative' (Ibid.: 119), where by 'structure' he means the central themes of the text.

Simpson's (2000, 2003) work is only partly relevant here, as he limits the study of humorous texts to one genre: satire. Despite this specific focus, however, he explicitly considers a discourse perspective to humour, where the roles of participants in a humorous interaction are stressed. While his earlier model of creating satirical incongruity (2000) is based heavily on GTVH, further work (2003) emphasises the role of the addressee (or *satiree*) in the *satirical uptake*, thus addressing the perlocutionary force neglected by the traditional theories. He argues that 'satire has no ontological existence,' but rather it 'is something that is conferred upon a text and this conferral is as much a consequence of the way the text is processed and interpreted as it is of the way it is produced and disseminated' (Ibid.: 153). Even though 'processing the text' here does not mean the cognitive capacity in the way which is favoured in this study, but rather the more pragmatically-informed notion of inferencing, the insight is invaluable.

The work of Larkin Galiñanes is perhaps the closest to the approach which I am adopting in this thesis. Her distinction between *internal* and *external incongruity* (2000) is especially relevant to my notion of a humorous narrative context, and it will be outlined and discussed in the following Section (2.3.). Her relevance-theoretical concept of *character-stereotypes* (e.g. 2000, 2002) built on strong implicature will be referred to in Chapter 3. Moreover, her recent work (2010) provides an example of how insights from the social-behavioural, psycho-physiological, and cognitive-perceptual schools within humour studies can benefit the study of literary humour. She methodically works through each group of theories to show how *superiority* is fuelled by negative identification to particular characters, how sequences of events build up tension which is then *released* through humour, and how some character-related *incongruity* can be resolved with reference to the knowledge we already have about the character.

Humour studies as a whole offers a wealth of insights for the linguistic analysis of narrative humour. It can be observed that many of the present-day theories of humour are based on

psychology (e.g. social and neuropsychology) and linguistics (pragmatics, semantics and cognitive linguistics in general), which means that an interdisciplinary linguistic-psychological approach to verbal humour has much to offer.

2.3. Cognitive Stylistics

The idea of a humorous narrative context, which is central in this thesis, relates to a number of theoretical approaches to discourse comprehension, especially those which stress the significance of context in text processing. The two which most strongly inform this study are Emmott's *Contextual Frame Theory* (1997) and Werth's *Text World Theory* (1999). The perspective underlying these models is that the semantic meaning of any utterance is not a fixed entity, but rather a product of negotiation between participants in discourse (e.g. Werth 1999: 17). This negotiation is highly knowledge-dependent. The following types of knowledge used in text processing have been proposed by Emmott:

(a) General knowledge of the real world;

(b) Knowledge of typical text structures;

(c) Text-specific stylistic knowledge (knowledge of the style of a particular text);

(d) Text-specific knowledge (knowledge of a particular fictional world).

(Emmott 1997: 21 and throughout Chapter 2)

The whole list will become important at later stages in the thesis, but since this part of the argument is concerned with context, let us concentrate on the last point – knowledge of the narrative context, which Emmott calls *text-specific*. Text-specific knowledge of a fictional world consists of 'mental representations, which, for narrative, are stores of knowledge about a particular fictional world' (Ibid.: 21). That could mean information about particular characters, settings and situations present in the narrative and the relationships between them. This is the

knowledge that the reader must be able to build up to be able to fully make sense of incoming textual information. Similarly, *text-specific stylistic knowledge*, that is, knowledge of the style of a particular text (Ibid.: 41), is also important to narrative comprehension. I will argue that both are equally significant in narrative humour processing.

What Emmott calls 'a particular fictional world' can be related to Werth's concept of a *text world.* 'Text worlds are [...] mental models constructed in the course of processing a given discourse' (Werth 1999: 74) – they are cognitive spaces built partly from the deictic and referential elements dictated by the writer/speaker, and partly from the knowledge provided by the reader/hearer. A text world is negotiated in order to establish a *common ground* (CG), that is, 'an agreed set of 'facts'' shared by the participants in discourse (Ibid.: 117). When it comes to comprehending written narratives, the CG (which is perhaps not far from the previously mentioned text-specific knowledge) is essential for following and understanding any text. A text world is built from two types of building blocks: *world-building elements* and *function-advancing propositions*. The idea of textual building blocks is vital to the main argument in this thesis, and it will be elaborated on in Chapter 3, where I discuss the types of elements used to create a humorous narrative world. Text worlds in Werth's terms, however, are not limited to narratives – any discourse negotiated by participants is a text world. In the context of verbal humour, this can mean both local jokes and extended humorous narratives.

A question that is relevant here is – what types of knowledge are used in comprehending *humorous* text worlds of varying complexity? The appreciation of the text worlds of local jokes often relies on the general knowledge that we bring in to the understanding process. While this will also be largely true of humorous worlds of narratives (these, too, are built partly from our own knowledge structures, as will be shown later in more detail), it must be noted that knowledge of the external, real world is not the only point of reference used in interpreting narrative humour. Knowledge of the internal text world, or text-specific knowledge, can be

equally important. Just as during the course of our lives we accumulate schematic knowledge which helps to make sense of the world, during the course of reading a text we build text-specific knowledge which makes interpretation of new textual information possible. Both are significant in humour comprehension, but it can be argued that long, complex texts (not only humorous novels, but even long jokes or anecdotes) rely on text-specific knowledge more than short, simple ones. That is why some humour is lost on the readers not familiar with a particular text world.

What I called 'knowledge of the external, real world' is strongly emphasised in Werth's theory. Text worlds are said to exist in a wider socio-cultural context, which Werth calls the *discourse world*. While I do not concentrate on the concept of the discourse world in this thesis, the idea is alluded to by hypothesising about, for example, the cultural factors involved in narrative humour appreciation or the perceived distance between the writer and the reader (both in Chapter 5).

The main focus of this thesis is the idea of text-specific knowledge (or knowledge of the text world) being a wide plane of reference for narrative humour comprehension. I mentioned before that it is partly based on Larkin Galiñanes' (e.g. 2000) relevance-theoretical approach to comic characters in literature. Larkin Galiñanes, who argues for resolved incongruity as a source of character humour, distinguishes between two types of incongruity found in literature – *internal* and *external*:

> With the former term [internal incongruity] I would refer to those elements in a story which deviate from the reader's expectations as created within the context of the novelistic discourse itself, and which pertain to what we might call a 'first level of narration,' concerning the characters and their interaction and being relevant for the reader in his apprehension of these. With the term 'external incongruity' I refer to those

> elements of the discourse which clash with the reader's encyclopaedic knowledge of the everyday world outside the novel, with his concept of what, in general terms, is appropriate and to be expected, and which pertain to a 'second level of narration,' that of communication between the narrator and the reader, englobing not only the characters and their interaction, but also the narrator's discourse.
> (Larkin Galiñanes 2000: 100)

Her emphasis being relevance theory and not narrative comprehension, notions such as text-specific knowledge or text worlds do not have a place in that model. The principle, however, is the same – when processing literary humour, the reader is likely to seek resolution of incongruity from two sources: general knowledge of the discourse world and text-specific knowledge of the text world. While the first has been extensively discussed within linguistics with regard to short humorous texts, the second deserves more attention.

The aim of this thesis is to outline the ways in which the construction of narrative worlds contributes to the creation of humour in comic novels. In the following chapters, cognitive stylistic notions which stem from the study of narrative or discourse comprehension will be combined with relevant concepts that are part of the linguistic and psychological research on humour.

3. Disrupted Schemata

This chapter is concerned with the nature of the elements which make up a humorous world. Since a humorous world is a construct designed to have a specific effect on the reader, building it must require a special assortment of materials which are likely to trigger the effect. In this chapter, I suggest that humorous narrative worlds are built to some extent from *disrupted world-building elements*:[5] disrupted settings, objects, situations, and characters. I show examples of such elements and hypothesise about the ways in which they are mentally processed in order to result in humour.

3.1. Schema theory

The *elements* which are the subject of this chapter are mental concepts triggered in the reader's mind in the process of reading a narrative. The relationship between language and knowledge has been widely discussed in literary linguistics. Indeed, the 'filling in' of textual gaps with one's own knowledge structures is the basic premise behind *schema theory*, a theory which originated in psychology (e.g. Bartlett 1932) but is now widely used in stylistics. The idea behind the use of schema theory in the study of discourse comprehension is that interpreting any kind of writing relies to a great extent on the reader's background knowledge. When reading a text, we interpret what we are presented with by supplying our own knowledge of the world, often conceptualised as mental stores or 'packets' of information, sometimes given the collective term *schemata*. Rumelhart stresses the significance of schemata for all aspects of information processing:

[5] The term *disrupted* is based on Cook's 1994 notion of schema disruption, which will be discussed in this chapter, while the term *world-building elements* refers to Werth's 1999 Text World Theory, which was outlined in the Literature Review.

> Schemata are employed in the process of interpreting sensory data (both linguistic and nonlinguistic), in retrieving information from memory, in organizing actions, in determining goals and subgoals, in allocating resources, and, generally, in guiding the flow of processing in the system.
>
> (Rumelhart 1980: 33-4)

All cognitive activities we are involved in – reading comprehension included – will rely on our background knowledge of typical entities and situations stored in schemata. Schemata may be the superordinate term, yet it has been suggested that there exist various kinds of mental representations which differ in their contents (cf. for example Minsky's 1977 *frames* and *scenarios* in Sanford and Garrod 1981). The sub-set of schemata which is especially relevant to this work and will be referred to at later stages is *scripts* (Schank and Abelson 1977a). A script, according to Schank and Abelson, 'is a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation' (Ibid.: 422). Schemata (including scripts) form the reader's *general knowledge* – it is that knowledge which will be applied to any text we are presented with as a means of interpretation.

3.1.1. Schema theory and verbal humour

Applying one's general knowledge when interpreting discourse can aid the understanding of any type of text, but humorous texts can be considered an especially convenient subject matter for observing this phenomenon. The appreciation of humour in itself is an act of interpretation – a cognitive activity that, to be successful, relies on the use of one's existing knowledge structures. If one was to simplify the notion of humour comprehension, it is possible to argue that humour has a certain transparency about it – your level of general knowledge determines whether you 'get' the joke, or you do not. If you do not, it means that you lack the schemata that would allow you to process the text to draw conclusions that result in humour, or if not in

humour per se, then at least an acknowledgement that the text is a joke (it is possible to 'get' the joke but not be amused by it). Consider the following example from *Bridget Jones,* which has been used in the Introduction. The line has the potential to be amusing only for the reader who possesses certain background knowledge of the real world, as its humour relies on our recognition of specific elements:

> [4]
>
> 'They are normal people,' I said furiously, nodding in illustration out at the street where unfortunately a nun in a brown habit was pushing two babies along in a pram.
>
> (Fielding 2004: 7)

The elements we need to be able to recognise and fill with our own knowledge are 'normal people' and 'a nun … pushing two babies along in a pram'. The humour is based on a relatively simple opposition between two contrasting concepts – motherhood and nunhood – the knowledge of which the reader already stores as schemata. What we know about 'normal people' is likely to clash with the image of a nun with a pram, since 'normal' nuns do not have families and babies. The conclusion we may draw is that the people the character is referring to are not so normal after all. This resolution of incongruity is likely to be pleasurable and may result in humour. Pleasurable amusement can be seen as a 'reward' for such a creative use of one's knowledge structures (see Suls' 1972 model in the Literature Review).

This idea of humour as a cognitive puzzle that needs to be solved with the aid of general knowledge stems from incongruity-based linguistic theories of humour based on simple jokes. The influential Semantic Script Theory of Humor (Raskin 1985) was briefly outlined in the Literature Review, and now is the time to illustrate the theory with real examples. The following line from Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is similar to the *Bridget Jones* extract above in that it will only be amusing to the reader who knows enough about the real

world to appreciate the amusing incongruity. Here, a character whose occupation it is to build planets has been informed that his current job, re-building Earth, is due to be cancelled:

> [5]
>
> 'You can't mean that! I've got a thousand glaciers poised and ready to roll over Africa!'
>
> (Adams 2002: 165)

Regardless of whether the line actually triggers humour, the reader either 'gets' the joke or does not. Like many of the simple jokes analysed by linguists, this line contains incongruity which can be spotted when supported by sufficient general knowledge – in this case, basic awareness of physical geography. The most obvious source of humour here is the incongruity between the existence of icy glaciers and a hot African climate, the detailed knowledge of which has to be supplied by the reader, as the writer does not provide any more information than what is given above. The contrast between 'hot' and 'cold' corresponds to what SSTH calls *script opposition*, which in linguistics is sometimes seen as the main source of verbal humour. SSTH is a cognitive linguistic model which acknowledges the importance of knowledge in humour processing – the *script* at the core of the theory is 'a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it' (Raskin 1985: 81) – it is essentially a schema. This is how the SSTH would illustrate the knowledge structures needed to comprehend the incongruity of Douglas Adams' line:

> Analysis of: 'You can't mean that! I've got a thousand glaciers poised and ready to roll over Africa!'
>
> Result: Joke?[6]
>
> Script 1: Glaciers

[6] This section would be filled in as 'joke' in Raskin's mode of analysis, but the term is not fully adequate here, as will be explained in the following section.

Script 2: Africa

Script Opposition: Cold/Hot, Possible/Impossible, Real/Unreal

(based on Raskin's analysis of a standard local joke in 1985: 127)

Script opposition means that the joke 'describes a certain 'real' situation and evokes another 'unreal' situation which does not take place and which is fully or partially incompatible with the former' (Ibid.: 108). The reader needs two separate schemata to be able to make sense of it: knowledge of a typical glacier, and knowledge of what it is typically like in Africa. The two cannot possibly coexist, which means that the text contains an incongruity and can be seen as humorous.

3.1.2. Schema theory and narrative humour

It is not unusual that this joke-based theory can so successfully be applied to the narrative-based Douglas Adams extract – it simply means that narratives contain humorous structures which are very similar to short verbal jokes on which such theories were based (see the discussion of 'local jokes' in the Introduction). There is, however, a way in which Example [5] escapes the semantic model of humour – the line has to be *contextualised* in order to be comprehensible. Unless you have just read *The Hitchhiker's Guide* and it is still fresh in your mind, 'You can't mean that! I've got a thousand glaciers poised and ready to roll over Africa!' is not likely to make sense without an introduction about the context in which that statement was made. This introduction should include, at the very least, information about who uttered the line and in what situation, for example, 'a character whose occupation it is to build planets has been informed that his current job, re-building Earth, is due to be cancelled.' It is true that the interpretation of the main source of incongruity in the line relies on our general knowledge of the world, as it does in local verbal jokes. The main difference is that the humorous line does not

stand on its own, but has to be considered as part of a wider narrative context. It is part of an extended joke.

Whether they are short jokes or long narratives, humorous texts of any length are constructed from elements which, in some way, manipulate the reader's general knowledge to introduce incongruity and achieve an amusing effect. The incongruity-creating device discussed above (script opposition) is a strategic juxtaposition of opposing schemata. While script opposition can be viewed as a primary tool for humour creation in simple verbal jokes, narratives will use it only as part of a wider range of cognitive stylistic strategies that draw on their readers' general knowledge. Those devices will be related to the construction of a broad humorous context (or humorous world), which is essential to narrative humour creation.

I suggest that many of the tools used in humorous novels are unrelated to what is seen as 'humour creation' from a traditional semantic-pragmatic perspective on verbal humour, that is, they lack the clash of contrasting concepts considered a necessary condition for a text to be humorous. This view is based on Triezenberg's notion of humour enhancers in humorous literature – elements which 'condition the reader for humor reception, thus enhancing humor while containing no discernible script opposition' (2004: 411, see Literature Review and the following chapters). While Triezenberg does not tie her humour enhancers to incongruity, I propose that, at least as far as the role of general knowledge in humour creation is concerned, humour-enhancing tools used by writers are often a means of introducing humour-bearing incongruity to world-building elements. Consider the following example from *Catch-22*, in which McWatt, an air force pilot, is introduced:

> [6]
>
> McWatt wore fleecy bedroom slippers with his red pajamas and slept between freshly pressed colored bedsheets like the one Milo had retrieved half of for him from the

> grinning thief with the sweet tooth in exchange for none of the pitted dates Milo had borrowed from Yossarian.
>
> (Heller 1994: 68)

Let us temporarily disregard the characters who appear in this extract, and concentrate on the background information about the world which they inhabit. On the most basic level, the understanding of this passage (and potentially the experience of humour) depends to some extent on the reader's schemata for particular people (thieves), objects (bed sheet) and goal-oriented situations (exchange). However, rather than looking for script opposition in the above scene in order to find the source of humour, it might be better to ask: how are these schemata manipulated to achieve a humorous effect? What has been deformed, what has been exaggerated, and what has been switched around? First of all, the 'exchange' script is rather abnormal: we would not expect that anything, even half a bed sheet, could be successfully exchanged for 'none' of something else. That is not how exchanges typically work. The fact that the object being exchanged is half of a bed sheet makes the situation even more unusual – while a 'coloured bed sheet' may be a relatively common schema, 'half of' it is a schema that stands out as slightly odd. Finally, a 'grinning thief with a sweet tooth' who has a habit of stealing bed sheets is an unconventional variation on the 'thief' schema. Our knowledge of the world is what can help us spot the abnormality in the passage: the 'exchange' script and the 'bed sheet' and 'thief' schemata which we may store in our minds are likely to be perceived incongruous with the manipulated representations in the text. Even if there is a certain contrast there, to limit the analysis to a search for script opposition is to neglect the quality of the actual scripts. The world of *Catch-22*, like many other humorous worlds, is built in a large proportion from actions thrown off normal course, deformed objects and distorted characters.

