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On Humor as a Rhetorical Strategy in English Literary Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Indirectness is a valuable communication skill commonly employed to accomplish specific objectives. Motivations for indirect use of language can be politeness, self-defense, or criticism of the other in conversation. Humor has been a subject of extensive study across various disciplines, including linguistics, literature, and philosophy. This interdisciplinary interest stems from both a desire to understand human behavior and an effort to explore how humorous techniques are employed within fictional works to achieve the author's intended effect. The article explores the rhetorical purpose of humorous devices in English literary discourse. In fiction, writers resort to humor as a means of ridiculing a certain trait of a character. The forms of humor include irony, understatement, sarcasm, self-deprecation, wit, satire, etc. The analysis has shown that writers most often use the strategies of initial, final, or double focus, placing humorous devices at the beginning, at the end, or at the centre and the end of a work of fiction simultaneously. The starting or finishing point for deductive, inductive and double-focus persuasive strategies is the author/character's perspective, which focuses on how they perceive what is happening within the story. Situational and narrative ironies enhance the impact of humorous means, thus creating a persuasive discourse. The linguistic material is analyzed through a discourse approach, pragmalinguistic and linguistic-stylistic methods of research.

Keywords: Forms of Humor; Situational/Narrative Irony; Persuasive Strategies; The Author/Character's Perspective; British Writers' Short Stories; Discourse Approach; Persuasive Discourse

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1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Humor is one of the main values of British culture. British humor is conceived as irony, also known as dry humor and subtle English humor with a play on words. One of the misconceptions that irony theorists always have to contend with is the conflation of irony and humor. The paradox, however, is that irony and biting sarcasm are the cornerstone of British humor. A defining characteristic of English humor lies in its extensive use of irony, which plays a central role rather than merely serving as a subtle enhancement. Irony is fundamental to the structure and delivery of English humor^[1]. S. Attardo concludes that humor and irony are not entirely distinct phenomena. In fact, the same can be said of many other tropes: one can interpret understatements and exaggerations as inappropriateness corrected (resolved) by relevance^[2]. It follows that there is genus-species relation between these concepts, in which the former appears as a genus, and the latter as a species. Humor comprises such forms as irony, understatement, self-deprecation, sarcasm, witticism, satire, etc.

The history of irony was analysed from a diachronic perspective^[3], showing how it came about that it turned into a pervasive rhetorical tool in the early twentieth century. Irony as a form of humor involves using words to convey the opposite of what they actually imply. Even if certain authors ostentatiously used the word, it is safe to conclude that *ironia* remained esoteric and technical throughout the sixteenth century. The Latin or French form of the word was likely to appear in an English context as the English form. Irony became a more accessible English word in the first part of the seventeenth century. Only in the early eighteenth century, when ironic writing had gained popularity and clarity, did people feel compelled to explore the idea of irony a little bit more deeply than its traditional definitions^[3]. However, in the early twentieth century, among all kinds of writing, there was none, in which writers were more ambitious to excel than in works of humor.

The early 20th century witnessed a surge of artistic and cultural innovation, driven by diverse movements responding to rapid societal, political, and technological shifts. Literary

experimentation flourished, with authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce pushing narrative boundaries to explore character consciousness. This period marked a transition from Victorian to modern novelistic forms. The tumultuous 1930s, culminating in World War II, led many established writers back towards traditional values. Prominent English novelists and short story writers, such as John Galsworthy, W. Somerset Maugham and other famous modern writers of the twentieth century created a great number of fictional stories with edifying message, in which they ridiculed certain traits of a character. Successful combination of humorous devices made humorous short stories pointed or targeted narratives with irony used as a key rhetorical tool.

This fertile linguistic material attracted the attention of many recognized scholars, such as Victor Raskin, Salvatore Attardo, Marta Dynel, Isabel Ermida, Giovannantonio Forabosco, Władysław Chłopicki, and many others. However, humor research has been confined to the static dimension of humor phenomena; therefore, the idea of match/mismatch of opposing scripts seems somewhat obsolete nowadays. It is high time scholars considered humorous means from the dynamic discursive perspective, i.e., regarding comical narrative as a process rather than the overlap with the opposing script, e.g., it is when things do not go as planned that a comedic effect is produced, and not vice versa.

This study considers the functioning of humorous devices in a particular discourse genre. The objective of the study is to explore the rhetorical purpose of humorous devices in English literary discourse, by examining the intricate relationship between rhetorical disposition (arrangement) and humor placement strategies (e.g., initial/final/double focus).

By closely examining how humorous devices impact narrative discourse, reshape it into a pointed narrative, and contribute to the theory of satirical style, this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the consequences associated with the integration of humorous devices into literary narrative.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Linguistic Theories of Humor

Studies have revealed that humor serves multiple important functions within interpersonal communication. It

can effectively diffuse tension and discomfort, express disapproval or aggression indirectly, and showcase strength and adaptability in difficult circumstances. Furthermore, humor acts as a coping mechanism for stress management, can be strategically employed for persuasion and influence, and even has the power to disrupt and redefine conventional patterns of formal discourse. Multiple functions of humor aroused scholars' interest in the psychology of humor, as well as philosophical teachings and concepts. All research in the field of comedy, satire, and humor was conducted from different perspectives: the psychology of humor, cross-cultural analysis, or diachronic comparison.

Therefore, three traditional theories of laughter and humor are examined: The Superiority Theory, The Relief Theory, and The Incongruity Theory. While the Superiority Theory holds that the cause of laughter is feelings of superiority, and the Relief Theory states that it is the release of nervous energy, the Incongruity Theory asserts that it is the perception of something incongruous—something that violates our mental patterns and expectations. This approach was taken by James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, and many later philosophers and psychologists. It is now the dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology^[4].

All theories regarding the linguistics of humor can be categorized as theories of incongruity, inconsistency, contradiction, or bisociation. The frameworks grounded in incongruity are fundamentally cognitive, as they rely on certain objective traits found within a humorous text or phenomena, such as situations, events, or images. According to the Incongruity Theory, humor arises from recognizing something incongruous—an element that disrupts our cognitive patterns and anticipations. Esteemed thinkers such as James Beattie, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Søren Kierkegaard, along with numerous subsequent philosophers and psychologists, have embraced this perspective. Currently, it remains the prevailing theory of humor within both philosophy and psychology.

Although Aristotle did not use the term *incongruity*, he hints that it is the basis for at least some humor. In the *Rhetoric*, a handbook for speakers, he says that one way for a speaker to get a laugh is to create an expectation in the audience and then violate it^[4]. Incongruity Theory has proved to be most suitable for interpreting humor in literary

discourse as short stories mostly focus on the theme of failure. I. Ermida shows that human failure and unhappiness can be successfully turned into humorous material. She points out the gap existing between attempt and achievement, or between dream and delusion, at the same time making the reader laugh^[5]. Linguistic theories of humor are well developed. Among them, is the incongruity theory of humor, as developed by Isabel Ermida^[5]. According to her, three important names help to establish the incongruity theory of humor, namely Bergson, Koestler, and Suls. Therefore, I adopted another tactic: exposing the nature of humor as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Incongruity may be observed on different levels: ideational, linguistic, logical, and narrative.

On the ideational level, the script-based semantic theory of humor posits that any text containing a joke can align, in whole or part, with two distinct and conflicting scripts. To elucidate, when a text evokes two different scenarios recognized by an individual and reveals a certain degree of opposition between these scenarios, it meets the linguistic criteria to be classified as a joke. In this regard, Raskin's Linguistic-Semantic Theory^[6] argues that verbal humor is associated with two disparate semantic scripts that diverge in various aspects, including themes of obscenity versus non-obscenity, violence versus non-violence, absence versus presence of money, death versus life, and bad versus good.

