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Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. Historical Development of Farce	3
1. The Middle Ages to the 16th century: Farce as “comic relief”	3
2. The 17 th and 18 th centuries: Farce on its way to becoming a distinct Genre	5
3. The 19 th century: The Peak of Production	9
4. The 20 th century: Farce and the Modern Drama	14
III. Freud and Psychoanalysis	22
1. The beginning of a Theory	22
2. The early Psychoanalytic System	23
3. Freud’s late Psychoanalytic System	28
IV. Redeeming Laughter – Freud and the British Farce	33
1. Freud’s Understanding of the Comic, Jokes and Humour	33
2. Jokes – The main Ingredient of Farce	35
2.1. The Psychogenesis of Jokes	35
2.2. Redeeming Laughter – How Farce affects the Audience	37
2.3. Three Conditions for a successful Joke – The Secret of a successful Farce	40
2.3.1. <i>The first condition: Every joke calls for a public of his own</i>	40
2.3.2. <i>The second condition: Make sure that the audience must laugh</i>	40
2.3.3. <i>The third condition: Intensify the cathexis</i>	48
2.4. The Technique of Jokes – Devices of the Farcical Dialogues	49
2.4.1. <i>Verbal jokes - The play with words</i>	49
2.4.2. <i>Conceptual jokes – The play with thoughts</i>	58
2.5. The Purpose of Jokes – Reaching the Unconscious of the Audience	70
2.5.1. <i>Harmless vs. tendentious jokes – Silent smile vs. loud laughter</i>	70
2.5.2. <i>Tendentious jokes – Expose and attack</i>	71

3. The Comic – Basic Devices of the Farcical Action	76
3.1. The Essence of the Comic	76
3.2. The Origin of the Comic Pleasure	77
3.3. The Species of the Comic – Delightful Moments on Stage	79
3.3.1. <i>“Situational comedy”</i>	79
3.3.2. <i>The comic of movement</i>	80
3.3.3. <i>The comic that is found in someone else’s intellectual and mental characteristics</i>	86
3.3.4. <i>Other species of the comic</i>	91
3.4. The Relation between Jokes, the Comic and Humour	93
 V. Conclusion	 96
 VI. Bibliography	 99
 VII. Index	 102
 VIII. Appendix	 103
1. Deutsche Zusammenfassung	103
2. Curriculum Vitae	105

I. Introduction

Psychoanalysis and British drama, in particular British farces, appear on first sight to have nothing in common. It has been, and sometimes still is, the claim of critics, when dealing with farces, that this genre is the most simple and superficial in the entire theatrical world. This could be the first impression one gets when reading or watching different farces. There is no pretentious plot, one-dimensional characters dominate the play, there are only one to three acts, a harsh and coarse tone rules the stage, a lot of physical action is performed, and the whole performance seems to be, in some ways, exaggerated and overdrawn. The reputation of the genre of farce may have its roots in the historical development, where farce was involved in constant rivalry with comedy.

Farce was regarded as the play for the simple mind. However, taking a closer look at this special genre, it can be discovered that, through farce, society is reflected in an authentic way, as most farces work with the essence of human beings. What we see on stage are the innermost tendencies of our current society. The plays reflect our fears, our secret wishes and parts of our inner feelings which we don't want to face in real life, the societal structures we live by, and they are often ironic remarks on humanity in general. But in contrast to comedy or tragedy, where the aim is, in a way, to teach the audience, to make them feel and give them something to go home with in order to live better lives, the aim of farce is to make the audience laugh. The more laughter, the better the quality of the farce.

Laughter is the point where farce and psychoanalysis can be related: Firstly, when farce works with the reflection of the abysmal depths of humanity, and through certain stage and acting techniques makes people laugh about them. Secondly, when laughing is seen as the ultimate release from an inner tension that has evolved through the way in which we live in society, as to some extent repressed individuals. This second point, which involves laughing as a release from an inner tension, is in accordance with Freud's cultural theories and his theories about jokes and their relation to the unconscious. In his cultural theories Freud claims that the development of culture also implies a process of repressing inner drives, which are in turn transformed into cultural achievements, such as any kind of intellectual work and art. Through laughing

humans are able, for a short time, to evade the process of repressing and therefore experience a form of release and relaxation.

The following thesis will concentrate on the two above-mentioned aspects: farce as a genre that reflects on human nature and society in a special way, through making the audience laugh. I intend to analyze the sources of the comic and the techniques that are used within farces to excite the desired laughter. The second aspect which I will concentrate on is Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and its relation to the sources of the comic and the techniques used within farce. The emphasis is therefore on Freud's theories about jokes and their relation to the unconscious, the comic and laughter. Additionally I will deal with his theories about culture, as these provide the basis for the whole thesis. As we are, according to Freud, to some extent individuals that repress inner drives, something is needed in order to reduce these inner tensions. In the case of farce, it is the laughter that is brought about in the audience which gives us the opportunity to find relief from repressed drives. Theatre is thus seen as a kind of medium for catharsis, for the author of the farce as well as for the audience and the actors.

In the first part of the thesis an overview of the development of farce in England from the Middle Ages to the Present will be given. I will examine the development of farce in the 20th century more closely as there are several other developments in the theatrical landscape in this century which have an impact on the genre of farce. Many traditional farcical elements are used in other genres, such as the *Theatre of the Absurd*, in order to reflect on society and humanity. In the following parts of the thesis I am going to deal with Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic theory. I will concentrate on his most popular works and in turn will relate parts of the psychoanalytic theory to theatre and the genre of farce. The subsequent chapters will have their focus on the sources of the comic in farces which are analysed in accordance to Freud's theories about joking and culture. The farces I have chosen for analysis were all written in the 20th century, except for *Charley's Aunt*, which I wish to include as a brilliant farce encapsulating every ingredient which makes up a typical English farce.

II. Historical Development of Farce

As previously mentioned the genre of farce has often been looked down on with scorn by critics. There is a constant rivalry with the elevated form of comedy, though, very often there is no clear line between the two genres. Laughing is included in both genres, however, what makes farce special is the kind of laughter it provokes. It is loud and unbridled laughter which is evoked through the special type of performance on stage. Over the centuries farce has become more and more a distinct genre, and today it is an important part of British drama.