Those elements are often not evidently humorous in themselves. That is because they do not need to involve an incongruity between two contrasting concepts as is the case with verbal humour. Instead, they operate on *a different kind of incongruity*, one between:

(a) What we know about typical real life entities (as held in schemata)

and

(b) The way those entities are represented in the text (as diverging from schemata).

In short, entities which appear in humorous discourse often differ from those which may be encountered in non-humorous discourse. Many of the settings, objects, situations and characters represented in comic novels are likely to drastically clash with the schemata that readers hold in their minds.

Humour-bearing incongruity which permeates humorous narrative worlds is a broader concept than the purely semantic opposition found in simpler forms of verbal humour. 'Incongruous' in the narrative context can often mean 'abnormal' or even 'subversive'. Humour becomes a 'subjective moral violation' of what we believe to be true about the world (Veatch 1998: 167), that is, a violation of our schemata for typical entities. The question is – to what extent can this type of incongruity be *resolved* to achieve a humorous effect (as in the case of puzzle-like opposition-based incongruity in local jokes), and to what extent does the pleasure lie in the feeling of violation itself? Morreall argues that 'not only do many adults enjoy incongruity for its own sake, but there is nothing perverse or immature in doing so' (1987: 197), and while this claim intuitively sounds valid, it would be an idea to support the philosophical approach with psychological testing of real participants (which will not be done in this thesis, but is a possible further direction).

3.1.3. Schema disruption and refreshment

Before I discuss this special kind of incongruity with reference to humorous literature, I want to stress that the ability to surprise readers with unusual representations of familiar entities is not exclusive to humour creation. In fact, it has been claimed that manipulating schemata is key to literature comprehension more generally. Semino writes about 'a cognitive approach to the definition of *literariness*, whereby the main common characteristic of literary texts is their ability to disrupt the ordinary application of schemata and their potential for causing schema change' (1997: 152). This statement is based on Cook's (1994) notions of *schema disruption* and *schema refreshment*, the basic premise behind which is that a distortion of a particular schema (disruption) can lead to something as powerful and long-lasting as a change in the reader's mind (refreshment). Cook argues that 'the primary function of certain discourses is to effect a change in the schemata of their readers. Sensations of pleasure, escape, profundity, and elevation are conceivably offshoots of this function' (Ibid.: 191).

It is not definite whether those 'certain discourses' referred to by Cook include humorous discourse. In their discussions of literariness, Semino and Cook draw on works by authors such as Tolstoy, Flaubert, Shakespeare, Woolf, Faulkner, Orwell and Eco, and while they briefly mention comedy (Wilde in Cook 1994: 34, Fry and Laurie in Semino 1997: 230-2), writers like Terry Pratchett or Douglas Adams do not seem to have a place in the 'schema-refreshing' literary canon. One reason may be that while high literature is said to have the ability to result in schema change, humorous fiction often stops 'half way' – it triggers schema disruption, but does not necessarily lead to schema refreshment. The *Catch-22* extract analysed above disrupts certain scripts and schemata, but it does not have the potential to affect the way we perceive them in our everyday lives. If we agree that literariness is closely bound with schema refreshment as Cook is suggesting, then perhaps humorous literature is not sufficiently 'refreshing' in this respect.

To counter this view of humorous literature, I want to show that humour can be a powerful vehicle for schema refreshment. Comic literature provides numerous examples of how even very serious issues can be presented in a way which disrupts and potentially challenges our views. The anti-war ideology behind *Catch-22* has been a subject of extensive debate within literary criticism (see Aldridge 1987 for a review), and as such does not need further discussion. The novels which are more interesting for the current purpose are those which are generally considered *popular fiction* and therefore far from the notion of literariness. The example below shows how humorous schema disruption in Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* can tackle potentially sensitive themes. It is a final part of the Guide's definition of a *Babel fish* – an organism which, once inserted into one's ear, is able to translate speech from any language into the language of its carrier:

> [7]
> Meanwhile, the poor Babel fish, by effectively removing all barriers to communication between different races and cultures, has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in the history of creation.
> (Adams 2002: 52)

The Babel fish concept plays on a rather sophisticated schema – the biblical Tower of Babel, which is a symbol of how the great multitude of human languages leads to conflict. The construction of the tallest tower on Earth is said to have not been completed because God chose to punish human pride by confusing people's tongues and making them unable to cooperate. The biblical account presents the birth of cultural differences as the beginning of a breakdown in communication that eventually leads to wars and suffering. Douglas Adams reverses this formula to achieve a humorous effect. In his text, lack of communication turns out to be desirable, as it appears that the one thing that pushes living beings to fight is the ability to understand each other. The Tower of Babel schema is disrupted, but also potentially refreshed.

The reader is encouraged to view a biblical concept from an atypical light-hearted perspective which, in the most extreme scenario, might even influence the way he or she perceives the *Bible*. These considerations are only valid, of course, if we agree with the principle behind the concept of schema refreshment (for a different view, see Jeffries 2001 for a discussion of *schema affirmation*).

Not all humorous schema disruption will lead to schema refreshment. I have indicated that a narrative world can be considered potentially humorous because of the way it plays with the reader's general knowledge, *disrupting* schemata for settings, objects, situations, and characters (as based on Cook's notion of schema disruption). Particular methods by which this disruption can occur will be outlined later, but firstly let us consider the cognitive aspect of interpreting unusual schemata. So far, emphasis has been placed on the idea of what is 'typical' and what departs from the 'typical'. There are two issues which need to be clarified before adopting this approach, each essential to a discussion of literary humour:

(a) Schemata for the same entities will vary for people, depending on their cultural background, age, personal experiences, etc.;
(b) Schemata are malleable – they are open to modification and elaboration.

Stockwell combines these two points by stressing that schemata 'have to be learnt either by experience or vicariously through teaching, mythology, or projected situations such as literary fiction, jokes, proverbs, and social rules' and adding that they 'accumulate complexity through life' and 'become multifaceted' (2006: 9). This thesis is not the place for a discussion of individual differences in general knowledge, but it is worth emphasising that any claims made here about humour comprehension are nothing more than hypotheses, as the dynamic nature of schemata makes them difficult to account for. The Babel fish extract can serve as an example – it

may or may not result in humour, just as it may or may not result in schema refreshment. Those outcomes will depend on the individual reader's cognitive resources, preferences and abilities.

3.2. Making sense of disrupted elements

Despite this lack of certainty relating to the use of schemata in discourse comprehension, claims have been made regarding certain aspects of narrative processing. The *dynamic meaning construal* model of text processing (Gibbs 2003) is very relevant to this thesis, predominantly as it concerns the comprehension of the humorous text of *Catch-22*, and is largely based on Hidalgo Downing's (2000) work on that novel. Gibbs proposes that:

> Skilled readers do not comprehend texts by simply activating pre-existing prototypes in the form of scripts. Instead, prototypical understandings arise as the products of dynamic meaning construction processes. [...] Thus, people use their embodied experiences to 'soft-assemble' meaning, rather than merely activate pre-existing abstract, prototypical conceptual representations.
> (Gibbs 2003: 35-37)

This means that the reader chooses the elements of a script or schema that are to be activated, as guided by the relevant aspects of the context. Gibbs' focus is not on humour, but rather on more general narrative comprehension, yet it will be shown that *soft-assembling* of meaning is key to humorous world creation.

3.2.1. Disrupted settings

Let us begin the discussion of soft-assembling in literary humour creation with a basic type of narrative world building block – settings. Another example from Heller's *Catch-22* can be used to demonstrate how schemata for locations can be disrupted to achieve humorous effects. The following extract illustrates a fighter aircraft whose crew have just made a spontaneous decision to turn back from their directed mission:

> [8]
> Nately ripped off his hat and earphones in one jubilant sweep and began rocking back and forth happily like a handsome child in a high chair. Sergeant Knight came plummeting down from the top gun turret and began pounding them all on the back with delirious enthusiasm. Kid Sampson turned the plane away from the formation in a wide, graceful arc and headed toward the airfield. When Yossarian plugged his headset into one of the auxiliary jack-boxes, the two gunners in the rear section of the plane were both singing 'La Cucaracha.'
> Back at the field, the party fizzled out abruptly. An uneasy silence replaced it […].
> (Heller 1994: 162-3)

The sentence 'Back at the field, the party fizzled out abruptly' sums up the description – the fighter aircraft temporarily becomes a 'party vehicle'. This is achieved by mixing the elements we automatically associate with the weapons and vehicles used by the armed forces (e.g. 'earphones', 'gun turret') with elements related to intense joy, which, while certainly possible to experience in the high-pressure environment of a military vehicle, are perhaps more unusual in this context (e.g. 'happily', 'delirious enthusiasm').

A good illustration of this is the sentence 'When Yossarian plugged his headset into one of the auxiliary jack-boxes, the two gunners in the rear section of the plane were both singing 'La Cucaracha.'', which I will now analyse in more detail. This sentence contains the following elements: 'headset', 'auxiliary jack-boxes', 'gunners', 'rear section' and 'La Cucaracha'. A reader with some knowledge of military vehicles and popular culture should be able to spot the incongruity. The frivolous song 'La Cucaracha' stands out when surrounded by technical jargon associated with lethal weapons. Although schemata for particular entities can vary for people, it can be argued that the 'fighter aircraft' schema for most readers typically includes elements such as mechanical equipment, high levels of pressure and a deadly purpose. It does not typically include light-hearted singing. Therefore, when the line above is read out of context, it might strike the reader as slightly odd at best, and as inappropriate at worst. There is little to suggest that it would invite a particularly humorous interpretation.

In the context of the novel, however, the aircraft description is likely to be comprehended as amusing. That is because a reader familiar with the twisted narrative world of *Catch-22* and who, importantly, accepts this world as humorous, *expects* to be amused. It has been mentioned that a humorous world is a world which encourages a humorous interpretation of incoming information. The reader of *Catch-22* who is presented with a 'headset', 'auxiliary jack-boxes', 'gunners', 'rear section' and 'La Cucaracha' in the context of a fighter aircraft is not going to reject 'La Cucaracha' as irrelevant just because it does not match the typical 'fighter plane' schema. Instead, that reader may potentially 'work' a little harder to arrive at a humorous interpretation by *incorporating* (not unlike Gibbs' soft-assembling) the non-fitting element into the schema. This addition means that the plane schema takes on a new, frivolous, slightly nonsensical quality. A *Catch-22* plane becomes an idiosyncratic plane – since the world of the novel is a humorous world, any setting which appears in it is likely to be a humorous setting. This will certainly not be true of all the locations in comic narratives, but it will be applicable to at least some of them.

As far as Gibbs' (2003) theory of text processing is concerned, the dynamic meaning construction process behind the creation of the idiosyncratic *Catch-22* plane can be explained with the use of two high-level processing mechanisms: *memory organisation packets* and *thematic organisation packets* (MOPs and TOPs in Schank 1982). Schank's definition of a MOP as consisting 'of a set of scenes directed towards the achievement of a goal' (1982: 97) suggests that the concept is better suited to the analysis of scripts for situations than schemata for objects or settings, but since Hidalgo Downing (2000) applies it to the notion of 'pride' in *Catch-22*, I will use her strategy to explain the 'humorous fighter aircraft' schema. The description contains two incompatible MOPs: 'using a fighter aircraft for military purposes' and 'using a fighter aircraft for entertainment purposes' which the reader needs to assemble into a coherent whole, therefore creating a meta-MOP 'humorous fighter aircraft'. This, Hidalgo Downing notes with regard to her own example, does not in itself explain why the narrative extract is amusing and informative. This is where the notion of TOP becomes useful. 'TOPs are convenient collections of memories involving goals and plans, written in terms of a sufficiently abstract vocabulary to be useful across domains' (Schank 1982: 113) – they help to establish connections between schemata that are seemingly unrelated, like 'military action' and 'light-hearted entertainment' in the 'humorous fighter aircraft' example. The reader of *Catch-22* should be able to combine the two to reach a meaningful and humorous conclusion, perhaps along the lines of 'soldiers are deluded and laughable' or 'war is absurd'.

3.2.2. Disrupted objects

Aside from unusual settings, a humorous world can also contain atypical 'props', that is, objects. Schemata for material entities can be disrupted in ways which make them surprising, but not necessarily humorous out of context. As with humorous settings, humorous objects do not need to be inherently amusing. It is the wider narrative context that can encourage the reader to soft-

assemble meaning to reach a humorous interpretation. The following extract from Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide* might appear mildly amusing because of the style in which it is written, but let us consider it in terms of the schemata it disrupts:

> [9]
>
> Arthur prodded the mattress nervously and then sat on it himself: in fact he had very little to be nervous about, because all mattresses grown in the swamps of Sqornshellous Zeta are very thoroughly killed and dried before being put to service. Very few have ever come to life again.
>
> (Adams 2002: 45)

The passage plays on our familiarity with the 'mattress' schema. A mattress is typically a completely harmless (inanimate) object, which can only inspire a slight degree of uneasiness if, perhaps, it is dirty or old. Someone who is nervous about sitting on a mattress may be joked at, usually along the lines of 'It is not going to bite you!' Douglas Adams seems to be drawing on that joke by creating a mattress which not only was once alive, but could also potentially hurt someone who sits on it. Just as *Catch-22* had its own type of a fighter aircraft, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has its own type of mattress – both humorous in the wider narrative context, where we expect to be amused. The difference is, perhaps, in that the example from *The Hitchhiker's Guide* is much more transparent about creating a consistently humorous narrative world than the one from *Catch-22.* The 'mattress' extract creates a presupposition about the fictional sub-world of the planet to which it belongs – on that planet, we are led to believe, all mattresses are potentially dangerous objects. Despite that difference, both the deadly mattress and the frivolous fighter aircraft are constructed by manipulating our general knowledge by enhancing schemata for well-known entities with unusual qualities.

Disrupted settings and objects have been discussed to draw attention to the fact that literary humour creation is a dynamic process, where the reader uses what he or she knows about the fictional world to draw conclusions about entities which appear in it. A high concentration of disrupted world-building elements can lead you to assume that the world is a humorous one. Once you perceive the world as humorous, you are likely to apply slightly different processing mechanisms when interpreting new incoming information. McGhee has proposed the notion of *fantasy assimilation* to suggest that we do not try to make sense of humorous material in the same way as we do with serious material. He hypothesises that a child who is presented with a picture of an elephant climbing a tree is not likely to incorporate it into existing relevant real-life schemata (that is, to *reality assimilate*):

> Rather, in a fashion which might be labelled 'fantasy assimilation', he proceeds to assimilate the source of inconsistency or expectancy disconfirmation into existing relevant structures *without* attempting to accommodate those structures to fit the discrepant stimulus input.
>
> (McGhee 1972: 65)

The stimulus might not make sense in a real life situation, but it will be assimilated as acceptable in a fantasy situation. McGhee emphasises that this is more likely to happen if the stimulus is a cartoon than when it is a photograph, because then the child has more certainty that the events depicted cannot exist in real life and need not be reality assimilated. A humorous photograph can trigger humour too, but generally only for children with a high level of 'cognitive mastery,' who know enough about the elements depicted to anticipate that the stimulus is not to be taken seriously. There are conclusions to be drawn from this which are relevant to narrative humour appreciation: mainly, we are more likely to be amused by incongruous elements if they appear in an unrealistic context which encourages a playful interpretation – and comic novels are a prime example of that type of context. Disrupted

settings and objects from which humorous worlds are built, then, are likely to be fantasy assimilated and perceived as amusing because of the wider context in which they appear.