Linguistic theories of humor represent conceptual frameworks that focus exclusively on verbal or written expression of humor. While humor is widely acknowledged as a domain that crosses multiple disciplines, linguistic theories of humor primarily derive from linguistic analysis and comparison. Consequently, linguistic theories of humor encompass several linguistic components, including morphology (the analysis of word forms and grammatical categories), phonology (the examination of sound systems in language, including their variants known as allophones, and crucial phonetic units termed phonemes), syntax (the investigation of sentence structure), semantics (the exploration of meaning at both the lexical and compositional levels), and pragmatics (the study of context-dependent meanings)^[7].

On the linguistic level, contrast/incongruity may be implemented as a linguistic or situational clash of meanings or ideas so that the boundaries may, at times, be blurred between various forms of humor, such as irony, hypocrisy,

paradox, punning or ambiguity. Wordplay is characterized as a witty or humorous manipulation of language that typically operates on multiple levels. It relies on the audience's ability to grasp both the overt meaning of the expression and an additional, concealed, or implied significance. The play on meanings, in turn, can arise as a result of a certain linguistic element of the utterance acquiring phonetic, morphological, lexical or syntactic ambiguity. In this regard, Koestler's concept of bisociation is pivotal for understanding creativity, humor, and cross-disciplinary thinking^[8]. In humor theory, bisociation is essential for understanding the mechanisms behind jokes, where unexpected connections between incongruent ideas produce the surprise effect, central to jokes and puns.

Likewise, on the logical level, J. Paulos regards humor as resulting from incongruity (in the appropriate emotional climate). He has sketched three sorts of incongruity suggested by logic: nonstandard models, level and type confusions, and misleading grammatical forms. There are other logical principles that give rise to humor, such as exaggeration and *reductio ad absurdum*, part-whole and relational reversals, intensional modalities, etc.^[9]. In a similar vein, Herbert L. Colston emphasizes the logical aspect of humor. The concept of relevant inappropriateness creates a distinct contrast through an ironic statement that intentionally deviates from expected norms. This deviation arises when the presuppositions of the utterance mismatch or are incompatible with the context in which the utterance is spoken; however, this incongruity must exist only to the degree necessary for the ironic interpretation to occur^[10]. Consequently, juxtaposition of two incongruous ways of viewing something (a person, a sentence, a situation, etc.) exposes the challenging, intellectual nature of irony.

As for narrative prose, the humor of English fictional stories seems to be their distinctive and expressive feature. Nevertheless, beneath the surface of humor in such stories, one may discover deep and philosophical implications. A humorous scenario often serves merely as a catalyst for deeper contemplation. In this context, it is essential to differentiate between the act of narrating ironically and the concept of ironic narration. The former refers to the strategic use of irony, while the latter denotes storytelling from an ironic point of view^[11]. This approach inherently values, celebrates, and employs various types of devices that constitute humor.

The ironic or jocular perspective of the narrator/character not only imparts an ironic or comical tone to the entire narrative, but also determines the development of events, which ends in an unexpected turn of events or an unforeseen outcome.

Thus, humor is the outcome of contrast/incongruity of opposing meanings (schemes). It permeates not only all levels of the language system, but is also an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Humor is also contextual, which testifies to its pragmatic nature. Therefore, it attracts interest from scholars of different persuasions: philosophers, psychologists, linguists and pragmatologists, as well as workers in different fields, including journalists, writers, directors and advertising production managers.

1.2.2. The Rhetoric of Humor

Since humor is a relatively culturally unique rhetorical tactic, it is more popular in places where wordplay is common (such as the UK, where puns are considered an art form). As a result, many people do not "get" humor, while others use the term inappropriately. It is a popular satirical style that is challenging to master since it always runs the risk of veering into overt sarcasm, which has been noted as the lowest kind of wit. A similar view is expressed by A. Easthope who thinks that English sense of humor is defined mainly by three things: the use of irony; the exposure of self-deception; a tendency towards fantasy and excess^[12].

It is conceived as a state of elation or excitement instigated by the perception, on the part of the listener, of surprise or incongruity. Resolving the incongruity — by noticing the ambiguity — is sometimes considered to be what is meant by the phrase 'getting the point' of the joke, or, simply, getting it. But the onus is laid on the receiver or 'decoder' of the joke to deem it funny or not^[13]. The lack of a deterministic or mechanical relationship between these elements is succinctly formulated by L. La Fave et al^[14]:

Humor lies neither in laughter nor in jokes but only in the minds of men.

Greek philosophers, including Aristotle and other classical authors, like Demetrius (3rd century BC), Cicero (1st century BC), and Quintilian (1st century AD), made a distinction between the coarse sort of humor, which raises laughs by buffoonery, coarse language and imperfections (physical or spiritual), and the more genteel type, based on wordplay, incongruity, surprise, etc., which raises a controlled smile and is suitable for a refined and cultivated elite. With respect

to comedy as a literary genre, therefore, those early thinkers interested in the subject saw in laughter and its appreciation a marker of social class^[15]. Building on the etymology of the words *wit* and *humor*, one can also distinguish between subtle humor and banter. The word *wit* originates from the word *field of wisdom* and *cleverness*, the quick operation of the mind. In the collocation of *wit and humor*, *wit* came to cover the more aggressive, cerebral aspects, while *humor* covers the benevolent, crude aspects. In German, these two key terms had similar histories to English in terms of origin and meaning changes^[16].

Different cultures view humor in different ways. The differences in styles of written and spoken humor between Britain and the USA can in some measure be accounted for by differences in the way the countries are divided into social classes, not through differences in economic organization or degree of economic inequality but the nature and legitimacy of status hierarchies^[17]. British humor alone was able to use styles that valued detachment from conventional morality and also took inequality for granted and hence devised forms of aggressive mockery that could be directed downwards. British humor was also able to employ a greater reach of allusiveness, vocabulary and sophistication than was possible in America^[17].

Thus, apart from being a class marker, and culture-specific, humor is also context-dependent. The relation of narratives to humor may be brought about through the relationship of frames^[18], or human failure^[5] to humor.

In my view, the relationship between narrative and humor is most evident in the author/character's perspective articulated against the backdrop of the story's events, whether forthcoming or already occurred. In the work of fiction, several forms of humor are brought to bear to create an ironic or playful tone. Among them the humorous device that expresses the author/character's perspective seems the most significant one. The perspective focuses on how they perceive what is happening within the story. For instance, Jane Austen's ironic perspective is established in the very first sentence of the novel:

Excerpt 1

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

(Austen, J., *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 2)

The ironic implication is that an unmarried woman's primary desire is to find a wealthy husband. Her singleness is seen as a deficiency, implying she is incomplete without such a partner.

Similarly, Katherine Mansfield opens her short story with:

Excerpt 2

"Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces... But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces?"

(Mansfield, K. *A Cup of Tea*, 39)

The understatement and the jocular appeal to the reader used to humorous effect imply that plain appearance is Rosemary's Achilles heel, the source of her inferiority complex.

Thus, an important role in narrative study is played by the author/character's perspective, ironical or jocular, which serves either as the springboard for the development of the plot or as the inductive summation of the character/author's reasoning. The latter are intended to persuade, elicit a response from the reader or listener, and convey meaning. In fact, humor is frequently employed to support persuasive messages in genres like fictional stories and comedies. It would be obvious that humor and persuasion are strongly related if one were to examine their relationship in detail. The interdependent relationship between humor and persuasion may be further explored by looking at how well humor works to persuade, and how it can either increase or decrease the effectiveness of persuasion.

Persuasive communication can be achieved through two primary pathways: the central and peripheral routes. The central route emphasizes logical reasoning and compelling arguments, while the peripheral route leverages emotional appeals, catchy slogans, and affective responses. Humor often operates through the peripheral route, inducing positive moods, enhancing the perceived credibility of the message source, and diverting attention away from potential counter-arguments. It is important to note that these two routes are not mutually exclusive and can work synergistically. Strategic use of humor, when directly relevant to the core message, exemplifies this synergy^[19]. For instance, legal arguments employing ridicule may simultaneously trigger emotional reactions and encourage rational assessment of evidence. Skilled communicators can intuitively utilize both pathways

for effective persuasion.