1. The Middle Ages to the 16th century: Farce as “comic relief”

The basic meaning of the word farce is “to fill” or “to stuff”, and it can be traced back to the Latin word “farcire”.¹ The first use of the term “farce” in its literary function can be traced back to the 13th century in France and England, where it was used to indicate sentences that are inserted in the litany between *kyrie* and *eleison*. These sentences were admonitions, and the word farce was used according to its basic meaning of “stuffing”. In the course of the time the Old French word *farce* was used to describe the stand-up speeches which were interpolated by the actors in the religious drama performances of the time. These interpolated elements were mainly comic episodes, and thus the term *farce* underwent a shift in meaning and was then used to describe the comical elements in the traditional religious and liturgical drama.²

The farces of the Middle Ages were characterised by their vivid and crude performances of contemporary reality. In the mystery plays of the time religious topics, such as life and death, hope and salvation and the existential themes of everyday life were unified on stage. The plot was mainly simple, situation comedy and slapstick dominated the action. One-dimensional characters who often displayed offensive language and behaviour made up another part of these early farces. What was, and still is, characteristic of the farces of the Middle Ages, and those of Modernism, is the visualization of inner experiences, emotions, feelings and mental attitudes. Therefore

¹ Cf. Drechsler, 13.

the method of personification is used as the preferred medium to transport these inner experiences to the outer world. The negative aspects of human nature are mainly emphasised and materialised through these performances, and it is in turn not surprising that the characters on stage have their fights, both physical and verbal, much to the amusement of the audience. The spectacles of the farces were a kind of release for the audience from the strict order of everyday life.³ The stage was the location where everything which was forbidden in the real world, could happen. It became the medium for the performance of everybody's repressed drives.

There has always been an ambivalent view of farce. With its excessive use of slapstick, offensive language and its loud and coarse scenes, including physical fights, farce seems to be nothing more than superficial amusement. If it is considered, however, that all the characters on stage are personified entities of human nature, the underlying depth of the plays has to be recognised. Farce is dealing with fears, aggressiveness and tragedies of human existence. As these fears, in the Middle Ages, particularly the fear of life's transience, are disguised in farcical elements, the audience are given the opportunity to face them and accordingly laugh about them.

Although farce was not known by this name in 16th century England, the practice of the genre was familiar to audiences and actors. Farcical performances, or comic episodes, were an integral part of medieval and Tudor drama. During this century there was the development of the stage-jig, a special version of "comic stuffing", including a mimed dance with dialogue which was sung to popular tunes. The jig was a great success and took audiences by storm. English theatre companies toured in England, Germany and Scandinavia and, in fact, everywhere they were welcomed and celebrated.⁴ In the late 16th century the English authors of farces were influenced by the production of farces in France and the aim was established to imitate the antique comic theatre, for example the theatre of Plautus, Aristophanes and Terenz.⁵

² Cf. Klemm, 4-5.

³ Cf. Drechsler, 15-16.

⁴ Cf. Davies, 16.

2. The 17th and 18th centuries: Farce on its way to becoming a distinct Genre

The 17th century was an important century for the popularity of farces. In 1660 the term “farce” became an official designation for comic plays. However as there was, in general, no clear division between the various genres on stage, it was especially difficult to draw the line between farce and comedy. The forerunner of the “official” farce is to be found in the Commonwealth period (1649-1660) and was called a droll. In 1649 when all theatres were closed down, there was the need to establish some form of entertainment, a project which was realised in the underground scene. There were a number of troupes of actors who toured through Britain and performed the above mentioned drolls, which were short plays aimed at amusing the audience. These troupes were highly mobile with only few or no props, always ready to leave the scene abruptly if there was imminent danger. Under such conditions it was not possible to perform the elaborated five acts of a play and the troupes had a repertoire of several one to three act drolls, which were in fact brief and coarse scenes taken from earlier five-act plays.

With the advent of the Restoration in 1660 the actors and producers of the drolls disappeared, as the tradition of five-act plays took over in the reopened theatres. The drolls were then to be found in fairs or the provinces.⁶ In the period between 1660 and 1700 the term farce was used to denote all plays which included comic elements, especially comic of action, jokes and farcical elements. The ultimate farce of the 17th century, which was kept in the repertory for over 60 years, was John Lacey’s *The Old Troop or Monsieur Raggou* (1665). It was a farce which was taken as a kind of model for the various farces performed during that century. The topic of the farce was taken from the every day life of the time. The play runs as follows: The King and Parliament are at war with one another. This war is the basis for the typical coarse scenes which include physical violence, as the atrocities and plundering of the royal troops are performed in a blunt way. The protagonists of the play are Raggou, a French cook, and the whore Doll Troop, who is pregnant and accuses all the members of the royal troops of being the father of her unborn child, in order to obtain some money or a husband.

⁵ Cf. Drechsler, 17- 18.

⁶ Cf. Hughes, 71-73; Kohl, 41-44.

The soldiers want Raggou to marry Doll Troop and want him to be blamed for the plundering as well. Raggou's evasive tactics to avoid the marriage are at the centre of the farcical action and are shining examples for the production of several other farces.⁷

There was certainly a need for many farces in the 17th century, as the audience were thirsting for funny and easy entertainment, due to the ponderous and sentimental operas and tragedies of the time. The farce was subsequently used as an afterpiece, and in the course of the time this usage of the genre became obligatory. The development of the farce in England was parallel to the development of the farce in France. Due to this parallel development a French influence could be felt on English stages, especially the influence of Molière and his farce productions. In his plays Molière focused on a certain vice of human existence and he expressed this vice on stage through personification. He used the devices of misunderstanding, family and other intrigues, disguise, verbal humour and slapstick to expose and ridicule the protagonist.⁸ However conservative arbiters of taste in England, who scorned popular applause, rejected the newly developed type of farce which had come about as a result of the influence of France and Italy on the English stages. One of the most vehement opponents of the genre was John Dryden. In the Preface to his play *An Evening's Love* (1668), he defined farce in his own terms:

That I admire not any comedy equally with tragedy, is, perhaps from the sullenness of my humour; but that I detest those farces, which are now the most frequent entertainments of the stage, I am sure I have reasons on my side. Comedy consists, though of low persons, yet of natural actions and characters; I mean such humours, adventures, and designs, as are to be found, and met with in the world. Farce, on the other side, consists of forced humours, and unnatural events. Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature: Farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. (Dryden quoted in Kohl, 70)

This quote is interesting in many ways, as on the one hand, Dryden was one of the first to define farce as a dramatic genre, and on the other hand, it was he who initiated the discussion as to whether a play is a comedy or a farce. This debate over the distinction between the two genres lasted until the 20th century. Despite Dryden's open rejection of

⁷ Cf. Hughes, 26-31; Kohl, 46; Klemm, 18- 19.

⁸ Cf. Drechsler, 19- 20.

farce, the genre developed into a favourite with the audiences, which can be partly explained by the cultural development of the time. As a result of the Restoration in 1660, the theatres were reopened, and audiences were eager for entertainment of any kind, which meant they were less critical than before the Commonwealth, and were willing, as Kohl points out, 'to swallow any nonsense' (Kohl, 87).