I mentioned earlier that the comprehension of humorous narrative worlds draws on our knowledge of settings, objects, situations and people. Since settings and objects have been discussed, the remaining part of this chapter will include a discussion of situations and people – the sources of *situational humour* and *character humour* very important to literary comedy. The two are certainly linked, as it is often the case that placing characters in amusing situations helps to establish that those characters are humorous. In this way, situational humour can be a pre-requisite of character humour, and as such will be discussed first.

3.2.3. Disrupted situations

Situational humour plays on scripts, that is, knowledge of the sequences of actions in stereotypical situations. Schank and Abelson write about the 'absurdity that arises when an action from one script is arbitrarily inserted into another' (1977a: 423), but do not elaborate much further on script disruption and humour. They do, however, outline a few ways in which scripts can be 'thrown off normal course':

> There are at least three major ways in which scripts can be thrown off normal course. *Distraction* (interruption by another script), *obstacle* (someone or something prevents a normal action from occurring), *error* (action is completed in an inappropriate manner, so that the normal consequences of the action do not come about).
> (Ibid.: 426)

I suggest that, under the right circumstances, each of these types of disruption – and others, those not outlined by Schank and Abelson – can lead to humour. The 'right circumstances' are, of

course, the otherwise humorous context in which they appear – the humorous world. Below are a few examples of situational humour which arises from various forms of script disruption.

(a) The following extract from Terry Pratchett's *Equal Rites* is a scene where Granny, a witch, is arranging to have her broom fixed by a dwarf:

[10]

'Yes, but can you repair it?' said Granny. 'I'm in a hurry.'

The dwarf sat down, slowly and deliberately.

'As for repair,' he said, 'well, I don't know about repair. Rebuild, maybe. Of course, it's hard to get the bristles these days even if you can find people to do the proper binding, and the spells need –'

'I don't want it rebuilt, I just want it to work properly,' said Granny.

'It's an early model, you see,' the dwarf plugged on. 'Very tricky, those early models. You can't get the wood –'

(Pratchett 1987: 143)

The dominant script here is 'arranging a flying broomstick repair' – a script that is not particularly common or well-known in most cultures. Pratchett manipulates it by interrupting it with one much more familiar, that is, 'arranging a car repair.' Utterances such as 'I don't know about repair. Rebuild, maybe', 'It's hard to get …' or 'It's an early model' sound like something we would expect from an obstinate car mechanic, not a broom-fixing dwarf. The humour lies in our recognition that the author is showing us something we know about the real world by inserting it into an unlikely fantasy context. The 'arranging a flying broomstick repair' is thus disrupted to create a humorous effect.

(b) A different example of situational humour can be found in *Catch-22*. One of the characters, Major Major, feels so uncomfortable around people that he orders his secretary to admit visitors to his office only when he is out:

[11]

'From now on,' he [Major Major] said, 'I don't want anyone come in to see me while I'm here. Is that clear?'

'What shall I say to the people who do come to see you while you're here?'

'Tell them I'm in and ask them to wait.'

'Yes, sir. For how long?'

'Until I've left.'

'And then what shall I do with them?'

'I don't care.'

'May I send them in to see you after you've left?'

'Yes.'

'But you won't be here then, will you?'

'No.'

(Heller 1994: 113-4)

As a result of this unusual order, the normal 'office appointment' script is prevented from occurring – Major Major acts as an obstacle. A script for a typical office appointment is composed roughly out of the following elements: arriving at the reception, introducing oneself to the secretary, sitting down in the waiting area, entering the office, conversation with the host, leaving the office. Throughout the whole of the novel, Major Major's visitors will be kept waiting in the hall and only let into the office after he has left (which generally involves Major Major jumping out through the window). Callers come in, but the host is no longer there. Even though they reach the 'entering the office' stage of the script, the actual goal – a conversation with the

host – is never achieved. An office appointment with the host absent is an abnormal situation, which can be perceived as amusing in the humorous world of *Catch-22*.

(c) Finally, in the following example, Bridget Jones describes what happened when she and her friend ate magic mushrooms while on holiday in Thailand:

[12]

On arrival at our latest hut I decided to put my hammock up outside, using thin string, which broke, so that I landed on the sand. This seemed at the time so very amusing I immediately wanted to do it again and, Shazzer is claiming, re-performed amusing hammock-crash repeatedly for forty-five minutes finding the amusingness undiminished by repetition.

(Fielding 2004: 297-8)

The 'putting up a hammock' script has been thrown off its normal course. What distinguishes it from the previous 'office' example is the emphasis on the *manner* with which the action is carried out. The *goal* which guides the hammock script (for more details on goals see Schank and Abelson 1977b) is generally to fasten it securely enough to be able to lie down supported by it comfortably. In the extract, Bridget ties the hammock outside her hut, but the string breaks and she falls down with it. As far as the stereotypical script is concerned, the hammock falling down is highly undesirable, as it does not allow the goal to be reached. An expected course of action would be to look for a stronger string, or abandon the use of the hammock altogether. The expected consequences of the script do not occur in the extract, however, as Bridget does not perform the action in an appropriate manner. Instead of altering her actions to complete the goal, she is content with persistent failure (which can be regarded as failure as far as the goal is concerned despite the dubious entertainment quality she gets out of it). Humour in this case is a result of the absurd, repetitive manner with which the disrupted script is carried out, which

defies our knowledge of a particular goal-oriented situation. It should be stressed again that a script thrown off its course is not humorous in itself, but it can gain a humorous quality in an otherwise humorous world, such as the world of *Bridget Jones' Dairy.*

3.2.4. Disrupted characters

As indicated earlier, writers can use situational humour as a means in itself, but often they will choose to tie amusing situations to certain characters. *Comic characters* are substantial building-blocks of humorous worlds. Their importance is stressed by Larkin Galiñanes, who proposes a relevance-theoretical approach to the notion of a humorous character (e.g. 2000, 2002). She suggests that characters in humorous narratives are built as easily accessed stereotypes which we form during the reading process. The main characters in Amis' *Lucky Jim,* she argues, are established through a series of strong implicatures so that finally 'the very mention of a character's name comes to conjure up a specific 'script' for him in the reader's mind' (2000: 101). Whenever the reader is confronted with a highly incongruous situation, he or she will be able to find coherence (or, in other words, reach resolution) by referring to the schemata he or she possesses for specific characters. This type of discussion leads us away from the notion of general knowledge to that of *text-specific knowledge* (Emmott 1997), which Larkin Galiñanes does not go into. To fully appreciate a comic character, the reader must have accumulated sufficient knowledge about that character in order to form what Larkin Galiñanes calls a *character-script.*

It can be argued that a character-script will be formed through a series of *social schemata* disruptions, where 'social schemata' refer to the knowledge we may have about particular people or social groups. Culpeper (2001) suggests *prototypicality distortions* and *recategorisation* as some of the mechanisms which can introduce humour to representations of people. The following list of character humour-building devices is based on his work:

exaggerated social group stereotypes, social role reversals, and characters who are impolite or do not adhere to social roles in other ways. Each of the techniques will now be illustrated with examples from humorous novels.

(a) Exaggerated stereotypes

Stereotypes are as pervasive in humorous narratives as they are in short local jokes. The difference is in the level of elaboration with which they are set up. The long form of the novel makes it insufficient to evoke a stereotype with a blunt 'How many Poles/mothers-in-law/PhD students does it take to screw in a light bulb?', but instead will invite characterisation as a technique which allows for stereotypes to be established. The following extract from Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* is just one of the ways in which Alexander Portnoy's parents' irritating qualities are demonstrated:

> [13]
> In Newark and the surrounding suburbs this apparently is the question on everybody's lips: WHEN IS ALEXANDER PORTNOY GOING TO STOP BEING SELFISH AND GIVE HIS PARENTS, WHO ARE SUCH WONDERFUL PEOPLE, GRANDCHILDREN? 'Well,' says my father, the tears brimming up in his eyes, 'well' […]
> (Roth 2005: 100)

A smothering parent is a powerful stereotype (a smothering Jewish parent – and Alex's family is Jewish – perhaps even more so, see Antler 2007, Ravits 2000) that should be easily accessible to most readers. What Roth seems to be doing here is 'exploding' the stereotype for comic purposes. The word 'everybody' in 'the question on everybody's lips', the capitalisation, the image of the father welling up – these suggest how excessive the parents' attitude is, at least as it

is seen by their son, who is the first person narrator. The social stereotype of an overbearing parent has been exaggerated to result in humour.

(b) Role reversals

This type of comic characterisation also involves stereotypes, but in a different way. Instead of exaggerating them, the writer can switch them around in a way that will enable us to recognise the reversal easily. Here is a fragment of a conversation between Yossarian and the psychiatrist to whom he had been referred as a result of his 'irrational' behaviour:

> [14]
>
> [psychiatrist] 'You think people are trying to harm you.'
>
> [Yossarian] 'People *are* trying to harm me.'
>
> [psychiatrist] 'You see? You have no respect for excessive authority or obsolete traditions. You're dangerous and depraved, and you ought to be taken outside and shot!'
>
> (Heller 1994: 344)

The reader familiar with the psychiatrist-stereotype and the patient-stereotype should be able to spot that the roles in this short dialogue have been reversed. Yossarian, the patient, is being perfectly reasonable about being in immediate danger (he is an active military officer). If there is anyone who seems insane, it is the doctor, who not only does not acknowledge the reality of war, but also makes claims that are nonsensical ('no respect for excessive authority or obsolete traditions') and threatening ('you ought to be taken outside and shot!'). It is the pleasure in recognising the switch that is the source of humour here, enhanced by the fact that a statement that would normally be paranoid is true in this context.

(c) Impoliteness

Let us now turn to the final method of humorous character creation, where non-adherence to social norms can have a humorous effect. The relationship between impoliteness and humour has been an object of study (e.g. *mock impoliteness* in Culpeper 1996, 2005), but mostly with reference to conversational humour and literary drama. Consider the following narrative extract from Dunthorne's *Submarine,* where Oliver, a Welsh teenager, talks about his dad:

> [15]
>
> There are ways of detecting that a bout of depression has finished: if dad makes an elaborate play on words or does an impression of a gay or oriental person. These are good signs.
>
> (Dunthorne 2008: 5)

The knowledge of what is socially acceptable in British culture makes the lines seem incongruous. For resolution, the reader turns to text-specific knowledge, that is, tries to find a rule that makes the incongruous incident coherent with the rest of the text. Since the extract above appears at the beginning of the novel, Larkin Galiñanes' character-script for Oliver's dad has not necessarily been formed yet, and the reader needs to refer to other elements of the text world for confirmation of whether the world is a humorous one and it is acceptable to laugh (we could easily imagine the lines above as part of a non-humorous plot designed to have a rather different effect). In short, culturally-specific schematic knowledge is the basis for the detection of incongruity, and text-specific knowledge for its resolution (as proposed by Larkin Galiñanes).

(d) Who are we laughing *at*?

Having outlined a few ways in which comic characters can be constructed, I will now attempt to link the literary linguistic perspective with the psychological approach to humour and narrative comprehension more generally. As with any socially-based humour, the question to ask (in line with the social-behavioural approach) is: who are we laughing *at*? Who is the object of humour, and who has the upper hand? La Fave (1972) outlines a theory of *identification classes* to deal with these questions – not in relation to reading humorous literature, but social interaction generally. He proposes that something 'is humorous to the extent that it enhances an object of affection and/or disparages an object of repulsion' and that 'it is unhumorous to the extent that it does the opposite' (Ibid.: 98). According to La Fave, we positively identify with people we like and we do not laugh at them, and negatively identify with those we do not like – they can become the butt of a joke. If the theory was to be applied to the *Submarine* extract, it would be easiest to assume that Oliver's dad is the object of negative identification (we are laughing *at* him), and the narrator (or in fact the implied author, who makes the witty comment), is the object of positive identification (we are laughing *with* him). This rather rigid approach to humour in social interactions has been challenged by Zillmann and Cantor (1996), who proposed a *disposition model of humour appreciation*, in which the positive-negative dichotomy was replaced by a continuum of affective disposition, where 'appreciation should be maximal when our friends humiliate our enemies, and minimal when our enemies manage to get the upper hand over our friends' (1996: 100-1). Importantly, neither La Fave nor Zillmann and Cantor based their findings on narrative humour, so those theories will only be partly relevant here.

One of the problems with applying either of these approaches to narrative humour is that simple labels such as 'friend' and 'enemy' might suit certain characters, but not others. Forster's (1962 [1927]) notion of a *round* character is perhaps overly simplistic, but can serve as an

introduction to the topic. A round character is too complex and multifaceted to be summed up in one sentence (unlike a *flat* character). I would argue that it is the round characters who are especially difficult to label as friends or enemies, because they can in fact become both. As text-specific knowledge builds up, a deeper understanding of (or even a certain attachment to) characters can also build up, possibly as a result of sympathy and other emotions (see e.g. Mar et al. 2011 on emotion and narrative fiction), and the reader can find himself or herself laughing both *at* and *with* a character. It has been hypothesised that 'empathic engagement is what fuels interest in tales' (Zillmann 2006), so some attachment to at least the main characters would be expected in certain types of narrative fiction. This will differ for particular readers, so at this point it is difficult to make any general claims.

Another problem with the psychological models mentioned is that, of course, we are also likely to laugh at/with our friends when they humiliate themselves if the nature of the communicative situation allows it. Humorous novels provide numerous examples of how laughter can be a response to witnessing (or perhaps even experiencing, if the levels of identification and empathy are sufficient) embarrassment. The reader's amusement and (potentially – depending on the level of identification) embarrassment is a recurring theme in *Bridget Jones' Diary*. Here Bridget, dressed in a short skirt, walks past a group of workmen and, as we know from a prior episode, is secretly hoping for them to wolf-whistle:

> [16]
>
> Put nose in air and decided did not care whether they whistled or not but just as walked past was huge cacophony of appreciative noises. Turned round, pleased to give them a filthy look only to find they were all looking the other way and one of them had just thrown a brick through the window of a Volkswagen.
>
> (Fielding 2004: 101)

Even the reader who does not identify with Bridget in this situation is likely to have accumulated enough knowledge about her (Bridget is a round character) that he or she might be laughing both at her, and with her. To claim that amusement is a detached state devoid of negative emotions of any kind (e.g. Morreall 2009) is to disregard the significance of self-disparagement in humour. Catharsis can potentially be experienced not only through tragedy, but also through certain forms of comedy.

Comic characters are just one of the many types of disrupted world-building elements found in humorous narratives. Next to disrupted situations, objects and locations, they help to introduce incongruity to humorous worlds. They are soft-assembled and fantasy-assimilated as amusing, and thus help to create a humorous context.

4. Repetition and Variation

Now it has been established that humorous worlds are built from specially distorted elements, it is time to consider the question of how those elements are combined to form a space that is not only coherent, but also potentially capable of creating an amusing effect. The emphasis is on the mode of exposition of distorted elements that increases the likelihood of humour to occur. The main tool which will be discussed here is the use of *repetition and variation* in constructing humorous worlds.

4.1. Repetition and variation

Linguistic research in literary humour acknowledges repetition as a structural feature of comic narratives. Attardo proposes the term *bridge* for 'the occurrence of two related lines far from each other' (2002: 236), while Ermida (2008) suggests the Principle of Recurrence as one of the necessary conditions for a narrative to be considered humorous. Most importantly for this thesis, the term *repetition and variation* is used by Triezenberg (2004 and 2008) as a way for the author to impress the audience with his or her craftsmanship and inventiveness by repeating the same joke over and over and magnifying its humorous effect each time. Triezenberg's definition of repetition and variation will be extended for the purpose of this thesis. Here, it will be used to mean predominantly *a repetition of a variant of the same element*. The devices which I group under the term *repetition and variation* in narrative humour creation are associated with the patterns of similar elements.

There are two types of elements which can be repeated in humorous narratives: *conceptual* elements (e.g. objects, characters and other world-building elements) and *stylistic* elements (e.g. words, phrases and other stylistic variants). Those patterns can be found in humorous narratives on two levels: what I call *local* patterns (which can be appreciated when a chunk of

text is taken out of context) and *extended* patterns (which are not visible in a chunk of text taken out of context). The latter distinction follows from the local/extended joke classification established in the Introduction. The table below demonstrates the relationships between the four types and levels of repetition and variation which will be discussed in this chapter:

REPETITION AND VARIATION		
	Local	**Extended**
Conceptual	Recurring world-building elements	
Stylistic	Recurring stylistic variants	

Table 1: Repetition and variation

As a way of introducing this concept, let us consider the following passage from *Portnoy's Complaint*, which exhibits a few different patterns. It is a scene where Alex Portnoy's father invites his non-Jewish work colleague, Anne, to the family's home for a 'real Jewish meal.' It is narrated by Alex:

[17]

At any rate, a Jewish meal is what she got all right. I don't think I have ever heard the word 'Jewish' spoken so many times in one evening in my life, and let me tell you, I am a person who has heard the word 'Jewish' spoken.