All in all, two forms of persuasive rhetoric exist. The first form occurs when the author explicitly states their stance and provides logical reasoning to support it. Another form is when the author can also employ techniques like humor or satire to critique societal norms or issues. The aim of such an essay is to persuade readers to accept the author's viewpoint.

Arrangement and Rhetoric

In classical rhetoric, "arrangement" refers to both to the inherent order of a speech's components and to the deliberate modification of this order to suit specific contexts. While arrangement encompasses the structuring of arguments, such considerations are primarily addressed under "invention." Similarly, the organization of individual words and phrases falls under the domain of "style." Arrangement was viewed as an iterative process, often intertwined with invention. Structuring arguments could lead to the discovery of new ideas, prompting the orator to continually refine both content and organization until an optimal arrangement was achieved. Subsequently, attention would shift towards stylistic refinement and effective delivery.

Rhetorical analysis examines the individual components of a text to elucidate how language is employed to achieve desired effects. Authors utilize rhetorical strategies not only to convey content but also to strengthen their ideas and influence readers. These strategies include varying surface order, selecting the level of detail, modulating narrator visibility, and controlling the amount of information available to the narrator^[20]. It is now widely accepted that journalistic discourse has strong positions in the text, viz., the title, the beginning, and the conclusion, which serve to ensure arguments. Likewise, the above-mentioned strong positions are ensured for the thesis in literary discourse, due to its genre peculiarities. Humor is infused into the thesis in strong positions of the text to interest the reader and emphasize the key points of the discourse. Thus, humorous devices perform a discourse-forming function, as a rule, formalizing strong positions of the text.

Humorous devices in titles serve a crucial role in engaging readers' interest. In the introduction of a story, they function as a thesis that lays the groundwork for subsequent reasoning. In this position they either act as the correct and valuable thought, which is then developed, or illustrate the discrepancy between the desired, proper state of affairs, and

the actual one. Humorous devices located in the conclusion of the text have a generalizing function: they summarize the previous arguments, and express indirect negative evaluation, as "irony inherently communicates implicit negative evaluation; positively evaluative irony is a myth"^[21]. Sometimes, in order to focus readers' attention on the main, key idea of the text, a circular composition is used: a humorous device in the title of a text or its center, and it also (unchanged or slightly transformed) becomes the concluding, summarizing sentence.

It can be stated that the widespread use of humorous devices is a striking feature of twentieth-century fiction, and modern fiction alike. Authors are attracted by the opportunity to characterize, evaluate complex phenomena in a precise, concise, but capacious in content formula, such as a technique of humor. Depending on the topic and the author's idea, the functions of humorous means in fiction may vary, but in any case their use makes the text more expressive and appealing for the reader's perception.

In her examination of Cicero's treatises on forensic rhetoric, R. Copeland highlights the essential role that rhetoric plays in the interpretation of narrative fiction^[22]. She articulates the significance of arrangement theories (*dispositio*) in understanding narrative structure and explains how rhetorical frameworks involving genre, stylistic choices, and figurative language are applied within interpretative frameworks. As was mentioned above, persuasive literary discourse has strong positions for the thesis in the text, viz., the title, the beginning or the center, and the conclusion of the text. Accordingly, the analysis has shown that writers most often use the strategies of initial, final, or double focus, placing humorous devices in the title of the short story, at the beginning, at the end, or at the center and the end of a work of fiction simultaneously.

1.2.3. Types of Rhetorical Strategies

The writer aims to 'inform' the reader about a particular fictional world; but also he needs to achieve a rapport with readers, an identity of viewpoint whereby the contents of the fiction are interpreted and evaluated in an appropriate way^[23]. Challenges in this endeavor often stem from the fact that novels and short stories are confined to the written medium.

An effective strategy in persuasive rhetoric is the incorporation of humor or satire to highlight the most distinc-

tive character traits of a protagonist or antagonist. Similar to other artistic expressions, narratives convey their significance through indirect means; thus, humor serves as a crucial device that enables authors to evoke emotional responses. By employing nuanced, often implied allusions, humor helps to critique certain traits of a character in a work of fiction by laughing at the many varieties of human eccentricity and folly. Reformulating Ana-Karina Schneider's words, we can say that the author or narrator's tricks "are an invitation to the reader to take part in the fun"^[24].

Rhetorical analysis involves an examination of the strategies employed by writers in their use of language to shape reader response, concentrating on the discrete components of a text to elucidate how linguistic choices produce intended effects. This implies that, beyond mere content, authors strategically utilize rhetorical techniques to communicate and reinforce their concepts, thereby impacting their readers. In contexts of persuasive communication, the objective of the author is to convince the reader to pursue a specific action or embrace a particular ideology.

In fictional writing, authors utilize both deductive and inductive reasoning to advance storyline and cultivate intrigue or understanding. Deductive reasoning, characterized by its progression from general principles to specific instances, can establish a sense of inevitability within a narrative or illuminate the logical capabilities of a character. Conversely, inductive reasoning, which moves from particular observations toward broader generalizations, can generate suspense, introduce an element of mystery, and empower readers to actively engage in discovering the truth.

Deductive reasoning operates on the principle of applying universally accepted premises to specific scenarios, resulting in irrefutable conclusions. This technique is a powerful tool for authors seeking to establish a sense of inevitability. By presenting characters with established rules or principles, authors allow readers to anticipate specific outcomes based on those rules. For example, if a character understands that "the butler always rings the doorbell before entering," they can logically conclude that "the butler hasn't entered" if the doorbell remains silent.

Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, proceeds from specific instances to broader generalizations. While conclusions drawn through inductive reasoning are likely to be true, they are not guaranteed with absolute certainty. Authors of-

ten employ this technique in mystery novels, presenting a series of seemingly unrelated events and challenging both the fictional detective and the reader to discern connections and patterns.

While deductive reasoning guarantees a conclusive outcome given valid premises, inductive reasoning offers probable conclusions subject to revision based on new evidence. Both methods can generate suspense: deductive reasoning through the revelation of a character's astute deductions, and inductive reasoning through the gradual accumulation of clues, allowing readers to anticipate the resolution. Ultimately, the choice between deductive and inductive reasoning depends on the author's desired effect and the specific demands of the narrative.

The culture-specific features of English literary discourse or its idiomaticity can manifest themselves in preferences in the choice of discourse structure, as well as in the manner of presenting information in the text. As a study conducted by Anna Mauranen showed, Anglo-American authors use initial-focus strategies, or deductive argumentation strategies, in contrast to Finnish authors, who prefer final-focus strategies or inductive argumentation strategies^[25]. Thus, culture-specific features of English academic discourse are evident in its rationality and empiricism, linearity in the presentation of ideas, the use of deductive strategies of argumentation and metadiscourse^[26]. English discourse has its roots in analytical philosophy, which, undoubtedly, influences the choice of composition and rhetorical strategies. This structure, therefore, can be seen as a prototype for many other types of discourse, including literary discourse.

While traditional narratives often follow a chronological structure (beginning with "once upon a time" and ending with "and they lived happily ever after"), stories can be organized in diverse sequences. Authors possess the freedom to manipulate narrative structure to create suspense, potentially by withholding information or presenting details out of order.

Inductive reasoning promotes active reader participation, encouraging them to engage in the process of discovery and anticipate the story's conclusion. Modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Graham Greene revolutionized storytelling by employing inductive argumentation techniques. These methods allowed for deep exploration into the complex inner lives of their characters, revealing their thoughts and perceptions with unprecedented intimacy. Ulti-

mately, narrative structure is a powerful tool that writers can wield effectively when employed with careful consideration and intent. In literature and cinema, four primary types of narrative structures are frequently utilized: linear, nonlinear, circular, and parallel.

Thus, as was mentioned above, persuasive literary discourse positions the thesis in strong locations within the text, viz., the title, the beginning, the center, and the conclusion of the text. Accordingly, the analysis has shown that writers most often use the strategies of initial, final, or double focus, placing humorous devices in the title of the short story, at the beginning, at the end, or at the center and the end of a work of fiction simultaneously.