Another reason for the popularity of farce was a shift in the social structure of the audience from an exclusively aristocratic to a middle class one. This led to a shift in the requirements of the audience concerning the plays. They desired to see a great deal of action on stage and characters and contents they could identify with. The easiest way to satisfy this wish was through the use of the devices of episodic structure and slapstick. The comic element, in particular, found the favour of the audience, the reason being that the farcical comic very often oversteps the limits of the cultural norms, through the exaggerated performances of the individual characters. The great success of farces is also due to the actors, who use the technique of improvisation in order to communicate with the audience. A performance of farce was thus more than merely watching a play; it was a form of an experience and exchange for both, the actors and the audience.⁹

The end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century were again of great importance for farce, due to a modification of the English theatrical bill in 1703-1704, which meant that farce, which was being used as an afterpiece, became a regular part of the English theatre. This double-billing, a five-act play followed by a short afterpiece, was the result of an ongoing struggle between the two established theatre companies of the time, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Field. The constant rivalry between the houses developed as there were not enough spectators to fill each of them weekly. Various pieces of farce were therefore generated as a tool to entice the audience. A good afterpiece, meaning a farce, was a guarantee for hauling in many spectators. As the struggle for spectators continued between existing theatre companies (some closed, others opened, such as Haymarket theatre), the theatre bill expanded, including then pantomime, rope dancing and juggling.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Kohl, 84-90.

¹⁰ For a detailed elaboration of the development of farce as afterpiece in England see Hughes, 60-93.

Concerning the contents of the farce of the 18th century, it can be observed that farces typically dealt with a love intrigue, involving a loving couple who were confronted with a harsh father or uncle, an old aunt or a guardian or other relatives who tried to prevent the lovers from being together. The interest of the audience lay in the tricks and treachery by which the young lovers managed to get their own way, rather than in any romantic scenery. Other central themes were taken from everyday life, from marriage, professional life, the church and government. Especially public institutions were often used as the targets of farcical scenes. Further there was a great interest in the material aspects of life, and many farces were concerned, besides the obligatory lovers plot, with fights about large sums of money. The characters, mostly represented as plain figures, behaved like fools in order to get the money, and this awkward behaviour was the basis for the farcical action.¹¹

The episodic structure of farce allows for the use of lots of slapstick, and the desired laughter is mostly achieved through the actor's improvisation. The penultimate scene is of great importance. In this scene the confusion has reached its peak in order to be solved in the very last scene, including a happy end, according to the principle of "poetic justice".¹² Due to the historical development of farce, another tendency can be perceived as well. As the reactions of the critics were in general depreciative, there was an endeavour to adjust the genre of farce to the elevated genre of comedy. This elevation was intended to be realised by adding "wit" and "sense" to the existing aim of exciting laughter within the audience. In fact, in the second half of the 18th century the newly produced farces showed more structure: the various scenes were more firmly joined together, there was a new form of development of the characters and the intrigue was organised more tightly. Moreover, through the aim of adjusting farce to comedy, farce was now specifically referred to as farce. The term was now used to designate this specific genre.

Paradoxically, however, as farce was supposed to have been adjusted to a higher level, nobody wished a comedy to be called a farce, which resulted in a certain confusion whether a play should be labelled farce or comedy. Hence, there was a strong

¹¹ Cf. Drechsler, 20-21; Klemm, 28-30.

¹² Cf. Klemm, 36.

desire for a definition for both genres. Through this longing for exact classification farce was now at the heart of several attempts to define its substance.

3. The 19th century: The Peak of Production

Most of the innovations of the 18th century in the field of the theatre were taken over into the 19th century, when the production of farces was at its peak.¹³ In the first half of the century a farce was either used as a curtain raiser or an afterpiece, as it had become a convention in the 18th century in order to attract audiences to put on an additional short play. In the second half of the century, however, a piece of farce was introduced as a short main piece in three acts. With the advent of this introduction, a strong French influence can also be noticed, as many French farces were adapted to English stages. This was due to the fact that there was a large demand for farces in England, and this demand could best be satisfied by falling back on the excessive amount of French productions and adapting them to English stages. In contrast to the farces of the first half of the century, where the moralising and didactic element was the main ingredient of a farce with the intention to adjust it to comedy, in the second half of the century, farces became more unbridled, including sexual themes, ambiguity and verbal indecency, according to their French models.¹⁴

However, from the 1880's onwards playwrights stuck to the national way of writing and producing farces, and left out the typical French characteristics, like, for example, the over-polite character, verbal indecency and satiric elements. Instead, there was the development of traditional English rough and sometimes violent characters with the typical elements of pathetic sentimentality and squeamish prudishness.¹⁵ Arthur W. Pinero was one of the most important dramatists of the time, who renewed the genre of farce and provided new impulses for further productions. His plays *The Magistrate* (1885) and *The Schoolmistress* are held up as shining examples of farces in the 19th century. Pinero's innovation lay in the fact that he did not stick to the principle of creating a farce according to a theme and adjusting the action around it. His main

¹³ Cf. Kohl, 139-143.

¹⁴ Cf. Davis, 20; Kohl, 147.

¹⁵ Cf. Kohl, 149.

interest was in individual characters and how he could present these characters on stage in various situations. The idea of character farces was not new, but through Pinero this special type of farce was given a new impetus. He put life-like characters on stage, who became entangled in the most improbable and absurd situations. The way they dealt with the situation in a farcical manner brought about the typical unbridled laughter from the audience. The emphasis lay on the action itself, which was performed by the individual characters. The better the actor performed the special farcical behaviour of the character, the more laughter was excited. The theme of the farce was of secondary importance because, as mentioned above, the emphasis lay in the current farcical and episodic action.¹⁶

At the end of the century, the French influence became increasingly lost and there was a general return to the traditional English style, as William Archer points out:

In the department of farce we have at least shaken off the yoke of France. The most popular farces of the past four years have all been of home manufacture (Archer quoted in Klemm, 150)

The English farce became again a light-hearted piece of entertainment, which mirrored English humour par excellence.

One brilliant example of a typical English farce of the time is *Charley's Aunt* (1892), written by Brandon Thomas. It is a play performed in three acts, and is set in a college in Oxford. The frame story is about two young college men, Jack and Charley, who want to date two young ladies with whom they are in love. The first problem which comes up is the fact that the two young women intend to travel to Scotland the following day, and the second catch is that the boys need a chaperon to attend the meeting, according to the tradition of the time. The first important device of a farce, namely time, is established through the given time pressure¹⁷. The young men need to arrange the meeting as fast as possible and they need someone to watch over the loving couples. The next development of action is established through the arrival of a letter from Charley's Aunt in Brazil. She is a very rich widow who wants to see her nephew. The young men see the solution to their problems in the arrival of the aunt, as she

¹⁶ Cf. Klemm, 66-67.