'This is your real Jewish chopped liver, Anne. Have you ever had real Jewish chopped liver before? Well, my wife makes the real thing, you can bet your life on that. Here, you eat it with a piece of bread. This is real Jewish rye bread, with seeds. That's it, Anne, you're doing very good, ain't she doing good, Sophie, for the first time? That's it, take a nice piece of real Jewish rye, now take a big fork full of the real Jewish chopped liver' – and on and on, right down to the jello – 'that's right, Anne, the jello is kosher too,

sure, of course, has to be – oh no, oh no, no cream in your coffee, not after meat, ha ha, hear what Anne wanted, Alex –?'

(Roth 2005: 83-84)

What is notable is that the extract is not explicitly humorous in the way that local jokes can be humorous (compare it, for example, with the puzzle-like Example [1]). This is important, as it signals something crucial about the techniques used in it – repetition and variation is not humorous in itself. Patterns of repetition and variation appear both in humorous and non-humorous texts, just as they appear in both literary and non-literary ones (see van Peer and Hakemulder 2006 for a discussion of this issue with regard to stylistic repetition and variation). It is likely, however, that this particular passage may be amusing to some readers (for example those familiar with the novel or with Jewish humour), and that its humour results partly from the repetition and variation used.

There are patterns here that can be observed both in the extract itself when it is taken out of its original context in the novel (*Local*), and, as I will show, in the extract when it is compared to the rest of the novel (*Extended*). Those patterns can be associated with particular stylistic techniques, but in this introductory section my approach is more about general impressions of the text than a rigorous classification of stylistic devices.

4.1.1. Local patterns

Local patterns are those which can be found in the extract itself. The passage above contains two types. Firstly, there are the stylistic patterns related to the use of specific lexical and syntactic choices, like the word 'Jewish' being repeated eight times. Secondly, there are some humorous elements which might potentially emerge from the extract as a result of this style of presentation, for example the 'Jewishness' of all the dishes becomes a joke in itself, and the

variation of the same 'Jewish dish' joke is recurrent in the passage. This distinction will be referred to as the previously mentioned *stylistic* and *conceptual* repetition and variation. Let us take look at the style first to see just how many analogous structures there are in this short text, and then try to link it to the potentially humorous elements which are created as a result.

Below is a breakdown of some of the stylistic patterns found in the extract. Underlining is used to signify repetition of the same variant in different contexts:

(i)

Jewish – 8 times

real Jewish – 5 times

real Jewish chopped liver – 3 times

(ii)

This is your real Jewish chopped liver, Anne.

This is real Jewish rye bread, with seeds.

(iii)

That's it, Anne

that's right, Anne

(iv)

I don't think I have ever heard the word 'Jewish' spoken so many times in one evening in my life, and let me tell you, I am a person who has heard the word 'Jewish' spoken.

(v)

That's it, Anne, you're doing very good, ain't she doing good, Sophie, for the first time?

The extract contains not only a high proportion of the same words (i), but is also dense in parallel sentence structures, both scattered around (i, ii) and contained within the same complex sentences (iv, v). One thing to note is that these types of stylistic patterning are not

inherently humorous. They can, however, enhance the humour of other patterns present in the text (this issue will be elaborated on in Section 4.2.3.). Moreover, this amount of repetition helps to convincingly characterise Alex's father as an obsessive individual.

It is clear that the passage is dense in stylistic repetition and variation, but there are also other elements running through it which are less stylistically marked, and more distinctly conceptual. Whether we choose to treat the text as humorous or not, it is hard to deny that it contains a high proportion of recurring distorted elements, which are variations on the same topic. This topic can be summarised as 'Alex's father is being obsessive about Jewish food.' Each line of the extract provides new, but easily recognisable evidence for this claim, whether it concerns chopped liver, rye bread or kosher jello. It is almost like a condensed piece of rhetorical writing, where the author is determined to give a lot of supporting information for the proposition he or she is putting forward. What, then, makes it humorous? I suggest that it is the reader's perception of the topic in question. For reasons which I go into in the following section, someone familiar with the narrative world of *Portnoy's Complaint* is likely to see the theme of the extract ('Alex's father is being obsessive about Jewish food') as more amusing than someone not familiar with it, and therefore view the passage is an assortment of 'mini-jokes' on the same amusing topic. In order to be able to see this particular theme as amusing, I argue, the reader must have encountered it before and learnt to treat it as humorous. The extract contains local patterns, but to appreciate their humorous quality, we must be aware of the place which it has within the wider narrative context – we must have knowledge of the extended patterns.

4.1.2. Extended patterns

As I signalled before, what cannot be inferred from the short *Portnoy's Complaint* extract in Example [17] is that it contains elements which correspond to certain themes that run through the whole of the novel. This is not in itself humorous – in fact it is usual for literature in general,

as thematic recurrence is a desirable quality of literary texts (there are numerous examples of this, like the recurrence of fire in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or epiphany in James Joyce's *Dubliners*). The difference is, I would argue, in the intensity with which this recurrence takes place (see Larkin Galiñanes 2000 for a discussion of strong implicature in humorous literature and weak implicature in 'high' literature, and Section 5.3.2. in this thesis). *Portnoy's Complaint*, for example, is very transparent about repeating the following subjects:

(a) *Being Jewish*: for example traditions, expectations, stereotypes, ways of relating to non-Jews;
(b) *Dysfunctional family*: for example Alex criticising/mocking/impersonating his family members, family members acting obsessively and ludicrously;
(c) *Food*: for example family meals, appropriate/inappropriate food, father's digestive problems.

It would be difficult in this space to give a comprehensive account of the number of times themes (a), (b), and (c) appear in the novel, so instead I suggest an analysis of one extract from the beginning of the book, which contains references to each of them. It is an exchange between Alex's mother and Alex, the first person narrator:

> [18]
>
> '[...] Alex, answer me something. You're so smart, you know all the answers now, answer me this: how do you think Melvin Weiner gave himself colitis? Why has that child spent half his life in hospitals?'
>
> 'Because he eats *chazerai*.'
>
> 'Don't you dare make fun of me!'
>
> 'All right,' I scream, 'how *did* he get colitis?'
>
> 'Because he eats *chazerai*! But it's not a joke! [...] '
>
> (Roth 2005: 24)

There are clear references to *Being Jewish* here – Melvin Weiner is a Jewish name, and 'chazerai' is Yiddish for 'junk food'. As for *Dysfunctional Family,* Alex's mother's repetitive sentence structures (e.g. 'You're so smart, you know all the answers now') and her preference for questions and exclamations signal an overbearing, oppressive personality. Similarly, Alex's outburst ''All right,' I scream, 'how *did* he get colitis?'' shows his agitation – the way his speech is reported can help us imagine him shouting at his mother. This is quite a heated conversation to be had over an everyday subject. That is because the subject (*Food*) is far from trivial for Alex's mother. 'It's not a joke!' for her, but it is for the reader of *Portnoy's Complaint.*

When we compare the two *Portnoy's Complaint* extracts, it turns out that even though they are both relatively short, they contain references to the same humorous themes. Alex's father being obsessive about Jewish food is similar to Alex's mother being agitated about food which, even if it is not Jewish, appears in a Jewish context. They are variations on the same subject and are parts of a pattern which will be easily recognised by the reader familiar with the novel. The patterns of extended repetition and variation are a prominent feature of humorous narratives and will be discussed in more detail after a brief overview of local forms of the technique.

4.2. Local repetition and variation

I mentioned before that the techniques grouped under the term *local repetition and variation* can be separated into two categories: those which concern patterns that are predominantly stylistic, and those which involve a recurrence of a variant of the same conceptual element. This division is represented in the table below:

<table>
<tr><th>LOCAL REPETITION AND VARIATION</th><th>Repetition</th><th>Variation</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Stylistic</td><td colspan="2">Foregrounding</td></tr>
<tr><td>Repetition</td><td>Variation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Conceptual</td><td colspan="2">Repetition of a variant of the same element</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2: Local repetition and variation

4.2.1. Stylistic repetition and variation

Foregrounding (Havránek and Mukařovský in Garvin's 1964 translation) is a stylistic technique which allows the writer to draw the reader's attention to the style of the text by making a shift of the stylistic level of the text from the usual background position to the foreground. In this way, everyday language can become *defamiliarised* (*defamiliarisation* is a term used by Šklovskij 1965 to describe the way in which art can make us look at the world in a new, fresh way) and gain an artistic quality associated with the previously mentioned literariness. Van Peer (1986) distinguishes between two types of foregrounding – *deviance* and *parallelism*:

> While deviance is the result of a choice the poet has made outside the permitted range of potential selections, parallelism is the opposite process, in which the author has repeatedly made the same, or similar, choices where the normal flux of language would tend to variation in selection.
> (van Peer 1986: 23)

His later work (van Peer and Hakemulder 2006) includes more specific information about each of the types. Deviance is said to correspond to the idea of poetic licence and include stylistic devices such as neologism, live metaphor, ungrammatical sentences, archaisms, paradox, oxymoron. Parallelism is characterised by repetitive structures like rhyme, assonance, alliteration, meter, semantic symmetry (Ibid.: 547). In this thesis, parallelism will be referred to as *repetition*, and deviance as *variation*.

While van Peer and Hakemulder acknowledge that foregrounding devices can be encountered in jokes (which they call 'everyday language' as opposed to literary language – Ibid.: 549), neither of the foregrounding techniques they mention has been extensively discussed in relation to humour creation in narrative texts. One of the reasons may be that foregrounding is a device which appears in both humorous and non-humorous narratives and can by no means be called a specifically humorous tool. It has to be noted, however, that many of the humorous narratives analysed for the purpose of this study are dense in foregrounding, and that this foregrounding can often have a humorous effect in a wider humorous context (see the 'Jewish meal' extract above and other examples in this and the following chapters). What I hope to emphasise is that stylistic repetition and variation can very effectively be used to enhance conceptual repetition and variation in narrative texts. While foregrounded language may not be funny in itself, it adds to the humorous world creation and may indeed be perceived as amusing in an otherwise comic context.

(a) Repetition

The idea of foregrounding as adding to literary humour creation is partly based on Triezenberg's theory of humour enhancers in humorous literature (outlined in the Literature Review and Chapter 3), which includes an enhancer called *repetition and variation*. While Triezenberg is concerned with conceptual repetition and variation and not foregrounding, she makes a claim that is interesting – if questionable – from the local-level stylistic perspective as well: 'repetition is inherently funny in itself' (2004: 416). It would be easy to provide evidence against this claim, but let us first explore it a bit more closely. If repetition was indeed funny in itself, then the following line from *Catch-22* should need no extra contextual information to trigger humour, as it relies on repetition rather heavily:

[19]

Major Major Major Major had had a difficult time from the start.

(Heller 1994: 94)

The word-form 'Major' is repeated four times, which certainly makes the line stand out even outside of its narrative context. Although empirical evidence would be needed to support this claim, the sentence is likely to be inherently amusing. Consider, however, a structurally similar sentence from one of Philip Roth's non-humorous novels, where a different word is repeated:

[20]

EVERYTHING SO INTENSE AND EVERYBODY FAR FROM HOME AND ANGRY ANGRY ANGRY ANGRY RAGE!

(Roth 2001: 72)

Like 'Major' in the previous, humorous example, here it is the word 'angry' which is repeated four times, but in this case it would be hard to argue that it is a source of any humour. The sentence is not very comprehensible out of context, but the fact that it is capitalised and ends with an exclamation mark clearly emphasises the furious tone established with the use of emotionally-charged words ('intense', 'angry', 'rage'). It would be difficult to imagine that this particular use of repetition would have a humorous effect even in its narrative context, and in fact it does not. Compare, however, an example from Roth's humorous novel:

[21]

The way it usually works, my mother cries in the kitchen, my father cries in the living room – hiding his eyes behind the *Newark News* – Hannah cries in the bathroom, and I cry on the run between our house and the pinball machine at the corner.

(Roth 2005: 63)

Out of context, this passage is not only unfunny – like the 'angry' Example [20] above, it can actually appear quite upsetting. The repetition of the verb phrase '[family member] cries' can be seen to emphasise how unpleasant the situation is. Out of context, the extract is rich in parallelism, but low on humour. What is needed to bring out the humour can only be provided by the narrative context. The reader of *Portnoy's Complaint* who accepts its wider narrative world as humorous is likely to treat the dysfunctional Portnoy family as amusing, even if it is the disturbing type of 'amusing' associated with *black humour* (black humour is an interesting topic, but space constraints mean that it will not be discussed in this thesis). The repetition in the 'crying' passage can enhance the black humour. Triezenberg, then, was partly right about repetition being amusing, but her statement lacks a vital element: repetition is inherently funny in itself *in the right context*. Repetition as a foregrounding device can add to humour, but is not amusing on its own.

(b) Variation

Variation has similar properties to repetition in terms of humour enhancement. The following extract from *Catch-22* is perhaps not a stereotypical example of foregrounding, but it helps to show how the use of stylistic choices from outside of the expected range can be baffling for the reader who does not know the wider context, and humorous for someone who expects to be amused:

> [22]
>
> Yossarian attended the educational sessions because he wanted to find out why so many people were working so hard to kill him. A handful of other men were also interested, and the questions were many and good when Clevinger and the subversive corporal finished and made the mistake of asking if there were any.

'Who is Spain?'

'Why is Hitler?'

'When is right?'

'Where was that stooped and mealy-colored old man I used to call Poppa when the merry-go-round broke down?'

(Heller 1994: 39)

The first half of the passage, which sets the tone and establishes certain expectations, is written in standard English. It includes complex sentences, formal variants such as 'attended' and 'handful' and a high level of cohesion (for example *reference* to Yossarian in 'other men', *ellipsis* of 'questions' in 'if there were any'). The second part of the passage is so rich in stylistic deviations from the established norm that it is practically incomprehensible. Not only do the short three-word-long questions contrast with the length and complexity of the previous sentences, but they also stand out as syntactically incorrect. Further variation is then brought about by the uncharacteristically long question that follows, where 'stooped' and 'mealy-colored' are evocative of poetic language, and therefore clash with both the preceding text and the child-like style of 'Poppa' and 'merry-go-round.' Variation in this passage can be described as a source of stylistic incongruity. Whether this incongruity is humorous is a matter of the reader's perspective or taste.

4.2.2. Conceptual repetition and variation

It is easiest to think about conceptual repetition and variation as repetition of a variant of the same 'joke' within a relatively short stretch of text. It will be shown how writers can repeat the same joke over and over again in a way which, thanks to strategically applied variation, intensifies the amusing effect of the joke rather than making it dull and predictable. This is how Triezenberg, on whose work this section is based, describes this type of repetition and variation:

> Repetition with skilful variation allows an author to use the same joke over and over again, magnifying it each time and also impressing the audience with his inventiveness. (Triezenberg 2008: 539)

There are of course problems with using the term 'joke' when discussing humorous narratives, and that is why I chose not to follow Triezenberg's terminology too closely. As I outlined in the introduction to this section, repetition and variation in this thesis is used to mean repetition of a variant of the same *element*, regardless of whether it is humorous or not, for humorous purposes.

Stylistic repetition and variation discussed in the previous section is somewhat separate from the conceptual type, but not completely unrelated. Even if it is the concept/element and not a stylistic variant which is repeated in a chunk of text, the patterning may also involve added stylistic foregrounding. The humour will lie mainly in the recurrence of a disrupted element, but it may be enhanced by the lexical or syntactic elaboration discussed above. Examples of various kinds will be provided in this section. Since the subject is *local* repetition and variation, those examples should be amusing out of context (or at least *potentially* amusing – that is, we understand that the text is humorous even if we are not particularly amused).