2. Materials and Methods

Humor is part of British culture. The early twentieth century constituted a golden age for humor. This was a period when irony turned into a pervasive rhetorical tool. This era was shaped by new trends in two powerful literary schools: realism of classical literature and innovation of modernist literature. As a matter of fact, the 20th century novel/short story focuses more on the inner world of characters than on the outer social world. For the same reason many writers preferred to concentrate on the so-called ‘anti-heroes’, who might better personify the doubts and contrasting impulses that characterise humanity in the 20th century. Besides, English discourse has its roots in analytical philosophy, which, undoubtedly, influences the choice of composition and rhetorical strategies. The structure of the twentieth-century discourse, therefore, can be seen as a prototype for many other types of discourse, including literary discourse. As I am concerned with the issue of the functioning of humor in literary discourse, I chose the twentieth-century literature for analysis. The writers working at that period contributed a lot to the theory of satirical style.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) employed innovative techniques like stream of consciousness, nonlinear narratives, and fragmented forms to express the intricacies of human cognition and the disorienting nature of modern life.

John Galsworthy (1867–1933), a renowned English novelist and playwright, distinguished himself with a unique form of realist naturalism. His works explored the inherent selfishness, elitism, and materialism he perceived in human

nature, yet he approached these themes with empathy. He is considered a key figure in subverting Victorian literary norms and beliefs, particularly through his insightful portrayals of the challenges and often — unfulfilled desires of women within marital relationships.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) stands as a prominent literary figure of the 20th century, acclaimed for his diverse body of work encompassing novels, plays, short stories, and critical essays. His keen insight into human nature informed narratives that delved into the intricacies of individual psychology.

Agatha Christie (1890–1976) is an acclaimed author best known for her seminal contributions to the genre of crime fiction. Her works are characterized by elaborate plot constructions, ingenious clues, and unforeseen revelations, captivating audiences across generations.

Graham Greene (1904–1991), a prominent English writer of the 20th century, is known for his exploration of the human psyche in his literary works. His novels frequently examine the intricate relationship between individual actions and their psychological underpinnings, often reflecting his devout Roman Catholicism through themes of sin and guilt.

In conclusion, the early twentieth century was a period marked by profound and sweeping transformations. These encompassed global conflicts, technological advancements, ideological clashes, and significant cultural shifts. The ramifications of this era continue to resonate in contemporary societies and international affairs, underscoring its lasting influence on the trajectory of human history. Twentieth-century literature distinguished itself from the rigid conventions of Victorian writing through innovative forms, thematic explorations, and narrative techniques. This departure from tradition allowed authors to grapple with the complexities of modern existence. The exceptional skill these writers demonstrated in employing humor was a primary factor in selecting their works for this research. Apart from the above-mentioned justification for the selection of texts, the inclusion criterion for the selection of texts proved to be the author/character’s perspective. The author’s or character’s point of view, in a lighthearted or sardonic tone, either acts as the starting point for the plots or as an inductive summary of their arguments.

The view of literature as a discourse type available for interpretation like other discourse types has been very in-

fluent as it has opened the way for research integrating different fields. A discourse approach is particularly interesting when applied to literature, precisely because of the possibility of dealing with the notions of dynamism and of different processing levels. The former, which views text as an evolving process instead of a fixed entity, facilitates an understanding of literariness as an active and ongoing phenomenon rather than a mere end product^[27]. The latter, the idea of processing at different levels of understanding, eg at pragmalinguistic or linguistic-stylistic processing levels, allows the reader to interpret as meaningful texts that make a point of being deliberately complex and often obscure. Therefore, the linguistic material in the present paper is analyzed through discourse approach, pragmalinguistic and linguistic-stylistic methods of research.

3. Results

Numerous fictional narratives aim to impart explicit ethical teachings or central message, often termed “moral” or “thesis.” These morals frequently constitute the core focus of short stories, akin to thesis-driven novels. Notably, a significant number of 20th-century literary works, especially short stories, directly and unequivocally convey moral instruction. The narrative’s thesis stands as one of its most salient thematic elements. It represents an idea, principle, or lesson that the implied author seeks to convince the implied reader to embrace^[28]. Infusing humor into the thesis can make it more persuasive. Readers are more likely to remember content that elicits laughter, and can lead to greater acceptance of the underlying message. The persuasive effect is further amplified by compelling arguments that arise from narrative or situational ironies, thus fostering a persuasive discourse. Henceforth, having considered the relations among rhetoric, narrative theory, and humor studies, as well as all the ways of humorous techniques arrangement in English literary discourse, I would like to illustrate them with the following excerpts from short stories by British authors.

3.1. Initial-focus Strategy in a Linear Narrative

In linear narratives the strong position is at the beginning of the story, viz., introduction. Implying that a character possesses a particular trait without providing precise information enables individual readers to interpret the story in varied

ways. A striking example of this is found in “Rain”, where the reasons behind the antagonist’s actions are suggested, but not clearly explained.

Excerpt 3

It was only because he was of an argumentative mind that in their cabin at night he permitted himself to carp.

“Mrs. Davidson was saying she didn’t know how they’d have got through the journey if it hadn’t been for us,” said Mrs. Macphail, as she neatly brushed out her transformation. “She said we were really the only people on the ship they cared to know.”

“I shouldn’t have thought a missionary was such a big bug that he could afford to put on frills.”

“It’s not frills. I quite understand what she means. It wouldn’t have been very nice for the Davidsons to have to mix with all that rough lot in the smoking-room.”

“The founder of their religion *wasn’t so exclusive*,” said Dr. Macphail with a chuckle.

(Maugham, W.S., *Rain*, p. 122)

Here, the wife’s words, suggesting they were the only people on the ship the Davidsons wanted to know, made Dr. Macphail grin. He made a witty remark about Mr. Davidson’s snobbery. Here we can observe a play on presuppositions, viz., the interplay between the presuppositions “a missionary is a person sent on a religious mission” and “a missionary is a messenger of God”, implying that God is more likely to identify with the first presupposition (understatement “wasn’t so exclusive”). Wit, often employed by members of higher social strata for satirical or pointed commentary, can be categorized as a form of irony^[29].

Excerpt 4

He went up to it and tore the record off. She turned on him.

“Say, doc, you can that stuff with me. What the hell are you doin’ in my room?” “What do you mean?” he cried. “What d’you mean?”

She gathered herself together. No one could describe the scorn of her expression or

the contemptuous hatred she put into her answer.

“You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You’re all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!” Dr. Macphail *gasped*. He *understood*.

(Maugham, W.S., *Rain*, p. 180)

Ironically, Mr. Davidson, attempting to convince a woman with reduced social responsibility to change her behavior, is himself seduced by her. Unable to cope with the failure, he commits suicide. In the final scene the author uses omission (Dr. Macphail *gasped*. He *understood*.), implying that the doctor realized the truth, which ultimately produces an ironic effect.

Excerpt 5

Polly knew that she was being watched, but still her mother’s persistent silence *could not be misunderstood*. There had been *no open complicity* between mother and daughter, *no open understanding* but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. Polly began to grow a little strange in her manner and the young man was evidently perturbed.

(Joyce, J., *The Boarding House*, p. 123)

In this story, Mrs. Mooney, who runs a boarding house, is concerned about marrying off her daughter. She learns that her daughter is having an affair with Mr. Doran, a thirty-five-year-old man who has worked in an office for many years. Mrs. Mooney understands what is going on between her daughter and Mr. Doran, but she waits for the right moment to take the offensive, protecting her daughter’s interests. Mrs. Mooney and Polly understand each other without words. The author uses litotes (*could not be misunderstood*) and ironic understatement (There had been *no open complicity*... - *no open understanding*), thus implying that they were unanimous in their willingness to induce Doran to marry Polly. This unanimity is emphasized through syntactic parallelism.

Excerpt 6

At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet and ran to the banisters. “Polly! Polly!”

“Yes, mamma?”

“Come down, dear. Mr. Doran wants to

speak to you.”

Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.