¹⁷ Cf. Drechsler, 33.

should function as the watchdog. Additionally they scheme to invite Lord Fancourt, another young man attending the college, in order to entertain the aunt, so that they can devote their time to the girls. Unfortunately, at a later point a letter from the aunt arrives, postponing her visit. Meanwhile Jack's father surprisingly turns up at the college, revealing to his son that the family is out of money. Together they hatch a plan that Jack's father should try to marry the rich Brazilian aunt. The third stage of action is established by Jack's father trying to woo Charley's aunt. As she is in fact unavailable Charley and Jack press Lord Fancourt Babberly to act as the Brazilian aunt. He happens to have an old lady's costume, as he performs as an old woman in an amateur theatre group. The way the boys treat Lord Fancourt is symptomatic of the rest of the play:

JACK. You must be Charley's aunt!

LORD FANCOURT (*in dismay*). Me? No!

(CHARLEY *sizes* LORD FANCOURT *by R. arm*, JACK *holding his L. arm*. LORD FANCOURT *backs a little and sinks down*. They then *slide him across to chair L. of writing-table*. LORD FANCOURT *rises twice and each time is pushed down again by CHARLEY*, who then *gives chair a kick backwards with the heel of his R. foot, careful to kick chair while it appears to audience as if he had kicked LORD FANCOURT*, who *writhes*. JACK *leaves him and gets C. to meet girls*. CHARLEY *stands L. of the chair so as to hide LORD FANCOURT from door L.I.E*. BRASSET *enters L.U.E.*)

JACK. Show them in, Brasset.

(BRASSET *opens door, L.I.E. Enter KITTY and AMY, L.I.E. AMY carrying bunch of flowers in tissue paper*. JACK *joins them*. LORD FANCOURT *makes an arch of CHARLEY'S right arm, and looks through it to see what girls are like, much to CHARLEY'S annoyance*. CHARLEY, *furious, smacks LORD FANCOURT'S face (he actually hits his own arm)*. LORD FANCOURT *draws back as though his face had been hit, clamping his hand over his nose and mouth.*)

Ah! You've got back. So glad! (Charley's Aunt, 32-33)

Lord Fancourt in his disguise constitutes the core of the farce, and provides the basis for every kind of farcical action and situation comedy. The interaction between the three boys very often takes place on a violent physical level; they bump one another, kick each other, and push each other whenever they disagree. It is a constant game of hide

and seek, which leads to the most bizarre situations. In the course of the play several characters enter the stage, such as Mister Spettigue, the uncle of one of the two girls, who learns about the wealth of the supposed aunt. He is also after the old lady's money, and he and Jack's father cause a great deal of laughter when making advances to the disguised Lord Fancourt. A typical theme of the time is hence integrated in the play in the actions of the two men, namely the desire to obtain a large sum of money. But it is for different reasons that the men long for Donna Lucia's wealth. Mr. Spettigue wants the money for his own selfish enrichment, whereas Jack's father desires the money to provide his son with a better future:

JACK (*turning to C.*). Well, dad – anything important?

SIR FRANCIS (*coming down R.C. to JACK, C.*). Yes, Jack, it is.

JACK. Oh, what is it?

SIR FRANCIS. You know I'd do anything to see you get on in the world, and make a mark – as I know you will, if you get your chance –

JACK. You needn't tell me all this, dad.

SIR FRANCIS. Well, Jack, having thought it over I've decided that you shall continue the career I originally mapped out for you, and seeing a way out of the difficulty, I've determined to take your advice, my boy, and marry a lady of wealth.

JACK. I see, you've fallen a victim to the fascinations of some young and lovely-

SIR FRANCIS. No, Jack, she's not "lovely" – and I'm afraid she is not over "young" – but she has one thing in her favour, she has *money* which, after all, is the real object in this instance.

JACK. All right, dad, as long as you are satisfied, go in and win!

SIR FRANCIS. And I have to thank you, my boy, for the tip.

JACK. Thank *me* for the tip? I don't remember, dad. Who is she? What is her name?

SIR FRANCIS. You'll be delighted when I tell you!

JACK. Yes. Well?

SIR FRANCIS. Can't you guess?

JACK. No, dad, I can't!

SIR FRANCIS. Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez. (*Slapping JACK on the shoulder and crossing L.C.*)

JACK. What? (*Goes R.C. – aside*) The deuce! (*Turning to SIR FRANCIS*) Dad, this is impossible! (Charley's Aunt, 51)

Jack forgets about the plan he made with his father, and so the bizarre flirtation between Jack's father and the disguised Lord Fancourt takes its course. The following scenes disintegrate into a "flirt combat" between the two men, which, of course provides a lot of material for the farcical slapstick.

Between all the chaotic actions during the meeting with the girls, Charley's real aunt arrives with a girl called Ela. The disguised Lord Fancourt recognises Ela as his lost love, and Donna Lucia, Charley's aunt, tells the sad love story of her youth. Thereby a subplot is established, by means of Lord Fancourt's and Donna Lucia's love stories. In the course of the play the action centres around concealing the secret that Lord Fancourt is not the real aunt, and on the several unhappy love stories. An episodic structure is provided through the constant introduction of either new characters or new love stories. The comicality is transported through the farcical action on a physical level, as well as on a language level where comic dialogues dominate the conversations, as, for example, the following one where Sir Francis proposes to Donna Lucia.

SIR FRANCIS (*aside*). Well, I've put myself to it, so I must come to the point.
 (*Clears throat again*)
 LORD FANCOURT. What, again?
 SIR FRANCIS (*going to R. of table – aloud bluffly*). Donna Lucia, do you know what a man longs for when he's lonely – desolate- and wretched?
 LORD FANCOURT. A drink?
 SIR FRANCIS (*goes down R. – aside*). What a woman – doesn't help one a bit! (*Up to R. of table – aloud*) No, Donna Lucia, this is what he longs for – he longs to plant in his own heart that bright little floweret.
 LORD FANCOURT. I know – by the wayside (*pointing L.*) – that one. Does he really?
 SIR FRANCIS (*heartily*). Yes, Donna Lucia, yes. (*With lover-like intention*) And I have come all the way from India to find that little floweret.
 LORD FANCOURT. You must be tired. (*Indicating chair*) Take a chair.
 SIR FRANCIS. Thank you. (*Sits R. of table C., puts hat, crown downward on C. table*) It's a long way, Donna Lucia.
 LORD FANCOURT. Oh, quite a long walk.
 SIR FRANCIS. But I have *found* it. (Charley's Aunt, 57)

As farce works according to the principle of poetic justice, the entire chaos is disentangled providing a happy ending for all the characters. The real Donna Lucia recognises her lost love in Sir Francis and they fall in love again. Additionally Sir

Francis' financial problems are solved and he can provide Jack a future at college. Mr. Spettigue consents to the marriage of the girls with the boys. Lord Fancourt and Ela recognise each other again and fall in love.