As Triezenberg's own work is based on *Catch-22*, it is fitting to begin with an example similar to the one she uses. Heller's novel includes numerous instances of local conceptual repetition and variation, such as the description of Colonel Cargill's career before the war:

> [23]
>
> Before the war he had been an alert, hard-hitting, aggressive marketing executive. He was a very bad marketing executive. Colonel Cargill was so awful a marketing executive

> that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes. Throughout the civilized world, from Battery Park to Fulton Street, he was known as a dependable man for a fast tax write-off. His prices were high, for failure did not come easily. He had to start at the top and work his way down, and with sympathetic friends in Washington, losing money was no simple matter. It took months of hard work and careful misplanning. A person misplaced, disorganized, miscalculated, overlooked everything and opened every loophole, and just when he thought he had it made, the government gave him a lake or a forest or an oilfield and spoiled everything. Even with such handicaps, Colonel Cargill could be relied on to run the most prosperous enterprise to the ground. He was a self-made man who owed his lack of success to nobody.'
>
> (Heller 1994: 31)

The element which is being repeated here is the idea that someone can be so bad at his job that he is actually successful. Comprehending this concept involves schema disruption as described in Chapter 3, and like many similar humorous world-building elements, is not inherently funny. What really brings out the humour is how it is described in the passage. After the introductory 'Before the war he had been an alert, hard-hitting, aggressive marketing executive. He was a very bad marketing executive' we are presented with a string of complex sentences, each of them structured in a way that communicates the dual, incongruous nature of the disrupted element. In the following examples, the duality is italicised and the opposition is underlined:

> Colonel Cargill was *so awful a marketing executive* that <u>*his services were much sought after*</u> by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes.

> He was a *self-made man* who owed his <u>*lack of success*</u> to nobody.

These are the first and the last sentences of the passage, but similar structures can be found in the other ones as well. I use text formatting to indicate the incongruous opposition in a way that should also emphasise that even though the same incongruity is being repeated, it is being repeated in different forms. This is the *variation* element of the device. Each of the sentences becomes a distinct little joke on the same topic – similar thematically, different stylistically. *Catch-22* provides more examples of this technique, but its various forms can be found in other texts too.

Bridget Jones also occasionally includes this type of repetition and variation, but many of those instances are not as stylistically elaborate as those in *Catch-22.* Consider the following extract, where Bridget orders a mini-cab to take her to the airport:

> [24]
>
> **9.50 a.m.** Goody. Have ordered mini-cab. Will be here in two mins.
>
> **10 a.m.** Where is mini-cab?
>
> **10.05 a.m.** Where the fuck is mini-cab?
>
> **10.06 a.m.** Have just rung mini-cab firm who say silver Cavalier is outside.
>
> **10.07 a.m.** Silver Cavalier is not outside or anywhere in street.
>
> **10.08 a.m.** Mini-cab man says silver Cavalier is definitely turning into my street at this moment.
>
> **10.10 a.m.** Still no mini-cab. Fucking, fucking mini-cab and all it's ... Gaah. Is here. Oh fuck, where are keys?
>
> (Fielding 2004: 165)

This passage is perhaps unlikely to be very amusing for the readers completely unfamiliar with Bridget Jones, unless they recognise the humour in the incongruity between the distress inherent in Bridget's notes and the lack of seriousness which can be inferred from their

presentation – it is unlikely that she would really write her diary while waiting for the taxi, and so we know not to take it too seriously. With regard to repetition and variation, however, I suggest looking at it as if it were a collection of mini-jokes on the topic 'Bridget Jones is going to miss her flight.' Those mini-jokes are very similar to each other, as the passage is a string of lines which are thematically related. The conceptual element which is repeated here is Bridget's frustration with the mini-cab running late – each consecutive segment is a sub-element which adds to the general topic. What is interesting in comparison with the *Catch-22* example, however, is that the segments are not very different from each other in terms of style. Let us treat 'Goody. Have ordered mini-cab. Will be here in two mins' as an introductory component and compare the first and the last segments of the remaining extract. In these examples, I have italicised recurring lexical elements, and underlined syntactic parallels:

> ***10 a.m.*** Where is *mini-cab*?

> ***10.10 a.m.*** Still no *mini-cab*. Fucking, fucking *mini-cab* and all it's ... Gaah. Is here. Oh fuck, where are keys?

I have marked the visible lexical ('*mini-cab*') and syntactic ('Where is [mini-cab]?/Where are [keys]?') parallels, but it can generally be noticed that the whole text is not very intricate when it comes to style. To a certain extent, it relies on a repetition of a few words or phrases, predominantly 'mini-cab' (7 times) and various forms of 'fuck' (4 times). There is just enough stylistic variation here to sustain the reader's interest, but the repetition in the extract can be associated with foregrounding, which, as I suggested before, can help enhance humour in a narrative text.

4.2.3. Do stylistic patterns enhance conceptual patterns?

The question is – would Example [24] lose some of its humour if it was less dense in stylistic repetition? Would a substitution of the word 'mini-cab' to a pronoun ('it') or a synonym (e.g. 'private taxi') have an impact on the humorous effect it can potentially have on the reader? Let us look at an extract from *The Hitchhiker's Guide* where the conceptual repetition and variation is perhaps more evidently enhanced by stylistic parallelism (underlined in the passage below) than in Example [24]:

> [25]
>
> Zaphod Beeblebrox was on his way from the tiny spaceport on Easter Island (the name was an entirely meaningless coincidence – in Galacticspeke, *easter* means small flat and light brown) to the *Heart of Gold* island, which by another meaningless coincidence was called France.
>
> (Adams 2002: 31)

In comparison with the previous extracts, the humour-bearing conceptual element is only repeated twice in this passage. This time, the element is the fact that certain places in the Galaxy happen to share their names with completely different places on Earth for no apparent reason. What is likely to intensify the humour of this nonsensical proposition is the repetition of the phrase 'meaningless coincidence.' Let us compare the extract above with the one below, where I use lexical substitution to avoid repetition:

> [26]
>
> Zaphod Beeblebrox was on his way from the tiny spaceport on Easter Island (the name was an entirely meaningless coincidence – in Galacticspeke, *easter* means small flat and light brown) to the *Heart of Gold* island, which happened to be called France.

In this text, 'happened to be' replaces 'meaningless coincidence.' The conceptual content remains unchanged, so the passage should remain at least mildly humorous despite this modification (the degree to which it is humorous will of course depend on whether we found it funny in the first place). While both passages still rely on conceptual repetition and variation, only the first one includes stylistic repetition. I believe the *first* one is more amusing, as its conceptual humour is enhanced by stylistic patterning. This is only a hypothesis and it would need to be supported with empirical evidence, but it is not insignificant that Douglas Adams, a predominantly humorous writer, would chose to employ lexical parallelism where it could quite easily be avoided. It is also not a (meaningless) coincidence that he chooses to repeat the structure a few pages further:

> [27]
>
> Today was the day; today was the day when they would realize what Zaphod had been up to. [...] Today was also his two hundredth birthday, but that was just another meaningless coincidence.
>
> (Adams 2002: 33)

The fact that these lines appear on a different page is significant, as it signals that the technique which I call local repetition and variation (whether it is conceptual or stylistic) can also be employed on a larger scale – this is what I call *extended repetition and variation*. As I outline in the following section, a variation of the same humour-bearing disrupted element can be repeated not only within a chunk of narrative that can be easily taken out of context, but such repetition can also be freely scattered around the whole body of the novel.

4.3. Extended repetition and variation

Extended repetition and variation operates on the same principle as the local form; the only difference is that the instances of the repeated element are not condensed into one passage, but occur at various points in the novel. The key feature of this technique which I want to demonstrate here is the *types of variation* of recurring elements. Humorous novels which exhibit repetition and variation contain different types of recurring units – from identical non-humorous elements showing up in different contexts (Section (a) below), to easily recognisable forms of the same non-humorous (b) or humorous element (c), to loosely related variations on the same humorous theme (d). Each of these types will now be discussed with reference to specific narrative examples.

(a) Identical non-humorous element

To follow from the 'meaningless coincidence' example above, let us look at a more extensive use of a similar type of repetition of variation – similar in the sense that the conceptual repetition is very strongly enhanced by stylistic repetition. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a novel which relies on repetition of the same stylistic unit in different contexts. There is a line which Vonnegut repeats a hundred and five times,[7] each time following information about someone's death. Here are two examples of the line, 'So it goes':

> [28]
>
> His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.
>
> (Vonnegut 2000: 1)

[7] I have checked this to the best of my ability, although alternative numbers can be found in other sources (e.g. Gavins suggests 'one hundred times' in 1999: 413).

[29]

Everybody was killed but Billy. So it goes.

(Vonnegut 2000: 18)

What is relevant here is the sheer number of times the line occurs in different but related contexts. It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that such abundant repetition leads the reader to form certain conclusions about the style of the text (cf. text-specific knowledge of the style of a particular text in Emmott 1997: 35). This stylistic awareness, once established, can then be manipulated by surprising the reader with humour-bearing incongruity. The following line appears to aim at that effect:

[30]

So Billy uncorked it with his thumbs. It didn't make a pop. The champagne was dead. So it goes.

(Vonnegut 2000: 53)

The death of the champagne is, unlike the real deaths mentioned, trivial, and 'So it goes' gains an incongruous quality to a reader with a sufficient knowledge of the style of the text. It is likely that the reader who has not read the first fifty-three pages of the novel can neither see nor resolve the incongruity of the line in that particular context.

This particular type of extended repetition and variation does not appear in any of the other humorous narratives which I have analysed, so it is perhaps not very common in comic novels. I have mentioned before that the technique I call repetition and variation is more explicitly humorous when associated with the recurrence of a variant of a conceptual element rather than with the repetition of the same stylistic unit. The phrase 'So it goes' repeated in its original form in all the other death-related contexts seems like more of a stylistic than conceptual type of

repetition and variation, and in fact often as it may appear, it does not generally trigger humour. It may have other effects, such as drawing the reader's attention to the number of times death occurs in the novel, encouraging the reader to reflect on the atrocity of war, or perhaps emphasising how universal death is and so challenge our perception of it as something deeply personal. The champagne example is quite unusual in that it seems to aim specifically at creating humour, yet it is merely one of the hundred and five times the sentence appears, and one of the very few that have a potentially amusing effect.

(b) Similar non-humorous element

The *Slaughterhouse-Five* extracts were used to show how a non-humorous stylistic unit can be strategically placed in unexpected contexts to create humour. The following set of examples from *The World According to Garp* should help to illustrate a slightly different situation – that is, when a non-humorous *conceptual* element gains humour in the same way. One of the recurring themes in the novel is characters who present cards as a means of introduction. It starts with a female character who is a member of *Ellen Jamesians*, a feminist group comprised of mute women who cut out their tongues in honour of Ellen James, a girl who was brutally assaulted and whose tongue was cut off by her attackers. This non-humorous and possibly emotionally-charged theme is first introduced when the following card is given to Garp:

> [31]
> *Hello, I'm Martha. I'm an Ellen Jamesian. Do you know what an Ellen Jamesian is?*
> (Irving 2000: 197, Irving's italics)

The exchange between Garp and Martha, the Ellen Jamesian, is a part of an extended scene, where the reader is led to conclude that the whole group is rather irrational and possibly laughable. They are highly distorted characters, and therefore it comes as no surprise that their

cards may not be as serious as the reader might have previously assumed. Through repetition and variation, the cards then become recurring disrupted elements, appearing in various forms in different contexts. After a car accident which leaves him unable to speak, Garp moves into a women's shelter run by his mother, where he needs to find a way of welcoming visitors:

> [32]
>
> And before his jaw healed, and his mauled tongue grew back together, Garp would answer the door with a ready supply of notes. Many of the visitors were not in the least surprised by being handed notes, because this was the only way they communicated, too.
>
> *Hello, my name is Beth. I'm an Ellen Jamesian.*
>
> And Garp would give her his:
>
> *Hello, my name is Garp. I have a broken jaw.*
>
> (Irving 2000: 379, Irving's italics)

As far as the semantics of humour is concerned, the extract above can be seen to contain a humour-bearing 'serious/non-serious' script opposition, where Beth's card stands for a 'serious' script, while Garp's stands for the opposite. Importantly, however, script opposition cannot be the only source of humour in that example, as the extract is not likely to be amusing when taken completely out of context. Only the reader who remembers the 'serious' script originally associated with the Ellen Jamesians' cards will be able to fully appreciate the incongruity.

Remembering various forms of word-building elements is a crucial aspect of narrative humour comprehension. It should be noted that while *The World According to Garp* contains other variations of the 'cards' element, these do not generally appear in close proximity to each other. Humour appreciation in a long novel requires us to retain information about specific contexts and elements which appear in them and then to compare those in order to spot incongruities and resolve them. This is one crucial way in which narrative humour differs from simple verbal

jokes – a humorous writer will use certain techniques to 'spread' humour across the whole of the narrative world (repeating a variant of an element for humorous purposes is one of those techniques), and this will mean that comprehension of a humorous novel will rely much more heavily on our ability to recognise and recall textual entities.

Apart from this purely cognitive aspect of repetition and variation, an analysis of this device can also invite considerations which relate to the emotional impact of reading. In the case of *Garp*, it is possible to ask: how can a tense, emotionally charged element (the assault on Ellen James) completely lose its gravity and become a laughing matter? Let us look at the final instance of the card-related repetition and variation. Once the cards appear in the context above and the element gains a fully humorous quality, the theme then reaches its climax in the novel: after the Ellen Jamesians become completely discredited following a series of rather embarrassing and tragic events (their role in Garp's murder being one of them), their cards are stripped of their original pride:

> [33]
>
> Ellen James would outlive the Ellen Jamesians, of course. Garp's murder drove them deeper underground, and their occasional surfacing over the years would be largely disguised, even embarrassed.
>
> *Hi! I'm mute.*
>
> their notes finally said. Or:
>
> *I've had an accident – can't talk. But I write good, as you can see.*
>
> (Irving 2000: 572, Irving's italics)

This time, the reader knows what to expect when the cards once again resurface – since they previously appeared in a humorous context, the subsequent anticipation is that of humour. Mentions of disabilities or accidents generally do not have amusing effects, but the right context

may bring out some black humour. It is possible that the tension of the emotional charge initially attached to Ellen Jamesians' cards has been released through repetition and variation. Although it is difficult to adequately communicate this effect out of context, the hypothesis is that the increase in text-specific knowledge can be accompanied by a build-up – and, in the case of humour, subsequent release – of emotion. These hypotheses are linked to the physio-psychological school within humour studies (see Literature Review) and will be elaborated on in the final section of this chapter.

(c) Similar humorous element

While the section above concerns non-humorous elements which accumulate humorous distortion through recurrence, this one is focused on repetition of elements which are already disrupted and potentially amusing, and which can gain even more humour in the process. *Catch-22* provides numerous examples of the repetition of a variant of the same disrupted world-building element. These are often elements which are mildly humorous to the reader who knows enough about the narrative world to be able to assemble them as humorous (see discussion in Chapter 3), such as the two prostitutes whose services Milo, a mess officer, is offering to Yossarian:

> [34]
>
> […] two twelve-year-old virgin sisters who were not really virgins and not really sisters and who were really only twenty-eight.
>
> (Heller 1994: 263)

As far as world-building elements are concerned, this one can certainly be called disrupted. Even if we recognise that Milo's description is just an exaggeration of a typical lie told by a savvy sales person and that the prostitutes are actually twenty-eight years old, it may be difficult for

us as readers not to attempt to assemble *all* the information we receive into some form of a unified mental image as we tend to do when reading narrative descriptions. The prostitutes, however old they really are, become a nonsensical, incongruous element typical of the humorous narrative world of *Catch-22*. As with other similar elements which populate the world (like, for example, the visiting arrangement in Major Major's office where visitors are only let in when he is away), the 'virgin prostitutes' element occurs in the text in various contexts and forms. The fact that Yossarian initially declines the offer does not stop Milo from making a similar one at a later point:

> [35]
>
> [Milo] 'I radioed ahead and made arrangements with a four-year-old pimp to supply you and Orr with two eight-year-old virgins who are half Spanish. […]'
>
> […]
>
> [Yossarian] 'I don't want any eight-year-old virgins, even if they are half Spanish.'
>
> 'I don't blame you. But these eight-year-old virgins are really only thirty-two. And they're not really half Spanish but only one-third Estonian.'
>
> 'I don't care for any virgins.'
>
> 'And they're not even virgins,' Milo continued persuasively.
>
> (Heller 1994: 268)

Twelve-year-old virgins here are replaced with even younger, eight-year-old ones, and joined by a four-year-old pimp – an image that can be humorous in itself if we are willing to suspend our real-life condemnation of child prostitution, but made even funnier because we have encountered a version of this concept before (the psychological aspect of it will be discussed later in this chapter). The two instances of the variants of the disrupted 'virgin prostitute' element appear relatively close to each other (just five pages apart), presumably to establish it firmly in the reader's mind before it is forgotten. Once established, the variant of the element is

used again, this time after around two-hundred pages, in a context where we would not expect it. Yossarian is very worried about a missing twelve-year-old girl and asks Milo for help in finding her:

[36]

'She's just a twelve-year-old virgin, Milo,' he explained anxiously, 'and I want to find her before it's too late.'