(Joyce, J., *The Boarding House*, p. 130)

In the final scene, Polly was waiting for the outcome of her mother’s “negotiations” with her suitor. She felt relaxed and seemed to forget what she had been waiting for. It was only after being called by her mother that she recalled what she had been waiting for. The final sentence has the ironical implication: Polly relied on her mother to such extent that she forgot entirely about the whole affair in her daydream.

Thus, a humorous device located at the beginning of the text suggests some implication about a certain trait of the main hero (or heroes) that determines their actions and the ensuing twist in the story.

3.2. Final-focus Strategy in Literary Narrative

3.2.1. Final-focus Strategy in a Circular Narrative

The arrangement of plot elements within a narrative is known as narrative structure. A circular narrative structure returns the reader to the initial point of the story. This technique frequently underscores themes of fate or cyclical recurrence, emphasizing the repetitive nature of events. The opening often subtly hints at the conclusion, providing a sense of completeness as the narrative concludes where it began. For example:

Excerpt 7

“For Sissy Miller.” Gilbert Clandon, taking up the pearl brooch that lay among a litter of rings and brooches on a little table in his wife’s drawing-room, read the inscription: “For Sissy Miller, with my love.”

It was like Angela to have remembered *even Sissy Miller, her secretary*. Yet *how strange it was*, Gilbert Clandon thought once more, that she had left everything in such order — a little gift of some sort for every one of her friends. It was *as if she had foreseen her death*.

(Woolf, V., *The Legacy*, p. 195)

The narrative unfolds exclusively from the viewpoint of Gilbert Clandon, a rather accomplished political figure

grappling with the recent passing of his wife, Angela. At the onset of the story, Gilbert is bewildered by Angela's behavior leading up to her unforeseen death. She had meticulously prepared thoughtful presents for each of her acquaintances, creating the impression that she might have anticipated her death. Although there is no specifically designated gift for Gilbert, he speculates that she may have meant for him to inherit the fifteen-volume diary she kept throughout their marriage. He remains completely unaware of the latest events in his wife's life. This uncertainty and his confused state of mind are reflected in the free indirect style of narration.

Excerpt 8

Then he opened the door, pausing on the threshold as if a sudden thought had struck her stopped.

"Mr. Clandon," she said, looking straight at him for the first time, and for the first time he was struck by the expression, sympathetic yet searching, in her eyes. "If at any time," she continued, "there's anything I can do to help you, remember, I shall feel it, for your wife's sake, a pleasure...."

With that she was gone. Her words and the look that went with them were unexpected. It was almost as if she believed, or hoped, that he would need her. A curious, perhaps a fantastic idea occurred to him as he returned to his chair. Could it be, that during all those years when he *had scarcely noticed her*, she, as the novelists say, *had entertained a passion for him*? He caught his own reflection in the glass as he passed. He was over fifty; but *he could not help admitting* that he was still, as the looking-glass showed him, *a very distinguished-looking man*.

(Woolf, V., *The Legacy*, pp. 198–199)

The arrival of Sissy Miller, Angela's longtime friend and secretary, interrupts Gilbert's contemplations. Sissy, visibly upset, accepts the brooch intended for her but declines Gilbert's offer of financial assistance, proposing instead to help him should he require it. Unfortunately, Gilbert misinterprets Sissy's offer of support as a gesture of a sexual nature. The author uses indirect free thought to reveal the politician's narcissistic tendencies, who referred to himself

as "*a very distinguished-looking man*." Furthermore, ironic understatement ("*had scarcely noticed her*," "*could not help admitting*") highlights his attitude towards Sissy as inferior.

Excerpt 9

"Who," he thundered, "is B.M.?"

He could hear the cheap clock ticking on her mantelpiece; then a long drawn sigh. Then at last she said: "He was my brother."

He was *her brother*; *her brother* who had killed himself. "Is there," he heard Sissy Miller ask, "anything that I can explain?"

"*Nothing!*" he cried. "*Nothing!*"

He had received *his legacy*. She *had told him* the truth. She *had stepped off the kerb* to rejoin her lover. She *had stepped off the kerb to escape from him*.

(Woolf, V., *The Legacy*, p. 205)

Following Sissy's exit, Gilbert starts to peruse Angela's diary. He takes satisfaction in noting the numerous mentions of him and his professional life. However, as he continues through the entries, he observes a decline in the frequency of his name, contrasting with an increasing presence of the initials B.M. Gilbert concludes that B.M. must have proposed to Angela to take on the role of his mistress. He reaches out to Sissy to confirm B.M.'s identity. It was a shock for Gilbert, used to being patronizing and self-centered, to learn that his wife, as a matter of fact, loved her secretary's brother, designated in the diary by the initials B.M. The meaning of the word "legacy" is played upon here: the contrast between the positive connotation associated with the word "legacy" and its actual meaning (*She had told him the truth about her unfaithfulness*) is revealed by the situation and the context in which it is used. The title "legacy" resonates with his disclosure, acquiring the ironic tinge. Thus, the twist in the story is accompanied by co-construction of verbal irony.

In conclusion, anaphora and parallelism (*She had stepped ... She had stepped ...*) shape the rhythm and impact, conveying his feelings of complete disappointment and bitterness from the loss of his illusions.

3.2.2. Final-focus Strategy in a Nonlinear Narrative

In the 1930s, G. Greene's short story analyzes themes of death, horror, and suspense. "Proof Positive" explores the

polarities of life and death, and attempts to solve the issue of the primacy of matter or spirit. The nonlinear technique often involves starting a story at a crucial point, then gradually revealing background information through flashbacks and other temporal shifts. By exploring a character's experience across different time periods, nonlinear narratives offer deeper insights into their psychological development and emotional complexities. For example:

Excerpt 10

...Weaver said in a voice which carried halfway across the hall, "It's cancer in my case."

In the shocked, vexed silence that followed the unnecessary intimacy he began to speak without waiting for any introduction from Crashaw. [...] He paid a few compliments to the local society; his remarks were just sufficiently exaggerated to be irritating. *He* was glad, he said, to give them the chance of hearing *him*; *what he had to say* might alter their whole view of the relative values of matter and spirit.

(Greene, G., *Proof Positive*, pp. 34–35)

The narrative revolves around a gathering of the 'Local Psychical Society,' where the featured speaker, Major Weaver, delivers a lecture that is boring or frightening to everyone in the room by his appearance and incoherent thought. He causes the feelings of hostility and irritation in people, for example, by his admission that he had cancer. His high self-esteem is evident in his claim that he is going to tell them about his experience. Constant references to himself (*He...him*) and emphatic construction (*what he had to say*) are intended to emphasize his 'great achievement'.

Excerpt 11

What the Colonel thought of most was Weaver's claim – "Proof positive" – proof, he had probably meant, that the spirit outlived the body, that it tasted eternity. *But all he had certainly revealed* was how, without the body's aid, the spirit in seven days decayed into *whispered nonsense*.

(Greene, G., *Proof Positive*, p. 38)

During his report, Mr. Weaver claimed that the spirit

could outlive the body, and this was irrefutable proof. The irony of the situation is that he dies during his report. Colonel Crashaw's sarcastic remark about the spirit (oxymoron "*whispered nonsense*") emphasizes the idea of the meaninglessness of Weaver's experiment. The chain of emphatic constructions (*What the Colonel thought of most...*, *But all he had certainly revealed ...*) shapes the rhythm and impact, conveying the Colonel's feelings of indignation and contempt. The title in this context takes on an ironic tone due to the violation of expectations.

Thus, feelings and emotions of characters in the final scene seem to be their indirect evaluation of the events or another character in the story by way of free indirect discourse. Readers are more easily persuaded through emotions, rather than messaging grounded in reason or logic. Writers resort to final-focus strategy to convince readers through characters' emotional reactions to the events/another character in the story. This approach shapes rhythm and impact, conveying their perspectives. As a result, the title resonates with the sarcastic remark, acquiring an ironic tone. What we observe here is co-construction of verbal irony. The irony is not solely embedded in the expression of the statement itself^[30]. Clift emphasizes the collaborative nature of verbal irony construction within interactions, suggesting that the context created by the character's concluding comment can be a crucial element in the interpretation of a title as ironic.