Charley's Aunt is a farce which is performed up until today in the most important theatres of the world. It is a farce par excellence and a typical example of 19th century productions in England.

4. The 20th century: Farce and Modern Drama

In the 20th century there are two different kinds of theatre, namely the theatres of commerce and those of the fringes. According to this split in the theatrical landscape there are different attitudes concerning the aim of the theatre in general. In the 1890's the *new drama movement* was established, which was a movement opposed to the commercial theatres. Participants of the *new drama movement* wanted to reform theatre. They wanted to bring new contents and new ways of acting onto the stage. Theatre was supposed to be more than a social gathering with entertainment; it should become a medium for social reform and power.

George Bernard Shaw was one of the authors who wanted to contribute to such a reformation of the existing theatre.¹⁸ Shaw wrote in conscious reaction against the theatre of his time. His view of the existing theatre was, that it was romantic, idealistic and simply not true, thus society never had the opportunity to change, as there was no input that could cause any reform. Shaw's aim was to provide this input that could give society the opportunity to reflect, to think about recent conditions and to change things where it was necessary. He wanted to lift the masks, to discover the truth and to show that real life is different from what we often think is real.¹⁹ Concerning the genre of farce, Shaw, like many other critics, despised it and wanted to bring more rationality into this type of performance. His aim was, as Davis states, 'to "humanize" the conventionally heartless materials and to lift his audiences above mere entertainment' (Davis, 21). He attempted to create more depth and called his newly invented farces, "farce á these", meaning that his farces had a thematic aim. He used the typical devices

¹⁸ Quaschnowitz, 30.

¹⁹ Mengel, 13, 14.

of farce and tried to bring in the intellectual and rational element through the dialogues between the characters on stage. The typical physical farcical action was then enlarged through wordplay, which meant that most of the action was transferred to the level of language. There was always a serious intention behind all the horseplay, in most cases it has been a satiric remark about society and its conventions. Nevertheless, Shaw's endeavour to elevate the genre of farce in this special way was an exception to the rule. The audience wanted to see what they were used to, and thus Shaw's newly generated farces did not have the desired success.²⁰

But the credit for numerous innovations in the field of farce, especially the way he created characters, and the way in which he used stage effects goes to George Bernhard Shaw and his longing for a theatre with more intellectual appeal. Farce, however, is a genre which is tied to the expectation of light entertainment and to making the audience laugh, thus other authors, such as Ben Travers, who was famous for his farces at the Aldwych theatre in the 1920's and 30's, or Somerset Maugham, had more success in this special field. They took over some of Shaw's innovations, but worked in the traditional way of the theatre of the time.²¹

The commercial theatres made it their business to endow the audiences with what they wished for, namely an evening full of light entertainment. They stuck to their traditions and conventions in order to keep their theatre goers. The West End theatre became a kind of trade mark, and in 1908 there was the foundation of the SWET, the Society of West End Theatres. It was the task of this organization to protect their own interests and to increase the reputation and exclusiveness of the West End theatres. The targeted audience was the upper and higher middle class, although spectators from the lower class also contributed much to the profit of the theatres. Members of the upper class celebrated an evening in the theatre as a social event and performances were tailored to their tastes, likes and dislikes. The West End theatres were run by so called actor – managers, actors who additionally managed theatres. They knew what the audience liked, and satisfied them with the actors they loved, and with dramatists who wrote the plays in the style they were used to.²² The West End theatres worked

²⁰ Cf. Kohl, 168-70; Klemm, 158-175.

²¹ Cf. Klemm, 74.

²² Cf. Quaschnowitz, 29-31.

according to the principle of hedonism and profit, thus there was no space for any experiments which could cause discomfort within the audiences. There was rarely a representation of the dark side of life, and there was an endeavour not to show too much of a reality which nobody wanted to see. No wonder that farce had a prominent position in the West End theatres, as it provided everything which was necessary for an entertaining evening in the theatre. Farce was the ideal genre to please the audience of the Edwardian Age, where much attention was put on the conventional decorum. During the actual performance farce provided a release from this etiquette of the time, as space was created for loud and unbridled laughter, thus the reputation of farce was, in the field of the commercial theatre, again at its peak.²³

The beginning of World War I can be regarded as the end of the Edwardian Age, and with the end of World War I was also the end of the period of actor-managers. The English stages were taken, step by step, under the wings of syndicates, who regarded theatre solely as business. The sole aim of these new theatre managers was profit and not quality. They worked according to the principle of the *long run*, meaning, that a chosen play was performed excessively, as long as it achieved the required profit. When the expenditures of the play exceeded the incomings the play was taken off the programme.²⁴ This working according to the principle of the *long run* was also due to the growing costs of production and the increasing rents demanded for the theatres. The consequences of such circumstances were that the quality of the performances reached their lowest level. However, it was not only the new managers of the theatres who contributed to this low quality on the English stages. There were also new audiences in the theatres, namely soldiers and their companions, who were looking for light and easy entertainment in order to forget about the horrors of the war. Additionally, there was no contribution from the *new drama movement* to the theatrical scene, thus War-time theatre was left on its own.²⁵ Farce was once again an ideal genre contributing to the theatre of the time, as it was loved for its escapist function, which was intended to make the audience forget about the war through laughing.

²³ Cf. Quaschnowitz, 32.

²⁴ Cf. Mengel, 61, 62.

²⁵ Cf. Quaschnowitz, 75, 76.

The time after World War I was, on the one hand a time of hilarity with people always looking for new impetus, but, on the other hand, it was a time of disappointment and disillusionment. The 1920's and 30's were a period of economic, political and social instability. The landed gentry had lost its leading position to the newly developed plutocracy and there was a clear-cut division between rich and poor. There seemed to be an abyss between the generations, which led to a great potential for internal and external conflicts. Women demanded a right to vote and to have more rights in society in general. Increasing numbers of women had a job, and more and more women lived as single women. Values such as marriage, family, church and religion were called into question and there was also a change in sexual moral concepts.

These changes in society were also reflected in the theatre of the time, as genres with a high degree of entertainment, such as revue, musical comedy, thriller and farce, flourished most of all. The London West End Theatre had become a full entertainment company suffering from economic pressure, which resulted in plays including only a small cast, established actors and conventional directors. This development was also due to the fact that theatre had new competitors, namely cinema and radio and that there was no new impetus to the recent developments in the theatrical landscape, as even the *new theatre movement* withdrew from the scene.²⁶

World War II did not bring much change concerning the development of the theatre. In 1939 the theatres were closed, but reopened a short time after largely in the provinces. In 1941 some of the West End theatres reopened as well and they continued the traditions of the 20's and 30's. Apart from the West End there was a renewed development of the amateur theatre groups, and the repertoire theatres of the provinces also started again to give performances. In 1940 there was the establishment of the *Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts*, which meant that since then there had been the beginning of a new theatre policy.²⁷ However, despite all the difficult developments in the theatrical world of that time, farce had never lost its popularity among the audiences. During the war years it was the perfect medium to enable people to forget about the horrific events of real life. After the Wars it became the genre which guaranteed an assured success. Farce is extremely flexible, and farcical elements were

²⁶ Cf. Quaschnowitz, 100-101.