Milo responded to his request with a benign smile. 'I've got just the twelve-year-old virgin you're looking for,' he announced jubilantly. 'This twelve-year-old virgin is really only thirty-four, but she was brought up on a low-protein diet by very strict parents and didn't start sleeping with men until –'

(Heller 1994: 469)

By the time this appears, the reader might have partly forgotten about Milo's 'virgin prostitute' scheme, but even if the element comes as a surprise in the context above, the concept is recognisable enough that it can be quickly refreshed. We are briefly puzzled by Milo's response which does not seem to follow from Yossarian's question – why is Milo so pleased with himself even though he and Yossarian are clearly not speaking about the same girl? This leads to surprise, and so we strive to find a way of justifying Milo's response. If we are not familiar with the narrative world of *Catch-22* and the disrupted 'virgin prostitute' element, we fail. If we are familiar with it, then we can recall the previous instances of the humorous element and reach some form of humorous resolution. I say 'some form of resolution,' as the incongruity resolution in this case is not the typical kind found in processing jokes or cartoons as described by Suls (1972) (see Literature Review). The extract above is not a joke which can be 'understood' in the simple sense – 'getting' it does not mean solving a puzzle by applying real life knowledge as is the case with many local jokes, but rather recognising what we see as humorous without asking any further questions. We have previously encountered a form of this particular disrupted

element and got used to treating it as humorous, so we anticipate being amused every time it appears. It is an example of *nonsensical humour*.

(d) Variations on a theme

The final type of repetition and variation which I want to mention in this thesis is perhaps the most common in humorous literature. It is certainly the most flexible and variable in itself, as it does not concern repetition of any particular kind of element, but rather establishing a certain humorous theme with the use of distinct, but loosely related elements. A humorous theme of this sort can, for example, be a comic character constructed through the persistent use of certain, usually humorous, characteristics. Repetition and variation in character creation is very effective in establishing what Larkin Galiñanes calls a character-stereotype (discussed in Chapter 3). Bridget Jones is one such character-stereotype. One of her most easily recognisable characteristics is the ability to get into differing degrees of trouble. Here are some of her more or less serious blunders, some of which have been or will be mentioned in this thesis:

(a) Bridget is being filmed riding a horse for an interview feature she is making for the television company she works for. Since she does not know how to ride, the horse goes backwards instead of forward. The footage is broadcast live on national television.

(b) Bridget goes to the hairdresser's before an important date and ends up with a very unflattering hairstyle, which she then tries to salvage by applying gel and raising her eyebrows to make the fringe appear longer.

(c) While on a skiing holiday abroad, Bridget drinks too much grappa and forgets to put on her skis before getting on the button lift. She then needs to be escorted down the slope.

(d) Bridget misses her plane to Italy because she takes too much time packing. She then books another one and nearly misses it as well, as she becomes too distracted by shopping at the airport.

(e) As an end to a rather unfortunate holiday in Thailand, Bridget is accused of smuggling drugs and is detained in a Thai prison.

From a bad hairdo to a jail sentence, it is clear that the character is constructed through an accumulation of similar elements – not forms of the same mishap, but rather various events of the same kind. Many other comic characters are created in the same way. While Bridget always finds new ways of getting herself into trouble, Milo from *Catch-22* insists on trying new business ventures which are destined to fail, and Alex's mother in *Portnoy's Complaint* is continuously insufferable when it comes to food-related issues. Importantly, this type of repetition and variation is not restricted to character creation – it is generally very effective when it comes to constructing a narrative world which is consistently humorous.

4.4. Why is repetition and variation humorous?

Triezenberg, who coined the term *repetition and variation* with regard to narrative humour, makes a rather questionable statement about its effect on the reader:

> We are delighted. Our laughter is therefore not entirely due to humor; we're laughing in sheer admiration for the construction of the text. Still, we are laughing, and the difference between laughter and humor is not an intuitive one.
> (Triezenberg 2004: 417)

The idea that we are likely to laugh in delight at the construction of the text is not convincing. Instead of approaching it in this way, I would be inclined to relate the pleasure in repetition and variation to certain insights from psychology.

The fact that the same joke may not only be funny more than once, but can even gain humour on repetition, has been the subject of various hypotheses in the psychological research on humour. Freud's work on humour is based in part on the idea that a 'rediscovery of what is familiar is pleasurable' because it can result in a sense of relief that he links to 'economy in psychical expenditure' (1989 [1905]: 148). Suls, whose Two Stage model (1972) is based on surprise, hypothesises that the same joke can amuse on second hearing as 'perhaps the repeated exposure of a given joke may lessen the tension aroused by its novelty and thereby increase liking for it' (1972: 94) – a view based on Zajonc's (1968) idea that familiarity lessens the tension provoked by new, unknown stimuli. As suggested earlier with regards to the 'virgin prostitute' example from *Catch-22*, once a particular element is established as humorous, we will associate it with pleasure and then expect to be amused by it when it appears again without having to determine whether it is funny or not. Psychological research suggests that the pleasure in the comprehension of the same joke (or, in the case of narratives, humour-bearing element) being repeated lies in the familiarity and ease it involves.

What the studies above seem to be lacking is a discussion of why repetition of a *variant* of the same joke may enhance humour. I suggest that this phenomenon might be linked to the idea of humour processing as a mental challenge which is only satisfying when it is difficult enough – Suls suggests that humour appreciation is not maximal when the joke is too obvious, since humour, ideally, should present 'the highest level of comprehended incongruity' (1972: 92). As far as repetition and variation is concerned, the fact that we are presented with a similar, but *not* identical element to what we have previously encountered, will increase the cognitive effort needed to process it and lead to more satisfaction. This is purely a hypothesis, and as such would need to be supported with empirical evidence.

The humorous effect of repetition and variation is a topic which deserves more academic attention. A stylistic analysis of a number of humorous novels indicates that the different

techniques grouped under the term repetition and variation (stylistic, conceptual, local and extended) are extensively used in narrative humour creation.

5. Humorous Mode

I have established that a humorous world is built from disrupted settings, characters and situations, often by means of repetition and variation. An intricate creation such as this, importantly, is not inherently humorous. There are worlds which rely on schema disruption, repetition, or both, to achieve rather different effects – a science-fiction romance, for example, might combine the two to create a melodramatic atmosphere almost completely devoid of humour.[8] What is it, then, that turns a distorted, repetitive world into a humorous world? In this chapter, I argue that humorous narratives are most effective when they are interpreted in what I call the *humorous mode*. It is up to the writer to provide the reader with *cues* which will encourage a humorous interpretation. In order to determine what those cues may be, I firstly discuss Triezenberg's model of *humour enhancers*, then analyse the *opening paragraphs* of a few humorous novels, and finally outline the importance of *distance* in narrative humour creation.

5.1. What is a humorous mode?

A *humorous mode* in this thesis is used to mean *a non-serious, playful manner of interpretation of a text which encourages a humorous reaction to it.*[9] I suggest that, in order to be amused by humorous language, the hearer must be, even very briefly, in a humorous state of mind – suspending some of the everyday problem-solving mechanisms which may inhibit humour reception. This idea will be outlined and supported with relevant secondary literature, but I will first illustrate this point with reference to the subject of this work – humorous novels. I suggest a comparison of extracts from two novels (Irving's *The World According to Garp* and Roth's *The Human Stain*), one of which sets out to get the reader in the humorous mode, and the other one aims to elicit a more serious state of mind. They are a particularly useful pair for comparison, as

[8] For example, Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife* is a novel in which a recurrence of variants of the same disrupted event (the protagonist's time travel) is moving and dramatic rather than humorous.
[9] The term itself is borrowed from Mulkay 1988, where it means a quality of discourse rather than participants' frame of mind.

they deal with a very similar subject-matter: car collision as caused by a jealous husband who drives into the car occupied by his wife and her lover. Both are instances of *foreshadowing* in that they hint to the reader that a car collision is going to occur, but they do it in different ways.

Let us first look at an extract from a non-humorous novel (*The Human Stain*), where the reader is encouraged to interpret the situation in the non-humorous mode. A Vietnam veteran Lester Farley, who cannot get over the fact that his ex-wife is having a relationship with an ageing Jewish professor, decides to kill the three of them:

> [37]
>
> He looked serene, but that was a fakeout. He'd made up his mind. Use his vehicle. Take them all out, including himself. Along the river, come right at them, in the same lane, in their lane, round the turn where the river bends.
>
> (Roth 2001: 256)

A lot can be said about Lester's *mind style* (Fowler, e.g. 1996) here: the uncomplicated syntax and vocabulary can be said to portray him as simple-minded, while the fragmented, repetitive last sentence gives him an air of agitation, or perhaps even mental instability. Aside from the character himself, the main point is that we are presented with a serious, emotionally charged piece which deals with a grave subject. The reader is being prepared for a tragic event, and this is done in a solemn way which encourages a sombre reaction.

This is why a similarly-themed passage from a humorous novel is a useful point of comparison. In *The World According to Garp*, after Garp finds out that his wife is having an affair with one of her students, he takes his sons to the cinema and leaves her at home so that she can break off the relationship. He does not suspect that she will invite the lover to her car and discuss the end of their affair in the driveway. This becomes important later, when, on the way back from the

movies, Garp accidentally drives into the car in which the couple are sitting, killing one of the children and badly injuring everyone else. One of the reasons why this happens is a mechanical flaw in Garp's car, which the reader finds out about shortly before the tragic incident. The following is an exchange between Garp and one of his sons, Duncan, on their way to the cinema:

> [38]
>
> 'And this defroster is such *junk*,' he added, 'that *no* one can see out the windshield anyway.'
>
> 'Why don't you write the Volvo people?' Duncan suggested.
>
> Garp tried to imagine a letter to Sweden about the inadequacies of the defrost system, but he couldn't sustain the idea for very long.
>
> (Irving 2000: 358)

The final sentence is the most notable here, as this is the one that invites a humorous mode of interpretation. The potentially dangerous element, a car defect which can (and indeed, *does*) lead to a life-threatening situation, is presented as if it is not supposed to be taken seriously. It is partly to do with the way the narrator reports Garp's thoughts – 'inadequacies' and 'sustain' are stylistic variants that are perhaps overly formal for narrative fiction (as supported by the Corpus of Contemporary American English)[10] and, as such, stand in opposition to some other, informal or common lexical choices like 'junk' or 'the Volvo people'. There is a slight stylistic incongruity here which may enhance the humour, but the main humorous potential is cultural rather than linguistic – it is the recognition of what a nonsensical an idea it is (from a North American perspective) for an average American motorist to write a letter of complaint about defrosting to the headquarters of the corporation itself, especially in a snowy place like Sweden.

[10] A search of COCA (online at *corpus.byu.edu/coca*) carried out in September 2012 showed that the texts labelled as 'Fiction' contain only 42 tokens of 'inadequacies' (in opposition to its synonym 'flaws', which appears 336 times), and 387 tokens of 'sustain' ('keep up', in contrast, occurs 1314 times).

Irving's way of foreshadowing a tragic event has a flippant tone to it, a tone which corresponds with the way the rest of the narrative world is presented.

Both Irving and Roth condition the reader for the reception of a fatal incident, but each of them sets up a different mode of interpretation. The world of *The Human Stain* is a serious world which is to be perceived mostly in a serious mode. The world of *The World According to Garp* contains very sombre or tragic elements, but even those can be 'tampered with' giving them a humorous angle which fits the humorous tone inherent in the context. This does not mean that the car collision is tragic in one novel, but not the other. In fact – and this is merely my personal observation – the accident in *Garp* may potentially have a stronger effect on the reader. That is because of the contrast between the humorous mode that the reader is in, and the 'ill-fittingly' serious event in which one child is killed, one permanently injured, and the parents are left with the guilt. It is typical of Irving and certain other authors (e.g. Vonnegut, Heller, Roth) to present the reader with a serious incident while in a humorous mode, but that of course will vary for writers, some of whom keep their readers in the comfort of the humorous mode for the duration of the whole novel (e.g. Pratchett, Adams or Fielding). Regardless of this particular aspect, it should be noted that the majority of the narrative examples used in this thesis are aimed at establishing a humorous mode of interpretation, as this is the mode that is pervasive to humorous narrative worlds.

5.2. Why establish a humorous mode?

The importance of being in the right state of mind for the reception of humour is emphasised by humour theorists from various disciplines, who stress that humour appreciation requires a suspension of some of the cognitive activities we use in everyday language processing. I will begin the discussion with the linguistic perspective, by outlining Raskin's classification into *bona-fide* and non-*bona-fide modes of communication* (1985), where humorous utterances are

considered the latter. Raskin argues that language can either be 'earnest, serious, information-conveying' and 'governed by the 'co-operative principle' introduced by Grice (1975)' (*bona-fide*) or used 'not to convey any information [...] but rather to create a special effect' (non-*bona-fide*) (Raskin 1985: 100-1). Let us leave aside the question of whether 'serious' language is indeed always produced with an aim of conveying information (cf. the other, *interpersonal* function of language in e.g. Halliday 1994 or Eggins 1994)[11] and concentrate on what Raskin calls non-*bona-fide modes*: lying, play acting and joke telling (amongst others). The key to a successful interpretation of those particular modes is recognition of the manner in which they should be perceived.

In the case of *joke telling* as a non-*bona-fide mode*, if we insist on treating a joke as serious, *bona-fide* communication, we will fail to be amused. A humorous text is most easily comprehended when we *expect* a joke, because then we do not need to make a choice about which mode to process it in (Raskin 1985: 101). Even though Raskin's theory is meant to apply predominantly to short jokes, I have mentioned before that this idea of a humorous expectation is significant to narrative humour processing as well. Many of the instances of narrative humour are only amusing because of the anticipation of humour to come, like this line from Amis' *Lucky Jim*, where we get a glimpse of the protagonist's thoughts with regard to evading his boss, Professor Welch:

> [39]
>
> Dixon, though on the whole glad at this escape, felt at the same time that the conversation would have been appropriately rounded off by Welch's death.
>
> (Amis 2000: 15)

[11] For a pragmatically-informed critical discussion of Raskin's non-*bona-fide* communication and its relationship with Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP), see Dynel 2008, who outlines the ways in which the CP allows for verbal humour, rendering non-*bona-fide* communication a misinformed concept.

I will use this example to link the linguistic notions of *bona-fide* and non-*bona-fide modes of communication* with research in psychology, namely two classic models of discrepant stimulus processing called *reality-assimilation* (Piaget 1952) and *fantasy-assimilation* (McGhee 1972). Fantasy-assimilation was mentioned in Chapter 3 with reference to a humorous interpretation of disrupted schemata – it is a mechanism which allows us to suspend our disbelief at a strange occurrence in order to be amused, and not puzzled. I would like to suggest that this is the mechanism behind processing non-*bona-fide* language. The reader of *Lucky Jim* knows enough about the text to expect non-*bona-fide* communication and to fantasy-assimilate the potentially unpleasant fact that Jim is fantasising about his boss' death, so that instead of seeing it as upsetting, the reader will treat it as humorous. It is doubtful that Jim actually wants Welch dead, so we know not to take it seriously. This would not be the case if we tried to reality-assimilate the information. Reality-assimilation is used in *bona-fide* language comprehension, when we are trying to make sense of what we are presented with in a serious manner. If we knew nothing about the light, playful context of *Lucky Jim*, we would probably try to determine why it is that Jim is being so bitter, whether he is actually being serious, and reflect on the lack of humanity of workplace relationships. A reaction which a particular text evokes in us will, therefore, depend on the mode and the mechanism we choose to adopt.

A discussion of potential reactions to humorous language would benefit from an empirical study (see 'Further Directions' in Section 6.2.), but since a relevant *theoretical* classification has been proposed in philosophy, I will briefly outline it. Morreall argues that there are three possible reactions to incongruity: 'Negative Emotion, Reality Assimilation (for our puzzlement at the strange), and Humorous Amusement' (1987: 188). These are useful here because of the nature of the narrative extract above – we could imagine Example [39] resulting in each of the three emotions, depending on whether we choose to interpret it in the humorous mode or not. Let us hypothesise about the potential reactions to the incongruity in the passage (note: I have

replaced Morreall's term *reality assimilation* with the term *puzzlement* to avoid confusion with Piaget's terminology):

Humorous Amusement: 'Jim is not being serious. He is being amusing, as usual.'

Puzzlement: 'Is Jim being serious? Why would he think about something like that?'

Negative Emotion: 'Jim's thoughts are unacceptable. His reaction is offensive.'