3.3. Double-focus Strategy in Literary Narrative

In a circular narrative structure, the conclusion of the story mirrors its beginning. Despite this symmetry in starting and ending points, the character(s) experience a significant transformation influenced by the events of the narrative. Narrative irony, which is more specific and readily identifiable, occurs when there is a discrepancy between what the characters and readers know, often happening in dialogue. The reader frequently possesses more information about the circumstances than a character. For example:

Excerpt 12

Mrs. Forestier did not know how she could ever have kept her reason after the loss of the man who was everything in the world to her but for the Hardys' wonderful kindness. In

her immense distress their unfailing sympathy was her only consolation. They, who had been almost eye-witnesses *of her husband's great sacrifice*, knew as did no one else *how wonderful he had been*. She could never forget *the words dear Fred Hardy had used* when he was breaking the dreadful news to her. It was *these words* that had enabled her not only to bear the frightful disaster, but to face the desolate future with the courage with which she well knew that brave man, that gallant gentleman, whom she had loved so well, would have wished her to face it.

(Maugham, W.S., *The Lion's Skin*, p.130)

In British culture, the politeness principle probably accounts for the use of 'white lies' in conversation. In this situation the Hardys' words of consolation and their acknowledgement of Captain Forestier's heroic act (*of her husband's great sacrifice, how wonderful he had been*) had enabled her to survive, despite their seeming sincerity. Mrs. Forestier found her consolation in a good memory of her husband as of a true gentleman, who, risking his life, made an attempt to save her dog.

Excerpt 13

Robert's face grew red, he clenched his fist and half rose from his chair.

"Damn you, stop talking about my wife. If you mention her name again I swear I'll knock you down."

"Oh no, you won't. You're *too great a gentleman to hit a feller smaller than yourself*." Hardy had said these words mockingly, watching Robert, and quite ready to dodge if that great fist struck out; he was astounded at their effect. Robert sank back into his chair and unclenched his fist.

"*You're right*. But only a mean hound would trade on it."

(Maugham, W.S., *The Lion's Skin*, p. 155)

Captain Forestier relied completely on his wealthy spouse, maintaining an impeccable appearance, playing golf, and dining at Riviera restaurants. Conversely, Fred Hardy identified Robert as the individual who washed cars at the

garage. In response, Robert refuted any association with the garage and asserted that he had never encountered Hardy prior to this interaction. Hardy behaved familiarly, making facetious comments about his wife. That infuriated Robert, and he threatened to beat him up. In response, Hardy quipped sarcastically that such a great gentleman was unlikely to hit a guy smaller than himself ("*You're too great a gentleman to hit a feller smaller than yourself*"). Much to his surprise, Robert agreed with him, failing to grasp Hardy's "blame by praise" along with his self-deprecation, which, overall, produced comic effect. In this situation irony seems to be mock politeness or, to be more precise, indirectly conveyed impoliteness, masquerading as politeness^[31]. This proves to be the main focus of the story, somehow predicting his ridiculous death. Despite his gloss and an impeccable appearance, Robert remained a garage mechanic, never having crossed the divide between understanding literary mentions and suggestive allusions.

Excerpt 14

He told her *as gently as he could*, but he had to tell her, and he had to tell her everything. At first it seemed as though she could not grasp the sense of what he said.

"Dead?" she cried. "Dead?" she cried. "Dead? My Robert?"

Then Fred Hardy, the rip, the cynic, the unscrupulous ruffian, took her hands in his and said *the words that alone enabled her to bear her anguish*.

"Mrs. Forestier," he *was a very gallant gentleman*.

(Maugham, W.S., *The Lion's Skin*, pp. 163–164)

Robert Forestier had deceived himself all his life so that he believed in his own lies. His pretense of being an English gentleman on the Riviera seemed so real to him that he tragically rushed into a house on fire to save his wife's dog. Trying to win "his match point" in order to be one of the aristocrats, he died while saving a dog. Ironically, recognition of him as a gentleman was just what he was aiming for, even at the cost of his life. This pretence as seeming acknowledgement of Robert's heroism acts as a final chord of this story.

Thus, in a circular narrative the writer may resort to double-focus strategy of argumentation. Within a circular

narrative, the prevalence of narrative irony is correlated with a cultural shift away from a commitment to sincerity. The idiom “white lie” embodies the standard of behaviour in Anglo-Saxon community in accordance with “culture of conformism”, “culture of compromise”. Broadly speaking, narrative irony represents a challenge to preconceived notions, occurring when the hero can mock at another character and at the same time, in a tragic situation, he may act as a gentleman. This gesture that appears simple and noble, at first glance, is cleverly distorted or undermined, frequently with a touch of subtle humor.

3.4. Double-focus Strategy in Situational Comedy

A notable characteristic of English literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is the emergence of irony as a crucial element, significantly influencing this period and the entire 20th century. Most short stories were written in the genre of humorous short stories, commonly referred to as sketches. This particular genre is marked by elements of low comedy, i.e., situational humor. Typically, these short stories encapsulate a brief moment in the protagonist’s life. The hero is impersonal, the author does not give him an individual characteristic, highlighting one, dominant feature, on the basis of which the plot is built. In humorous short stories, the image of an eccentric hero is often encountered, traditional for the novels/short stories of that period. The technique of situational humor serves them for an additional comic characterization of the hero, revealing their character. In prose fiction, this technique is the main one, and is used, as a rule, not to individualize the hero, but is rather a structure-forming element that unites a number of comic situations. For example:

Excerpt 15

Undoubtedly one of Mr Parker Pyne’s *greatest assets* was *his sympathetic manner*. *It was a manner* that invited *confidence*. He was well acquainted with *the kind of paralysis* that descended on clients as soon as they got inside his office. *It was Mr Pyne’s task* to pave the way for *the necessary disclosures*.

(Christie, A., *The Case of the Discontented Husband*, p. 218)

In this situation Mr Parker Pyne appears as a clever businessman, involved in human affairs, setting matters right, e.g., reuniting a husband and a wife. The story highlights Mr Pyne’s skill in understanding and manipulating human emotions to achieve a desired outcome. The humor in the situation is achieved through the use of hyperbole (*greatest assets*, *the kind of paralysis*). The excerpt abounds in emphatic structures (*It was a manner that ...; It was Mr Pyne’s task ...*) so that it sounds more like an advertisement for his business to attract more clients to his office, which, overall, produces a humorous effect.

Excerpt 16

“I suppose you have a lot of men friends,” said Mrs Wade.

“Oh, yes. I like men better than women. *Women are never really nice to me*. I can’t think why.” “*Perhaps you are too nice to their husbands*,” said Mrs Massington with a tinkly laugh.

(Christie, A., *The Case of the Discontented Husband*, p. 226)

Reginald Wade is trying to win back his wife’s love so that she does not leave him. He turns to Parker Pyne for help to save his marriage. Pyne decides that the charming Madeleine de Sara is what Reggie needs to console him and make his wife jealous. In this situation, Madeleine de Sara, playing the role of Reginald’s lover, pretends to admit that women have always treated her badly. Mrs. Massington sarcastically remarks that perhaps it is because she treats their husbands too well. This sarcastic mockery (“blame by praise”) through wordplay on the attribute “*nice*” (*Women are never really nice to me* vs. *Perhaps you are too nice to their husbands*) is levelled at Madeleine de Sara, creating comic effect.

Excerpt 17

“Enter the Queen of Vamps,” said Mr Parker Pyne, smiling.

“*Vamps!*” said Madeleine. She gave a hollow laugh. “*I’ve never had such uphill work being a vamp*. That man is obsessed by his wife! It’s a disease.”

(Christie, A., *The Case of the Discontented Husband*, p. 231)

In this example, irony is achieved through echoing Mr Pyne's words^[32]. The ironic attitude is reinforced by hyperbole (*I've never had such uphill work*). Miss Madeline de Sara doubts the efficacy of her charms in this situation.