²⁷ Cf. Maack, 105-106.

used by many authors to attract audiences, and so this genre has also found its way to the Modern Theatre, as the following example will show.

In the second half of the century, during the 1960's, there was the development of the *Theatre of the Absurd*, which represented an important contribution to the Modern Theatre and the European tradition. The *Theatre of the Absurd* designated a group of dramatists who came mainly from Europe. Although they carried out their projects very differently they shared a common view about reality. The ideological basis of the *Theatre of the Absurd* is the philosophical tradition of existentialism, which is expressed on stage through a symbolic code of acting. The central themes are those of feelings of emotional and mental homelessness, of being uprooted and of a metaphysical fear of existence, which seems to be pointless due to the loss of values and faith. The aim of the *Theatre of the Absurd* is the expression of the feeling of absurdity of existence in a world where nearly everything is regulated by the intellect. Existentialism rejects rational discernment and advice, as reality stems from every individual's subjective perception of the world. In the beginning the reaction to the *Theatre of the Absurd* was determined by perplexity and rejection, however over time the new genre became increasingly accepted, and today some plays are considered well known classics of the theatrical landscape world wide.²⁸

Alongside with the *Theatre of the Absurd*, the absurd farce made its way onto the English stage. This might be explained by the fact that in its essence farce deals with the same ambiguity as the *Theatre of the Absurd*. Both genres contain a sceptical view of the human being and its living conditions. In the traditional farce this ambiguous view of mankind and society is realized through the presentation of characters in real life situations and how these characters lose, by and by, control over the situation and start to behave in an exaggerated and sometimes hysterical manner. The emphasis of the traditional farce is on the action level, and the devices of misunderstanding, coincidence and slapstick are used in order to make the audience laugh. In the absurd farce, the main emphasis is on the visualization of inner conflicts of the characters, and in order to make the audience digest the performance of existential loss more easily, farcical elements and devices are employed. The existential elements are not as obvious as in the *Theatre*

²⁸ Cf. Drechsler, 2-3.

of the Absurd, where through the reduction of language and the constant role changes confusion is created within the audiences. However it can be said, that in contrast to the traditional farce where the aim is to provide the audience with light entertainment, in the absurd farce the aim is to reflect about society in a critical way, and to use the farcical elements consciously to reach the audience.²⁹

As mentioned above, farce whether traditional or absurd, in its essence has always dealt with the human being and its position in the world. The success of a piece of farce is assured by the comic elements within such a play, but paradoxically it is also these elements which are responsible for the negative criticism of the genre, which designates it to superficial entertainment. Humour and the comic are phenomena of their own, which are difficult to grasp, and there have been several attempts to analyse the essence of them. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Charles Baudelaire, Henri Bergson and many others dealt with humour from different perspectives. However, there is not one theory which takes hold of the phenomenon of humour as a whole. In the field of psychology the forerunner in the study of humour was Theodor Lipps followed by Sigmund Freud, who wrote the famous book *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious* (1905). In this book Freud deals with humour and the effect of laughter on the human psyche. He provides an explanation of our need for laughter and tries to explain why we seek out opportunities which enable us to have a laugh.

Farce is built upon laughter; nearly everything takes place in order to excite the desired hilarity and Kohl points out that:

Die Hauptaufgabe der Farce ist, das Lachvermögen des Zuhörers anzuregen. Die Unterscheidung zwischen der Farce und anderen Gattungen des komischen Dramas kann in der Hauptsache nur auf Grund ihrer W i r k u n g erfolgen, die sie beim Publikum auslöst und muß folglich auf der N a t u r d e s L a c h e n s selbst beruhen. (Kohl, 178)

The authors of farces are wrongly accused of producing superficial and undemanding plays and Kohl further claims that:

²⁹ Cf. Drechsler, 102.

In der Vorherbestimmung des psychologischen Effekts liegt die Schwierigkeit für den Farcenschriftsteller, und gerade hierin zeigt sich seine Meisterschaft, daß der imstande ist, die für die Farce charakteristischen, logischen Spannungen bewusst zu meistern. (Kohl, 179)

Creating a farce has never been an easy task. In order to produce a good farce the playwright needs to reflect society. The audience is most willing to laugh about the abysmal depths of humanity and society when they are confronted with incidents from the everyday life, which are presented in an amusing, often, exaggerated way, so that the tragedies of life can be laughed about. Furthermore, farce is not only “a bit of clowning on stage”; it is strictly organised and well thought-out, with the intention of creating the above mentioned logical tensions, which subsequently trigger loud and unbridled laughter.

The following sections of this thesis will focus on the sources of the comic within farces which are related to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. I have decided for the psychoanalytic approach of the genre, as it offers the opportunity to explain why farce holds this successful position in the theatrical world. In his cultural theories, as well as in his theories about humour and jokes, Freud provides some interesting insights into the human psyche, which can be used to analyze farce and its effects on the audience from a psychoanalytic view. However, there are several other reasons why I wish to link farce with psychoanalysis: the genre of farce is fascinating as it polarises: it is both loved and hated. Initially I tended to look down on farce, yet at the same moment I was fascinated by something which I could not explain in the beginning. Whilst reading more and more farces, particularly those of the 20th century, I was unable to identify any form of superficiality. It appears that behind all the horseplay, there lies an existential truth about human beings, their fears, hopes and insecurities.

The fascinating aspect of farce is that everyone is invited to reflect on the depth of such a play, although no one needs to do so, as farce also provides a superficial side whereby comic elements allow for an entertaining evening. Finally, I perceived the link to psychoanalysis, initially through the study of Freud’s theories about culture, whereby he points to the reason why we need the arts as a form of sublimation for our repressed inner drives. It was Freud’s theory about humour and jokes and their relation to the

unconscious which prompted me to analyse farces in the light of parts of the psychoanalytic theory. The main aim of farce, namely to trigger loud laughter, is one basic reason for analysing farce in the light of Freud's theories, as laughter is not only seen as the guarantee for the success of the genre, but also as a medium for cathartic release within the audiences.