The table below shows the way I chose to combine this particular classification with the other theoretical approaches mentioned before:

Mode	**Communication**	**Mechanism**	**Reaction**
Humorous	Non-*bona-fide*	Fantasy-assimilation	Amusement
Non-humorous	*Bona-fide*	Reality-assimilation	Puzzlement; Negative emotion

Table 3: Modes

It also suggests the place of the term *humorous mode* (as it is used in this thesis) within the larger theoretical framework. One relevant concept missing from it is what Morreall calls *play mode* (2009). Morreall suggests that humorous amusement as a reaction requires the hearer/reader to be in a *play mode*, which for him means, 'disengaged from conceptual and practical concerns' (2009: 50) and that 'to be amused by some incongruity [...] is to have a measure of practical disengagement from it' (1987: 199). According to Morreall, then, amusement is a reaction to a discrepant stimulus that we are in a disengaged state, a play mode. *Play mode* is a concept broader than what I call *humorous mode*, since, as I outline below, it is not specific to humour processing.

I have mentioned the concepts of play mode, fantasy-assimilation and non-bona-fide communication as associated with what I call humorous mode in the comprehension of

humorous language. The key point I want to make about those theories is that while they were conceived with reference to humour comprehension, there is nothing about them that is specific to humour. In fact, they could just as well be applied to a discussion of the reception of art in general, or fictional narratives in particular. Joke telling may be non-*bona-fide* in Raskin's terms, but he also mentions 'play acting' and 'lying', both of which can be seen as related to story telling. Fantasy-assimilation occurs when we know that 'depicted events do not necessarily occur in real life' (McGhee 1972: 65), which is true not only of funny cartoons on which McGhee's theory is based, but also of many instances of imaginary narratives. Finally, play mode is required not only for joke comprehension, but also for narrative fiction comprehension, if we agree with Morreall that all it takes is a state of practical disengagement from what we see. Humorous language may be non-*bona-fide*, involve fantasy-assimilation and a state of detachment, but so does the language of fictional narratives. This is especially significant for the purpose of this thesis, as it deals with *humorous language in fictional narratives*. How can we distinguish between the two if the area of overlap is so extensive? Berlyne suggests a solution:

> Humor and most play are accompanied by cues that mark them as not 'serious.' Art and make-believe or role-playing games contain cues that mark them as not 'real.'
> (Berlyne 1972: 56)

It is relatively safe to assume that 'art and make-believe games' include literary fiction (see 'novels, pictures, plays' as *make-believe* in Walton 1978: 96). Let us then examine this distinction between humour being non-serious and fiction being non-real with the aid of two narrative examples, one non-humorous (*The Human Stain* again) and one humorous (*Submarine*). While the previous humorous/non-humorous car collision extracts were chosen because of the similarities in content, this time it is not the content, but the form which is alike for both passages (this will become important later).

(a) Non-humorous fiction: serious, but not real

The following extract from *The Human Stain* follows directly from the one which appeared previously in this chapter. Lester Farley decides to kill his ex-wife and her new partner, and the reader is given an account of his thought process:

> [40]
>
> He's made up his mind. Got nothin' to lose and everything to gain. It isn't a matter of if that happens or if I see this or if I think this I will do it and if I don't I won't. He's made up his mind to the extent that he's no longer thinking. He's on a suicide mission, and inside he is agitated big-time. No words. No thoughts. It's just seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling – it's anger, adrenaline, and it's resignation. We're not in Vietnam. We're beyond Vietnam. (Roth 2001: 257)

(b) Humorous fiction: not serious and not real

The passage from *Submarine* seemingly has nothing in common with the one above. Oliver is purposefully annoying his dad by flicking through television channels:

> [41]
>
> Snooker, *Songs of Praise*, snooker, *Songs of Praise*, snooker, ITV advert break ...
>
> 'Oliver, I'll put a brick through that fucking machine!'
>
> He leans down and yanks the adapter plug from the wall: the TV and video die. I have filled his skull with blood. I put down the remote control. He is pinkish. He breathes. He looks a bit confused. Like a man waking up after a full moon and finding blood all around his mouth. (Dunthorne 2008: 223)

Intuitively, it is hard to argue with Berlyne's distinction into serious and non-serious: Roth is likely to be aiming at seriousness, while Dunthorne is doing the opposite. What is interesting, however, is that they are using similar stylistic techniques to achieve their effects. The passages are structurally alike: they include analogous types of sentences (e.g. 'No words. No thoughts' in Roth, and 'He is pinkish. He breathes' in Dunthorne), both contain colloquialisms ('big-time' in Roth and 'fucking' in Dunthorne) and emotionally-charged vocabulary with connotations of aggression ('suicide', 'agitated', 'anger' in Roth and 'yanks', 'die', blood' in Dunthorne). What this suggests is that while passage (a) can be labelled *serious*, and passage (b) can be labelled *non-serious*, it is not possible to find any specific 'cues' which would 'mark them' as such (as Berlyne is suggesting). It is more our acknowledgement of the subject-matter or, more importantly, our knowledge of the overall mode of the text itself that helps us see the non-seriousness in passage (b). A more in-depth discussion of *cues* as a topic in humour studies will follow in the succeeding section, but one conclusion needs to be drawn from the above analysis: humorous narrative texts may contain cues which seem to enhance humour reception, but those cues may not be different from what we find in non-humorous narratives.

5.3. How to establish a humorous mode

To establish a humorous mode is to provide cues which indicate to the hearer/reader that the text is to be interpreted playfully and that laughter is encouraged as a reaction. I have mentioned the importance of *cues* as a concept in the psychological research on humour. McGhee and Berlyne suggest the following:

> Of course, in most humor situations [...] various external cues are readily available leaving no doubt that the situation is not to be construed in a serious manner.
>
> (McGhee 1972: 74)

> Humor is accompanied by discriminative cues, which indicate that what is happening, or is going to happen, should be taken as a joke.
>
> (Berlyne 1972: 56)

The question is – what are those cues? How to indicate to the hearer/reader that an utterance is to be taken playfully? There is a significant difference here between jokes and longer comic narratives, as I would argue that jokes are much more easily marked as humorous discourse. 'Have you heard this one?' is just one of the cues one might use to make a shift from the serious to the humorous mode, but sometimes even that is not needed, as jokes often have a recognisable structure – they are relatively short, some follow a question and answer pattern, or contain key phrases such as 'knock, knock' or 'a guy walks into a bar'. Narratives do not share those properties. The closest a novel comes to anything as explicit is through a *paratext* (Genette 1997) – an epigraph, foreword, or perhaps a cover image, which may guide the reader's interpretation of the text. In the case of humorous narratives, it can be a fragment of a review on the cover which indicates that the book is funny, like 'a flawless comic novel' on the back of Penguin's 2000 print of *Lucky Jim* or 'The most outrageously funny book about sex yet written' on the front of *Portnoy's Complaint* published by Vintage in 2005. However, these only appear after the book has been read by a number of editors and published. Writers, therefore, have to find their own ways of signalling to their readers that the text requires a humorous interpretation. They will use devices which are less explicit, but can nevertheless be successful in eliciting a playful mode of comprehension.

It is important to stress this lack of explicitness of narrative humorous cues. That is because the term *cues* is not exclusive to humour studies and psychology, and in other areas may imply a degree of fixedness and transparency. In pragmatics, for example, a cue can be a particular syntactic structure which helps the hearer make a certain type of inference, like the whole-part juxtaposition used by adults to teach new words to children (see Saylor, Sabbagh and Baldwin

2002). In discourse analysis, cueing can be associated with *hedging* – for example, Di Marco and Mercer (2004) discuss the use of particular words or phrases to signal the writer's attitude to citations in scientific discourse. Language research in Artificial Intelligence can also be seen to associate cues with fixed phrases or expressions (Grosz and Sidner 1986, for example, discuss *cue phrases* in discourse). In this thesis, a cue is seen not as a recognisable, frequently observed structural element as it might be in certain other areas of linguistics, but rather more implicit signal which may encourage a humorous mode in the reader.

5.3.1. Humour enhancers

One linguistic approach which can be linked to the psychological notion of humorous cueing is the previously mentioned Triezenberg model of humour enhancers. Triezenberg does not explicitly state this connection with psychology, but it can be deduced that her humour enhancers are in fact cues, encouraging readers of humorous narratives to apply the humorous mode when interpreting the texts:

> A humor enhancer is a narrative technique that is not necessarily funny in and of itself, but that helps an audience to understand that the text is supposed to be funny.
>
> (Triezenberg 2008: 538)

Each of the humour enhancers was briefly outlined in the Literature Review, and in what follows the definitions are backed up with narrative examples. Triezenberg supports her idea with examples from *Catch-22*, but I will use extracts from a wider range of humorous novels.

(a) Diction

[42]

He didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo.

(Vonnegut 2000: 24)

A simile that compares a soldier to a flamingo is perhaps slightly unusual, but it is the alliteration in 'filthy flamingo' that especially stands out. Triezenberg suggests that such lexical choices are 'more interesting, therefore more enjoyable' (2004: 413), while Nash calls them 'peculiar intensities of linguistic patterning' (1985: 124) that can often be found in humorous texts. The problem with this device is that it is also extensively used in non-humorous literature, where it does not have an amusing effect (see the discussion of foregrounding in Chapter 4).

(b) Shared stereotypes

In this extract, Bridget Jones is reading Lonely Hearts advertisements, and one of them says:

[43]

I'm interested in the usual kind of things – magic, occult, paganism.

(Fielding 2004: 212)

The humour here will be appreciated by the reader who shares the (mainly Western) negative stereotype of a person interested in 'magic, occult, paganism' and thinks that not only are those people not 'usual,' but they are often considered rather odd. As readers, we immediately guess that Bridget will not call this man, and we may also begin to question the potential of Lonely Hearts. Such a swift reaction would not be possible if the stereotype was not easily recognisable. Since humorous texts are aimed to elicit prompt reactions, it can be hypothesised that

humorous novels will contain a higher proportion of such simple stereotypes than non-humorous ones (cf. Larkin Galiñanes' idea of strong implicature in humorous literature and weak implicature in 'high' literature, e.g. 2000).

(c) Cultural factors

> [44]
>
> He [Dad] seems surprisingly calm considering that he has recently had to talk about emotions.
>
> (Dunthorne 2008: 220)

This passage is interesting, as there are various possible humorous interpretations. It can be funny because it plays with what we know about the Dad character in the novel. There are, however, alternative interpretations of it which are based on shared cultural stereotypes. In certain cultures, *men* are sometimes thought to be reluctant to talk about their emotions. *Parents* as a group can be considered to belong to the same category as well, which would provide another interpretation. Alternatively, it can be amusing because *British people* (the Dad in the novel is British) are famously not open about their emotions. If we are not familiar with any of the characters in the novel, but are still amused by the passage above, it means that we have accessed one or more of those culturally shared stereotypes. Our own personal experiences will also have an impact on the way we comprehend the example, but since humorous writers are unaware of our personal experiences, they are more likely to take cultural factors into account when constructing easily recognisable jokes for particular audiences.

(d) Familiarity

[45]

Monks do not believe in locked doors. Nor do they believe in possessions. The two may be linked.

(Dunthorne 2008: 153)

It is not surprising that monks do not lock their doors and that they do not accumulate material possessions. The surprising elements in the passage are the juxtaposition which is forcing an inference and the modal auxiliary 'may' in this context. This line presents a simple, well-known idea in a way which 'defamiliarises' it (Šklovskij's concept of *defamiliarisation* was mentioned in Chapter 4). The pleasure is in putting the familiar concept back together again, in the enjoyment of recognition. Familiarity is closely linked to stereotypes and cultural factors – writers of humorous literature will often aim at accessibility of the ideas they are putting forward.

(e) Repetition and variation

[46]

It was love at first sight.

The first time Yossarian saw the chaplain he fell madly in love with him.

Yossarian was in the hospital with a pain in his liver that fell just short of being jaundice. The doctors were puzzled by the fact that it wasn't quite jaundice. If it became jaundice they could treat it. If it didn't become jaundice and went away they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them.

(Heller 1994: 7, underlining marks repetition)

The various meanings of repetition and variation (including Triezenberg's version of it) were discussed in Chapter 4. I provide the example above not to analyse the foregrounding mechanisms used in it, but mainly to draw attention to two things: firstly, the passage is very dense in stylistic repetition, and secondly, this is a passage that appears at the very beginning of the novel. It is not a coincidence that such a heavily foregrounded fragment serves as the *opening* to a humorous narrative. The importance of openings will be discussed in Section 5.3.3.

It is true that the elements which Triezenberg calls 'enhancers' do appear in humorous literary texts, and it is possible to speculate that they may enhance the experience of humour in narratives. It has to be noted, however, that the same techniques are also present in non-humorous literary texts, where not only do they not trigger humour, but can enhance less positive emotions.

5.3.1. The importance of familiarity

Despite the fact that the techniques labelled as *enhancers* can be found in both humorous and non-humorous narratives, I want to argue that there is a certain regularity specific to humorous texts that emerges from Triezenberg's classification. It is the importance of *familiarity* in narrative humour creation. This familiarity is established through, for example, easily accessible stereotypes, shared cultural knowledge, well-known ideas and repetition of the same jokes – elements abundant in many comic narratives. While both humorous and non-humorous novels contain some degrees of both familiar and unfamiliar elements, one could argue that non-humorous novels do not involve as much familiarity as humorous ones do (see Section 4.1.2. for a discussion of *extended repetition* in humorous fiction).

I mentioned before that amusement is just one of the possible reactions to incongruity (see Morreall's 1987 classification). I suggest that we need to know that it is 'safe' to laugh at

something unexpected – if it is not 'safe,' we are more likely to be puzzled or upset by it. One of the cues which tell us that it is safe is when we are surrounded with familiar elements. The reader of a humorous novel must feel that there is sufficient familiarity in the surrounding context to justify amusement as a reaction to incongruity which he or she encounters. Veatch suggests that:

> […] humor occurs when it seems that things are normal while at the same time something seems wrong. Or, in an only apparent paradox, humor is (emotional) pain that does not hurt.
>
> (Veatch 1998: 164)

This duality of the familiar and the unfamiliar in narrative humour will be further explored in the following sections. What should be concluded from this part is that while both humorous and non-humorous novels may contain humour enhancers, humorous ones are especially rich in familiarity.

5.3.3. Openings

I have mentioned that in contrast to jokes, narratives lack specific structural elements which would explicitly provide a cue to the reader that the text is to be interpreted in the humorous mode. There is hardly a narrative equivalent of 'Have you heard this one?' or 'Do you know the one about ...?', but opening phrases like that might be a good starting point in the search for narrative cues. That is because they act as introductions: once 'Have you heard this joke?' is uttered, there is little doubt that what we will hear is going to be humorous. Larkin Galiñanes does not mention this quality of jokes, but she makes a suggestion about it in humorous narratives:

> In the case of novels, [...] it would be convenient for the critic to study how the narrator or implied author signals **from the outset** his intention for the work to be interpreted in a humorous tone, and how effective these signals are for the subsequent appreciation of the humour in the novel – that is, how the situation is avoided in which the reader does not really know whether to take the work before him seriously or not. (Larkin Galiñanes 2010: 214, my emphasis)

We can therefore assume that the opening of a humorous novel is significant, because it establishes the humorous mode of the whole work, thus preparing the reader for humour reception. It is not surprising that it is the *initial* segment of the text that will lead the interpretation of what follows – experimental research in psychology suggests that primacy overrules recency in impression formation (Luchins 1957). Luchins' results have been linked to literary reading comprehension by Sternberg (1978: 94).

I will now provide examples of the opening sentences/paragraphs of one non-humorous novel and three humorous ones to look for patterns of contrast and similarity. If the humorous openings made use of certain techniques that were absent from the non-humorous one, it may be worth pursuing the hypothesis that certain devices might be more successful in enhancing humour than others. For the convenience of comparison, the opening sections were chosen from novels with first-person narration.

(a) Non-humorous opening

> [47]
>
> It was in the summer of 1998 that my neighbor Coleman Silk – who, before retiring two years earlier, had been a classics professor at nearby Athena College for some twenty-odd years as well as serving for sixteen more as the dean of faculty – confided to me that,

at the age of seventy-one, he was having an affair with a thirty-four-year-old cleaning woman who worked at the college.

(Roth 2001: 1)

(b) Humorous openings

[48]

It is Sunday morning. I hear our modem playing bad jazz as my mother connects to the internet. I am in the bathroom.

I recently discovered that my mother has been typing the names of as-yet-uninvented mental conditions into Yahoo's search engine: **'delusion syndrome teenage', 'over-active imagination problem', 'holistic behavioural stabilisers'**.

(Dunthorne 2008: 3, my emphasis here and in the examples below)

[49]

All this happened, **more or less**. The war parts, anyway, are **pretty much** true. One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden for taking a teapot that wasn't his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. **And so on**. I've changed all the names.

(Vonnegut 2000: 1)

[50]

She was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school **I seem to have believed** that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise.