Excerpt 18

"Is she here?" he demanded, advancing into the room. "Where is she?" He caught sight of Madeleine. "Darling!" he cried. [...] "...I don't know why I was blind so long. *But I've known for the last three days.*"

"*Known what?*" said Madeleine faintly.

"*That I adored you.* That there was no woman in the world for me but you. Iris can bring her divorce and when it's gone through you'll marry me, won't you? Say you will, Madeleine, *I adore you.*"

(Christie, A., *The Case of the Discontented Husband*, pp. 232–233)

Mrs. Wade's marital dissatisfaction led her to seek companionship outside of her marriage with an individual named Sinclair Jordan. Parker Pyne, a renowned problem-solver, devised a plan to rekindle Mrs. Wade's interest in her husband by encouraging Mr. Wade to engage in a harmless flirtation. Subsequently, a week later, Madeleine, a staff member of Parker Pyne, visits his office to provide an update on the situation. She confesses her inability to charm Reggie. However, things did not go according to Mr. Parker Pyne's scheme. Reggie falls in love with Miss Madeline de Sara and decides to break up with his wife. Unexpectedly, the door swings open, and Reggie enters, expressing his sincere love for Madeleine. Anadiplosis (*But I've known... - Known what?*) and framing (*I adored you ... I adore you*) reinforce an emotional appeal for Madeleine to marry him. This unexpected turn of events creates a comical situation. In this humorous situation the characters find themselves in absurd circumstances. As a matter of fact, the unexpected turn of events was not what Pyne was expecting. The incongruity between expectation and reality is exaggerated for comedic effect.

Excerpt 19

"Ahem!" said Mr. Parker Pyne. "I regret to admit it, but it was *an error of judgement on my part.*" He shook his head sadly, and

drawing Mr. Wade's file towards him, wrote across:

FAILURE – owing to natural causes.

N.B. – They should have been foreseen.

(Christie, A., *The Case of the Discontented Husband*, p. 234)

In the final scene Mr. Parker Pyne had to admit his failure in the case of Mr. Wade. He recorded a verdict of failure with more precise definition "*They should have been foreseen*". The title of the story is an example of register-based humor, in which most of the language is in a conversational style or tone, except for one word (legal term "the case") which is radically different in tone (or register) from the rest^[33]. The title resonates with the verdict delivered, which, overall, creates a humorous effect.

Excerpt 20

The actor, Gilbert Caister, who *had been "out"* for six months, emerged from his east-coast seaside lodging about noon in the day, after the opening of "Shooting the Rapids", on tour, in which he was playing Dr Dominick in the last act. A salary of four pounds a week would not, he was conscious, remake his fortunes, but *a certain jauntiness* had returned to the gait and manner of one employed again at last.

(Galsworthy, J., *The Broken Boot*, p. 27)

The story is about a poor, unemployed actor Gilbert Caister, who had recently received a small role in a theatre touring the seaside. Here the author makes a witty remark about the actor's unemployment, using slang (*had been "out" for six months*). Understatement "*a certain jauntiness*" implies that despite his miserable existence, the actor continues to believe in his high destiny and his happy future, which, overall, reinforces the humorous effect and makes the reader smile.

Excerpt 21

... and in front of the window he removed that hat, for under it was his new phenomenon, not yet quite evaluated, his *mèche blanche*. Was it an asset, or the beginning of the end? It reclined backwards on the right side, conspicuous in his dark hair, above *that shadowy face*

always interesting to Gilbert Caister. [...]

He walked on, and became conscious that he had passed *a face he knew*. Turning, he saw it also turn on a short and dapper figure — *a face rosy, bright, round, with an air of cherubic knowledge*, as of a getter-up of amateur theatricals.

Bryce-Green, by George!

(Galsworthy, J., *The Broken Boot*, p. 28)

Here the author uses synecdoche (*a face*) to create an implicature: the actor is preoccupied with his appearance as all actors are. Appearance is an important part of the actor's profession. Accordingly, Gilbert Caister recognizes his friend, with whom he communicated in his youth, by his appearance. The "*face*" becomes an important identification sign for him.

Excerpt 22

"And what do you think of the state of the drama?"

[...] Caister drawled his answer: "Quite too bally awful!"

"H'm! Yes," said Bryce-Green; "*nobody with any genius, is there?*" And Caister thought: "*Nobody with any money.*"

(Galsworthy, J., *The Broken Boot*, pp. 29–30)

During his walk Gilbert Caister met the director of amateur performances and philanthropist Bryce-Green, with whom he had been previously acquainted. Bryce-Green invited him to dinner, during which he asked about the current state of the theatre. Trying to impress the patron, he criticized the state of the drama. Supposedly he agreed with his comment; however, in his thoughts Caister reformulates his erroneous comment ("*nobody with any genius, is there?*") as echoic restatement, a type of echoic mention^[32], conveying the feelings of bitterness and gloomy pessimism of a retired actor who does odd jobs.

Excerpt 23

Silence recalled him from his rings of smoke. Bryce-Green was sitting, with cigar held out and mouth a little open, and bright eyes round as pebbles, *fixed – fixed on some object near the floor*, past the corner of the tablecloth. [...] Out there above the carpet he

saw it – his own boot. It dangled slightly, *six inches off the ground – split – right across, twice, between lace and toecap*.

(Galsworthy, J., *The Broken Boot*, p. 31)

Despite his attempts to put on airs in order to be at the same level with Bryce-Green, his footwear revealed the truth of his plight. Once a noble gentleman, he had to face the reality of rocky and poverty-stricken life. The art of satire in this story is straightforward and double-edged. Comically exaggerated circumstances, in which Gilbert Caister finds himself, are emphasized graphically, by means of dashes in speech (*six inches off the ground – split – right across, twice, between lace and toecap*).

Excerpt 24

The waiter came skating round as if he desired to clear. Must go! Two young women had come in and were sitting at the other table between him and the door. He saw them look at him, and his sharpened senses caught the whisper:

"Sure – in the last act. Don't you see his *mèche blanche?*" "Oh! Yes – of course! Isn't it – wasn't he - I"

Caister *straightened his back; his smile crept out*, he *fixed his monocle*. They *had spotted his Dr Dominick!*

[...] He gathered himself and rose. The young women were gazing up. *Elegant, with a faint smile, he passed them close, so that they could not see, managing – his broken boot*.

(Galsworthy, J., *The Broken Boot*, p. 32)

Mr. Caister, for whom acting has become a way of existence and survival in this world, keeps up his image of a talented actor, successful in his profession, in every possible way. He overheard the customers in the restaurant whispering about him, when they recognized him. Encouraged by that attention, he walked majestically past them, trying to hide his broken boot from their admiring gaze. Here dashes in speech, as represented graphically, shape the rhythm and impact, adding nuance and emphasis to the message being conveyed. The description of his tactic, which he undertook when leaving the restaurant, took on a satirical tone in the final scene (*he passed them close, so that they could not see,*

managing – his broken boot). Thus, grief gives way to joy, balancing the hero's life and implying that the life-affirming beginning should prevail in everyone's life.

Consequently, humor serves as a dynamic and impactful literary tool within the realm of fiction, capable of crossing cultural and temporal divide while enriching narratives with cleverness, enjoyment, and intellectual richness. The writer creates comedic situations or situations in which characters encounter absurd, ironic, or humorously exaggerated predicaments. Various stylistic, prosodic, and graphical techniques are employed to heighten the incongruity between expectations and actual outcomes for comic effect.

4. Discussion

Thus, narrative types, despite their varied manifestations, represent compositional units organized by a certain perspective (author, narrator, or character). However, when examining narratives, it is crucial to consider two key aspects. Firstly, narration creates the illusion of the author's absence, while in reality, the author's perspective and expressiveness shape the reader's interpretation of the text. Furthermore, an author's narrative often aligns with the viewpoint of one or more characters.