Farce therefore also reaches a higher aim, namely, in psychoanalytic terms, the release of inner tensions which cannot be expressed in the real world. The stage is perceived as the medium where everything can take place, everything is allowed, and cultural norms lose their power. Furthermore the cathartic function of farce also serves the needs of the author, as, through writing a piece of farce, he/she finds his/her release within the act of writing contents which are out of the cultural norm. Additionally farce also has a cleansing effect on the actors. On stage they act out what might be an emotion which would normally be repressed and relegated to the unconscious in real life. Examples of this can be found within the numerous scenes of physical action, where (unconscious) inner aggressions could be released through acting a scene including, for instance, a physical fight.

Emphasis is laid on two aspects of Freud's theories: One aspect is that of the cultural, where I understand, according to Henk de Berg, Freud's cultural theories as a kind of social critique, where psychoanalysis 'provides an analysis of the relationship between individuals and between the individual and society' (Henk de Berg, 2). This facet of psychoanalysis is one essential point when dealing with farces, as many plays basically deal with a critical view of the individual and his/her relation to society. The second aspect which I have used as a tool for the analysis of the selected farces is Freud's theory about jokes and the comic and their relation to the unconscious. Therefore I have utilized his famous work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) as my main source, as in this book Freud deals with the most important sources of the comic, from a psychoanalytic perspective.

The analytic part is divided into two sections, whereby the first section deals with jokes and the level of language within farces. The second section will be concerned with the comic and the level of action. Additionally, and for this thesis as important as Freud's theory about jokes and the unconscious, is his work *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). In it Freud provides some interesting explanations for any kinds

of parapraxes which happen in everyday life. From a psychoanalytic perspective these mistakes that seem to happen accidentally are determined by the unconscious of the psyche, and could provide a deeper insight into the real/unconscious motivations of an individual. Many of these mistakes, as described by Freud, are consciously used by many authors in order to create a comic effect within a farce. These parapraxes, when used in a play, are thus an important source of the comic.

In the following I will give a short overview of Freud's life and the development of the psychoanalytic theory, as it might be interesting to bear in mind how Freud came about his famous ideas of the unconscious, before we start to investigate his special field of the comic in relation to the British farce.

III. Freud and Psychoanalysis

1. The beginning of a Theory

Sigmund Freud was born on May 6, 1856 in Freiberg where he spent the first three years of his life. In 1859, when Sigmund was three years old, his father decided to take his family to Leipzig, partly due to economic difficulties, and partly as a consequence of Czech nationalist resentment of Jews. Not more than one year later the whole family settled in Vienna, which was to be Sigmund Freud's home for the rest of his life. At the age of nine Sigmund began to attend the Sperl Gymnasium, a high school in Vienna. During this time he won many prizes and distinctions and was the top of his class.

In 1873 Freud entered the University of Vienna in order to study medicine. He was not overwhelmingly interested in medicine itself, and in his fourth year he became a student of physiology under Ernst Brücke. In Brücke Freud had found a second father, and he admired him as a great scientist. From 1876 to 1882 Freud worked at the Physiological Institute, where Brücke set him to work on the histology of the nerve cells of *Petromyzon*, a spinal animal. Freud, at this time, was influenced by Darwin's theory and through his studies of comparative anatomy and embryology he was able to contribute a further piece of evidence towards the Darwinian hypothesis, which was at

that time still a subject of controversy. Freud's early work in neurophysiology, anticipating the modern concept of the neuron theory, is the basis of neurology today.

In 1879 he had to do his compulsory military service in the Austro-Hungarian Army. In 1881 he passed his final examinations and took the degree of doctor of Medicine. In 1882 he began to practice, on the advice of Brücke, at the General Hospital in Vienna. This was due to the financial difficulties of his family, who were now dependent on his personal earnings. It was in the same year that Freud got to know Martha Bernays, his future wife.³⁰ In 1883 the young scientist was appointed a post in Meynert's Psychiatry Clinic, due to his brilliant histological research, and in 1895 he was appointed lecturer in neuropathology and became a *Privatdozent* at the university.

From 1885 to 1886 Freud worked in Paris with the celebrated French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, who impressed him with his method of hypnosis, which he used as an instrument for healing medical disorders. Charcot stimulated Freud's growing interest in the theoretical and therapeutic aspects of mental healing. Nervous ailments became Freud's speciality and in the following years he founded the psychoanalytic theory of the mind.³¹

2. The early Psychoanalytic System

Freud gradually established a lucrative medical practice in Vienna, where he, step by step, developed his famous psychoanalytic theory. The first cornerstone in his early system was the development of the method of free-association. This method, of letting the patient talk about whatever came into his mind, was revolutionary in Freud's own times, as it meant that the physician had to renounce the element of domination and control over the patient. In 1890 he developed the concepts of "resistance", meaning the difficulty which the patient experiences in recalling his past, "repression", the unconscious tendency to block out painful memories and "conversion" meaning the transformation of painful memories into physical symptoms. The second great cornerstone of psychoanalysis is called "transference", meaning the process by which, during the course of analysis the patient projects, his repressed infantile feelings onto

³⁰ Cf. Costigan, 1-14.

³¹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, x-xii.

the person of the analyst. By consciously admitting such feelings and by re-enacting them with the analyst himself as the new love object, the patient can experience psychic relief. It was then in the year 1896 when Freud named the new technique “psychoanalysis”. An indispensable part of psychoanalysis was the process of inquiring into the sexual life of the patient, a process that was startling to the medical practice of the nineteenth century, and which in turn led to a partial loss of Freud’s reputation.³²

There were more and more hostile receptions towards Freud’s work, and the university’s neurological institute was therefore closed to him. In 1896 Freud’s father died, which was a profound personal experience for the scientist. His father’s death triggered many long-buried recollections which sprang unbidden into his life and the following summer he started his famous self-analysis (1896-1899), including the systematic analysis of his dreams, which led to the writing of his great work *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).³³ The book was one of the two cardinal texts, the second being *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), written by Freud explicating the principles of Psychoanalysis. Freud himself considered this writing as the key to his work. It comprises the Topographic Model, which explains that the ‘psychic apparatus as a compound instrument’ (Freud, *Interpretation*, 378) consists of an unconscious (Ucs), a preconscious (Pcs) and a consciousness part (Cs). The book also contains the famous principles of the Oedipus complex, the work of repression, the struggle of desire and defense and it provides a wealth of material from case histories. Furthermore it demonstrates how unconscious forces shape our mental and emotional lives, and it describes the clinical method of the interpretation of dreams.³⁴

Though the *The Interpretation of Dreams* is today generally recognized as one of the most important works by Sigmund Freud, in the year of its first publication it was almost entirely ignored by the medical profession. Those who paid attention to the book condemned it with scorn. For Freud the next six years were marked by bitterness, isolation and poverty. In 1902, due to the influence of a former patient Baroness Marie Ferstel, Freud was given the title of Professor at the University of Vienna. It was, however, not the title of “Professor Ordinarius”, meaning full professor. This title he did

³² Cf. Costigan, 22-41.