(Roth 2005: 3)

One interesting point of comparison between these two types of openings is the figure of the narrator. The humorous and the non-humorous narrators, I suggest, seem to exhibit different degrees of commitment to the story and they are not equally trustworthy. While the non-humorous narrator is very knowledgeable and authoritative about his subject-matter (this comes across, for example, in the way he quotes exact dates, places and ages), the humorous ones are less so. The phrases in bold indicate those instances when the narrator is presented as unstable (Dunthorne), non-committed (Vonnegut) or ambiguous (Roth). Those narrators invite a *non-serious* approach to their stories. What seems to be the case is that the humorous openings are constructed in a way which signals that what comes should not be taken overly seriously.

All four extracts use different registers and stylistic devices. There do not seem to be any linguistic techniques which are specifically humorous and directly prepare the reader for the humorous mode. The authors of the humorous novels analysed did not use punch lines or other joke-like elements to explicitly cue humour in their openings. They did, however, use narration to establish and play with the perceived *distance* between them and the reader.

5.3.4. Manipulating distance

There exist a number of definitions of the term *distance* with regard to literary linguistics (e.g. Leech and Short 2007, who have a several uses). The one which I apply in this thesis is that it is *the feeling of familiarity between the writer and the reader, as perceived by the reader*. I will use this section to explore the idea of manipulating distance as a way of cueing a humorous mode.

(a) Establishing a joking relationship between the writer and the reader

One of the methods for establishing a humorous mode is for the writer to build a playful relationship with the reader. The importance of *joking relationships* based on shared group membership has been stressed not only by social anthropologists (e.g. Apte 1985), but also by psychologists (e.g. Ruch 1993). Ruch proposes that 'the effectiveness of humor may depend on who tells the jokes and whether this person is liked or not' (1993: 623). In the context of humorous fiction, the one who 'tells the jokes' is the (implied) author.

It is the author who needs to gain the reader's sympathy in order to communicate certain values. Larkin Galiñanes suggests that 'if the [...] reader finds the narrative funny, it means that s/he has been induced into sharing these values, at least temporarily' (2010: 206). Notions such as 'values' or 'ideology' here refer to the choice of the object of humour – the butt of the joke. Humour is likely to be most effective if there is an agreement between the participants as to what deserves to be joked about, and what does not – if the object of humour is not chosen sensitively, the joke might be perceived as boring or even offensive. In the case of written narrative fiction, this subtle balance is not easy to achieve, as the participants know very little about each other. The writer cannot be sure whether the reader shares his or her beliefs about what is humorous, and therefore needs to find a way of ensuring at least some of the reader's engagement. Maintaining the reader's involvement can be attempted through certain manipulations which help the writer to 'seduce' the reader. The reader who feels some form of connection with the writer is more likely to laugh at the writer's jokes. Connection is a broad term, but the sense which most concerns us here is that of closeness, as achieved by manipulating distance between participants in discourse. The lesser the perceived distance between them, the more familiar, comfortable and friendly the relation becomes, and consequently, the more appealing the writer (and his or her ideology) appears to the reader.

These considerations are linked to what Booth (1961) calls a *secret communion* between the writer and the reader. For Booth, a vital component of this secret communion is the way the *narrator* is portrayed in the novel and the attitude the reader has towards the narrator which results from it. Even though it is the narrator who guides us through the narrative world, some authors will discourage us from forming a trusting relationship with him or her:

> […] though the narrator may have some redeeming qualities of mind and heart, **we travel with the silent author**, observing as from a rear seat the humorous or disgraceful or ridiculous or vicious driving behaviour of the narrator seated in front. The author may wink and nudge, but he may not speak. The reader may sympathize or deplore, but he never accepts the narrator as a reliable guide.
>
> (Booth 1961: 300, my emphasis)

Booth calls narration unreliable when 'the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him' (1961: 159), and while the following extract from Terry Pratchett's *Equal Rites* uses a slightly different strategy, it nevertheless illustrates how certain narrative techniques can widen the gap between the reader and the narrator, but lessen the distance between the reader and the implied author:

> [51]
>
> Mist curled between the houses as the wizard crossed a narrow bridge over the swollen stream and made his way to the village smithy, although the two facts had nothing to do with one another.
>
> (Pratchett 1987: 12)

The first part of the sentence employs a technique typically associated with setting the scene in third person narration. The clause 'Mist curled between the houses' acts as a description of scenery. It is nothing more than background information which helps the reader imagine the location where the 'real' action, the wizard's activity, takes place. Combining two distinct types of actions (that is, mist curling and wizard walking) in one compound sentence by a conjunction 'as' is customary in written narratives. An experienced reader is expected to take such a structure as a certain convention without asking questions about the link between the two. That is why the second part of the sentence comes as a surprise. The narrator suddenly draws attention to the arbitrary convention of storytelling, specifically to the common means of presentation of a narrative world. Aside from encouraging the reader to critically reflect on narrative conventions, this also affects the relationship between the reader and the narrator.

While Pratchett's narrator suddenly becomes less reliable, the writer himself gains a certain degree of credence by such a skilful way of marking his or her presence. Such a shift can lessen the distance between the implied writer and the reader and can lead to a secret communion. Importantly, this does not necessarily need to have an amusing effect. However, it does under the right circumstances, such as when this technique is just one of the many ways in which a humorous world is constructed (as is the case with Pratchett's writing) – next to, for example, repeatedly introducing incongruity through distorted world-building elements and situations. The crucial point about secret communion is that it is not humorous in itself, but may enhance the humour inherent in the narrative world by establishing a good joking relationship between the writer and the reader.

(b) Switching between multiple narrative worlds

Aside from a communion-building device, the Pratchett extract above could in fact be seen as an inherently amusing situation, made humorous by the incongruity between the conventional and

the unconventional elements of the description. The cognitive aspect of the comprehension of unreliable narration can be linked to Gavins' (2007) work on *narrative deception*, that is, the ways in which writers exploit the readers' narrative processing habits to achieve a variety of effects, humour being one of them. She suggests that the reader is likely to unconsciously 'privilege text-world information provided by the narrator over that provided by enactors at the same level of discourse' (Ibid.: 131, where *enactors* is a term taken from Emmott 1997, but which for Gavins means 'characters'). When accumulating knowledge of a narrative world, we tend to trust the narrator more than we trust the characters, and therefore unexpected behaviour of the narrator will have more of an impact on the way we perceive the text. As far as the Pratchett example is concerned, the knowledge of the text world which, up to that point, was being constructed by the narrator, now needs to be re-assessed in light of the new information we have received about the storyteller. The reader might have to switch from the familiar narrative world (e.g. 'this is a pleasant village scene in a fantasy world') to a different one which allows for the existence of the new information (e.g. 'nothing in this world should be taken seriously, because it is just a made-up story'). This cognitive activity can be called a *world-repair*, and, if the shift in the reader's impression of the novel is particularly extensive, may lead to a *world-replacement* (Gavins' terms based on Emmott's 1997 notions of *frame-repair and replacement*).

World-repairs and world-replacements are not dissimilar to the incongruity-resolution mechanisms applied in verbal humour comprehension. Just as in a local joke we need to switch from one *script* to another for resolution, the resolution of switching from one *text world* to another can have humorous effects in extended humorous fiction. World-repairs and replacements are not inherently humorous, but can become amusing if, for example, the worlds are built from highly distorted or unexpected elements, such as in the *Bridget Jones* example below. Bridget goes to the hairdresser's the day before an important date, and the outcome is as follows:

[52]

7 p.m. Back home. Hair is complete fright wig with hideous short fringe. Just spent forty-five minutes staring in mirror with brows raised trying to make fringe look longer but cannot spend whole of tomorrow night looking like Roger Moore when the baddy with the cat has threatened to blow up him, the world, and the tiny box full of MI5 vital computers.

(Fielding 2004: 122)

Three text worlds can be seen to emerge from the extract:

(a) Bridget Jones

The first world is the reality of Bridget Jones, which can be easily accessed by anyone who has had an unsuccessful appointment with a hairdresser. The reader recognises such world-building elements as ‘hair’, ‘wig’, ‘fringe’ and such function-advancing propositions as ‘staring in mirror’, which, however exaggerated or distorted (it would perhaps be unlikely to stand in front of a mirror for exactly forty-five minutes), nevertheless form a coherent picture of a woman obsessing over a haircut, most likely while alone in her house.

(b) James Bond

The second world is the world of James Bond, as will be identified by those readers who recognise ‘Roger Moore’, ‘baddy with the cat’ and ‘MI5’ as the elements of one of the films. This world, like the previous one, is not inherently humorous in itself but, like the Bridget Jones world above, gains a slightly comic quality through a humorous mode of presentation.

(c) Blended world

The real humour lies in the world which is conceived as an incongruous combination of the two. When Bridget says that she ‘cannot spend whole of tomorrow night looking like Roger Moore,’ the reader is encouraged to visualise the world of ‘tomorrow night’ – that is, Bridget’s date night, where she gets through the evening with comically raised eyebrows. This third world is an incongruous *blended world* (Gavins’ 2007 term, based on Fauconnier and Turner’s 2002 work on *conceptual blending*), which consists of elements of the already established (and completely distant) worlds of Bridget Jones and James Bond. International spies, advanced technology and deadly weapons become incorporated into the mundane social life of middle-class Londoners with the use of one link, or humorous *trigger* (Raskin 1985), which allows a switch between the two worlds – raised eyebrows. The humour here lies not only in the construction and mode of presentation of each of the sub-worlds, but also (if not mainly) in the switch between the two which allows for a humorous blended world to be constructed so elegantly.

(c) Manipulating the point of view

Humour-enhancing manipulations of distance like the blending discussed above are not arbitrarily inserted into the body of the text. Rather, they support the construction of a certain perspective and therefore are used strategically. Bridget Jones may not be the most reliable narrator (mainly due to her inconsistent, erratic behaviour), but a close insight into her thoughts is one of the main sources of humour in the novel. This is also the case in Amis’ *Lucky Jim*, where the reader has an opportunity to share the protagonist’s thoughts. In the following extract, Jim Dixon, a young lecturer in medieval history, is thinking about his article which he intends to submit for publication:

[53]

Dixon had read, or begun to read, dozens like it, but his own seemed worse than most in its air of being convinced of its own usefulness and significance. 'In considering this strangely neglected topic,' it began. This what neglected topic? This strangely what topic? This strangely neglected what? His thinking all this without having defiled and set fire to the typescript only made him appear to himself as more of a hypocrite and fool.

(Amis 2000: 14-5)

Dixon is the *focaliser* in the passage, which means that the reader is encouraged to view the world from his point of view. The use of *Free Indirect Discourse* (FID) to report his thoughts helps to supplement this internal focalisation. Even though the passage is an example of third-person narration, the character's thoughts merge with the narrator's comments to the extent that the two are practically inseparable. The phrases 'its air of being convinced of its own usefulness and significance' or 'without having defiled and set fire to the typescript' are evocative of a resigned, sulky academic – we have no trouble identifying that they belong to Dixon himself. The stream of 'This what neglected topic? This strangely what topic? This strangely neglected what?' is less subtle, as it is as close to a direct representation of the character's thoughts as the narrator can get. The choice of FID is a significant one, as this particular manipulation of perspective can make it easier for the reader to sympathise with the character's feelings, or if not fully sympathise, then at least create an illusion that we understand the character better (see for example Hakemulder and Koopman 2010 for an empirical study of this). We are perhaps more likely to sympathise with Jim (and, in fact, be amused by his thought process) if we are familiar with the conventions of academic style and recognise his thoughts as something we may have experienced with regard to the less successful instances of our own writing.

What is especially significant is that both the sympathy-enhancing topic and the sympathy-enhancing mode of narration were used to communicate the thoughts of Jim, as opposed to any of the other characters. Readers of *Lucky Jim* will know that the novel is based on a rather strong contrast between the 'good' characters, *with* whom we laugh, and the 'bad' characters, *at* whom we laugh (this is a slight simplification, as I argued in Chapter 3 that such a clear-cut division is rare). Jim belongs to the first category, that is, he is the vehicle through which the author communicates his ideology – 'the joker' with whom the reader is meant to sympathise. As such, he needs to be given preferential treatment, and presenting the text world from his point of view is one of the techniques used to achieve it. As a result of the FID-enhanced focalisation, the reader might find it easier to identify with, and potentially form an attachment to such 'preferred' characters. By lessening the distance between readers and the chosen characters, authors can indirectly lessen the distance between the readers and the authors themselves.

Strategically used focalisation, world-repairs and constructing unreliable narrators are just a few of the narrative techniques which help the author manipulate the distance in humorous narrative worlds. Some of those distance-shifting devices are used to communicate that the text is not to be taken completely seriously, and thus encourage the reader to process it in the humorous mode. The humorous mode is the preferred mode of interpretation for many instances of humour in humorous narratives.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary

In this thesis, I have explored some of the ways in which humour is created in comic novels. I have argued that it is often the construction of a narrative world that contributes to the creation of humour in narrative texts, and have proposed a model of humorous worlds based on an analysis of a number of humorous narratives. Humorous worlds – worlds which are designed to have an overall amusing effect on the reader – are (a) based on extended jokes, which run through the whole of the world and (b) contain techniques which encourage a playful humorous mode of interpretation, thus helping to create an overall humorous context. The reason why some instances of narrative humour are not funny out of context is that they are parts of such humorously marked extended jokes, and their appreciation requires the ability to look for a humorous interpretation in the wider narrative context.

The discussion of humorous worlds was split into three parts:

In *Disrupted Schemata*, I suggested that many of the elements which make up humorous worlds are designed to clash with our general knowledge of typical entities. I linked this to Cook's (1994) notion of schema disruption, and provided narrative examples of disrupted settings, objects, situations and characters.

In *Repetition and Variation*, I discussed a few techniques used for combining the disrupted elements outlined in the previous chapter. I suggested that a repetition of a variant of the same element (conceptual repetition and variation) is an effective device in humorous world creation, and that its comic potential can be enhanced by foregrounding (stylistic repetition and variation).

Finally, *Humorous Mode* was aimed to address the issue that the devices mentioned in the previous chapters are not intrinsically humorous, and can be found in non-humorous narrative fiction as well. I suggested that the humorous potential can be best realised when the reader is in a humorous mode – a humorous state of mind. I outlined some techniques which can cue the reader into this state.

6.2. Further directions

This thesis provides an outline of some of the techniques used in narrative humour creation. A natural progression would be to expand it by adding more *cognitive stylistic* devices to the model of humorous worlds. For example, while mind style and speech and thought representation were briefly alluded to, they could be applied to humorous narratives in more detail.

Like cognitive stylistics, *pragmatics* is another discipline which is likely to develop our understanding of how a humorous context is built. In fact, theories of politeness (Leech 1983, Brown and Levinson 1987) and Grice's Maxims (1975) have already been applied to the study of character speech in drama (Culpeper 1996) and humour in TV series (Dynel 2012).

This study was focused on written narrative fiction, but it would be an idea to verify to what extent the humorous worlds model can also be applied to written *narrative non-fiction*, like humorous biographies or memoirs. In the same way, this type of research could be extended to *dramatic and film discourse*, like comedies and sitcoms.

There are two types of narrative humour which emerged as particularly interesting: *black humour* and *nonsensical humour*. These were briefly alluded to in this thesis, but they certainly deserve further study from a cognitive stylistic perspective.
Cultural differences in humour appreciation are another topic which could be explored with reference to humorous narratives, especially in relation to culture-dependent variations in readers' schematic knowledge.

Finally, cognitive stylistic research on humour like that set out in this thesis is very suitable for empirical study. Reader response experiments could be carried out to verify the hypotheses which I have put forward, mainly the idea that some instances of narrative humour are funnier in than out of their context. Additionally, issues of *embodiment* in relation to the experience of slapstick, or *empathy* linked to our appreciation of awkward, uncomfortable humour in narratives could be tested on real participants.

6.3. Concluding remarks

This thesis is an attempt to provide evidence for the claim that the way humour is created in narratives differs from the way it is created in jokes. Introducing humour to a narrative usually requires more than providing a surprising punch line behind a simple incongruity that can be easily resolved, like it is done in jokes. The examples of narrative humour used in this thesis should serve as proof of this, since they are not as transparently amusing as typical jokes are.

Narratives have their own set of techniques used in humour creation – techniques which are mostly related to the construction of the narrative world. A humorous narrative world is a context which relies on a number of techniques to make it amusing as a whole. Once the wider narrative context is established as humorous, the elements which appear in it are likely to be

assimilated as humorous. For that reason, individual instances of narrative comedy tend to lose some of their humour when taken out of their original context.

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