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth articulates that the act of reading inherently fosters a dynamic and implicit conversation. This exchange encompasses not only the relationship between the author and their crafted narrative, but also extends to an implied dialogue among author, narrator, fictional characters, and ultimately, the engaged reader themselves^[34]. These four elements can be positioned along a spectrum ranging from complete identification to total opposition across various dimensions, including moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical values. Anglo-American authors typically engage in greater metacommunication compared to authors writing in other languages. Consequently, texts produced in the Anglo-American context exhibit a higher level of reflexivity than those written in other linguistic traditions. The rhetorical strategy guides the reader through the progression of the text, introducing them to the core idea and the arguments presented by the author. This rhetorical approach is more interactive and can be characterized as reader-oriented. In a literary work, rhetorical strategies can encompass stylistic devices such as irony, understatement, wit, sarcasm, and

satire. These devices are strategically positioned within the text (at the beginning, middle, or end) and often interact with situational or narrative ironies, ultimately contributing to the creation of a persuasive discourse.

Built on the ideas of writers' personal relation to the topic, authors employ humor to ridicule a distinctive trait of the character as humor often revolves around mocking the failings of others. At the same time humor also plays a vital role in fostering rapport and identification with readers, thereby enhancing the likelihood of their agreement with the author's perspective. Additionally, humor can effectively undermine counter-arguments, rendering opposing viewpoints absurd.

As the predominant function of the twentieth-century literature is the education of its readers, works of fiction aim to convey specific moral or philosophical insights and are often categorized as 'thesis narratives.' In these thesis-oriented formats, the moral themes typically dominate the overall narrative structure. Within the realm of English short stories from the twentieth century, humor serves as a crucial facet of interaction among the author, narrator, characters, and the reader. While often perceived merely as a tool for entertainment in casual exchanges, humor also enhances persuasive communication as readers are generally more receptive to wit and sarcasm. Consequently, humor has attracted considerable scholarly attention from philosophers and researchers across disciplines, including linguistics, literature, and philosophy. The primary motivation behind this scholarly inquiry lies not only in the quest to elucidate human behavior but also in exploring how humorous techniques are woven into fictional works and how they facilitate the realization of the author's intentions. The author/character's perspective functions as the starting-point for deductive argumentation, ending in the ensuing twist. Conversely, inductive argumentation ends with a final statement expressing the antagonist's point of view. In situational comedy writers resort to double-focus strategy, highlighting situational humor in comic situations. Overall, the cumulative effect of the story's humorous devices is powerful, if somewhat predictable.

Thus, humorous devices highlight the main points in the short story and push forward the development of the narrative as well as evoke the readers' emotions, involving them ultimately into the communication with the author. Feelings

and emotions of characters in the final scene seem to be their view of the events or another character in the story by way of free indirect discourse. The crossover between logos and pathos in humorous means enhances their impact, creating a persuasive discourse. Overall, the successful combination of humorous devices and situational/narrative irony, or situational humor produces ironic or humorous effect in the narrative discourse.

5. Conclusions

The paper is concerned with the functioning of humorous devices in a particular discourse genre. In the present paper, I have attempted to overview the research on humor in literary narratives, and the main goal of this work is to explore the persuasive potential of humor in the context of literary discourse. The objective of the study is to explore the rhetorical purpose of humorous devices in English literary discourse, by delving into the intricate relationship between rhetorical disposition (arrangement) and humor placement strategies (e.g., of initial/final/double focus).

C. Colebrook notes that literary works are frequently evaluated based on their ironic weight, defined as “its capacity to mean something other than a commonsense or everyday use of language”^[35]. Consequently, interpreting subtleties and uncovering the implications of a text has emerged as a central concern in literary analysis. A persistent challenge faced by scholars studying irony is the tendency to equate it with humor. Ironically, irony and sharp sarcasm are fundamental elements of British humor. It is important to understand that humor is a broad category encompassing various forms of expression, including irony, understatement, self-deprecation, sarcasm, witticisms, satire, and others.

Humor exhibits significant cultural variation, playing a prominent role within British society. The disparities in humorous expression observed between Britain and the United States can be partially attributed to societal class distinctions. As an older nation, Britain historically exhibited pronounced differences in social standing and cultural practices among its various classes. Consequently, humor in Britain reflects this diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of styles. This concept is not new; ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle recognized different types of humor: coarse humor reliant on slapstick and buffoonery, contrasted with refined humor

based on wordplay, incongruity, and surprise.

Humor is a powerful and versatile literary tool that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, enhancing narratives with wit, entertainment, and intellectual depth. Scholarly analysis reveals several key functions of humor in communication: mitigating social discomfort, expressing hostility, demonstrating fortitude during adversity, providing stress relief, facilitating persuasion and manipulation, and even challenging established norms within formal discourse. Notably, in twentieth-century literature, humor frequently serves to satirize particular character flaws.

Furthermore, humor proves to be a highly effective persuasive tool. By employing ambiguity, wordplay, wit, irony, and comedic situations, it can influence readers more persuasively than arguments reliant solely on logic or reason. One of the most common reasons why it is used is to create some humorous situations. However, it can also engage readers, emphasize points, criticize ideas, or add a layer of depth to the text that has been presented. Moreover, employing humor as a tool for persuasion could enhance its efficacy as a comedic technique may not only capture attention but also create a surprise effect. The uses of humor are multifaceted, but this can often be best shown through simply exploring a number of different examples of humor in works of fiction.

As the analysis of linguistic material shows, a humorous device placed at the beginning of the text suggests certain character traits of the main hero (or heroes) that determines their actions and the ensuing twist in the story. Writers resort to final-focus strategy to convince readers through characters’ emotional reactions to the events/another character in the story. Feelings and emotions of characters in the final scene seem to be their indirect criticism of others in communication.

The writer creates comedic scenarios in which characters are placed in ridiculous, ironic, or significantly exaggerated situations. Various stylistic, prosodic, and graphic techniques are employed to amplify the incongruity between expectation and reality for humorous effect. A common comedic trope involves a character perceiving a circumstance as perilous—potentially undermining their self-worth—despite posing little actual risk to the reader. The interplay of situational humor with sharp, sarcastic commentary results in an engaging and persuasive narrative.

An important role in narrative study is played by the

author/character's perspective, ironical or jocular, acting either as the basis for the plot's progression or as an inductive summary of their logic. As the study shows, British authors use initial-focus strategies, or deductive argumentation strategies, as well as their complementary final-focus strategies or inductive argumentation strategies. In situational comedy they resort to double-focus strategy, highlighting situational humor in comic situations.

To sum up, while previous research on humor focuses on the study of jokes, our results show that humorous devices have persuasive potential in literary narratives. These findings suggest that investigators can identify the author's message by their perspective, which would considerably facilitate the process of interpreting the text.

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the influence of persuasive techniques within literary texts. It focuses on exploring ideas and formulating a theory of persuasive strategies in literary discourse. It is important to acknowledge that this study, due to its qualitative nature, has inherent limitations. Future research endeavors could potentially adopt a multidisciplinary approach, comparing the impact of persuasive strategies across both literary and other discourse types. Exploring the impact of persuasive strategies, eg within journalistic contexts, while comparing findings with those of this study, would undoubtedly offer valuable insights.

In conclusion, humor can be characterized as a craft that involves the strategic placement and indirect expression, achieving its efficacy through various techniques such as understatement, paradox, puns, and diverse forms of wit to articulate incongruities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of all humorous devices is largely contingent on the recognition and manipulation of contrasts or incongruities among words or events and their respective contexts. The incongruity between words or events and their contexts appears to be a fundamental aspect of irony. Violation of expectations accomplished by situational or narrative irony in the end of the story seems the most compelling argument in the author's reasoning. Co-construction of verbal irony appears to be the concomitant effect, in most cases.

The ironic or jocular perspective of the narrator or character not only imparts an ironic or comical tone to the entire narrative, but also determines the development of events, which ends in an unexpected turn of events or an unfore-

seen outcome. Throughout the whole story, the writing is a winning combination of dry humor and arguments, and the cumulative effect is wonderfully entertaining.

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