³³ Cf. Costigan, 45-55.

³⁴ Cf. Gay, 104.

not obtain until 1919. For Freud, living in Vienna was a misery, and he never ceased to detest the city. It was, on the one hand, the poverty and the rejection of his work which made Vienna an unpleasant place to for the scientist to live, and on the other hand, it was the constant presence of virulent anti-Semitism which brought bitterness into his life. During the years following *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud wrote and published many works, and for the first time he attempted to lay his ideas before as wide an audience as possible.³⁵

In 1901 the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* was published and this book found a wider audience. This could be due to the fact that it is the easiest book for the layman to approach on the subject of psychoanalysis. The *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* deals with all kinds of unconsciously motivated mistakes that occur in daily life, such as slips of the pen, slips of the tongue, the forgetting of names and so on. Freud was able to show how repression was constantly at work, not only within dreams and neurotic people, but also among healthy people living everyday lives. For example, when analysing a slip of the tongue, Freud could prove that the unintended word which comes to our lips, expresses our real intention. The momentary amnesia which inhibits our memory and the unintended word, are a compromise between the conscious intention and the repressed thought. Relating this part of the psychoanalytical theory to theatre, it can be observed that these unconsciously motivated mistakes, as described by Freud, are very often used in plays, prominently in farce, in order to create comical scenes. Freud also postulated in this work a strong determinism, as it is the basic premise of the book, that many kinds of familiar daily actions which had hitherto been ascribed to chance were in fact determined by psychic laws. With this discovery Freud contributed towards circumscribing the field of mental free will and he claimed that determinism reaches much farther than we suppose.³⁶

In 1905 the two books *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* appeared. Inspired by Fliess, who remarked that his *Interpretation of Dreams* was surprisingly full of jokes, Freud began to investigate jokes, and found out that their essence lay in the inner processes involved. These processes, namely condensation, displacement and indirect representation, he further

³⁵ Cf. Costigan, 81-89.

³⁶ Cf. Costigan, 108-111; Freud, *Psychopathology*, 160.

claimed, were the same processes as those in the “dream work”. Freud then postulated the following hypothesis concerning the way in which a joke is formed in the first person:

A preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception. (Freud, *Jokes*, 205)

Freud drew distinctions between dreams and jokes, stating that a dream is more disguised and tends to take over a passive ego, while a joke can also come from nowhere, just like a dream, but in this case the ego is more in the charge of the situation. Dreams serve the purpose of the avoidance of displeasure, and jokes, on the other hand, serve the purpose of the attainment of pleasure. Good humour, as Freud found out, produces moments of highly valued pleasure being a brief triumph of the psyche over the forces of repression or the pains of reality. There are several types of jokes, for instance, the “innocent joke” which raises a little smile and the “tendentious” one, which usually produces loud laughter. The slight pleasure which derives from the verbal technique of a joke is, in Freud’s view, a form of fore-pleasure. This fore-pleasure can relax the listener and thereby prepare that person to experience some deeper sexual or aggressive promptitude usually kept hidden. In relation to the theatre it can be said that the audience is in a constant state of fore-pleasure whilst watching a farce, waiting for the next opportunity to laugh and therefore experience this release from hidden tensions. In this way new pleasure is facilitated by momentarily lifting suppressions and repressions and enabling a more intense release of affect in the form of laughter.³⁷

In his book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud outlined perversions and “normal” development, from childhood to puberty, with a lack of censoriousness and openness hitherto virtually unknown in medical literature. For him it was the second book of importance after the *The Interpretation of Dreams*, explaining his view of infantile sexuality. On the whole it is Freud’s claim that sex is not confined to sexual intercourse between adults of opposite genders. His conception of sexuality is wider than that, and to it belongs the notion that sex is to be found in the child’s life, thoughts

³⁷ Cf. Erwin, 292.

and wishes. The development of sexuality is part of a person's affective development as an individual, and there are obstacles to such a development. With most people, their childhood sexuality, to some extent, remains unchanged, thus infantile sexuality is to be seen not only in the young child, but also in the adult.³⁸

In the following years Freud expanded his theory more and more, and also applied to other fields, such as literature (*Gradiva*, 1907), painting (*Leonardo da Vinci*, 1919) and sculpture (*The Moses of Michelangelo*, 1914). Freud's first contribution to anthropology and social thought was in 1913 with the publication of the writing *Totem and Taboo* in which Freud claimed that cultural institutions, such as religion, totemism, exogamy rules and the incest taboo, represented neurotic defenses and compromise formations (symptoms) on the group level. Totemism, according to Freud, was the precursor of religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, and it was an ambivalent and guilt-laden attempt to overcome the son's primordial oedipal aggression against the primal father. Many of the theories provided in *Totem and Taboo* were to find their fullest expression twenty years later in *The Future of an Illusion*. After the publication of *Totem and Taboo*, Freud was charged with indecency; once again his psychoanalytic model was the object of severe criticism and now he was also accused of sacrilege.³⁹

When the First World War broke out Freud was fifty-eight. The flowering of psychoanalysis was violently disrupted. Between the winters of 1915-16 and 1916-17 he decided to give his last lectures at the university, and to publish them as a considered statement of the fundamentals of psychoanalysis. To his surprise, the audience he found in wartime Vienna had increased from three people to whom he had addressed his lectures on dreams fifteen years earlier, to a hundred. Despite this success in the field of psychoanalytic science, life in Vienna, by 1918, was very hard, and his private practice had almost disappeared. What really weighed Freud down was the sense of agony of a civilization collapsing, and the doubtful outlook for the future of mankind.⁴⁰

³⁸ Cf. Costigan, 111-114; Erwin, 277-278.

³⁹ Cf. Costigan, 177-184; Erwin, 25-27.

⁴⁰ Cf. Costigan, 194-204; Gay, 361-375; Jones, 3-5.

3. Freud's late Psychoanalytic System

Freud's late psychoanalytic works are marked by a slightly misanthropical view. In his writing *Thoughts for the time on War and Death*, published in 1915, Freud stated that the war revealed unmistakably what psychoanalysis had privately deduced from human behaviour, both from the dreams of normal people, and from the symptoms of neurotics, namely that the primitive impulses of hatred and aggression had not been uprooted by civilization, but had only been repressed into the unconscious. There they lay awaiting an opportunity to spring forth once more, endowed with all their primal energy. For Freud the war illustrated the inability of human reason to control powerful emotions, and further it showed that it was an illusion that mankind had become civilized. He claimed that disillusionment was not really justified as, 'In reality our fellow citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed' (Freud quoted in Costigan, 205). Freud further criticised that through the war there was a relaxation of the rules of official morality, as for instance killing had become a civic duty, and that this relaxation of the rules of official morality had a harmful effect upon private morality as well.⁴¹

During the decade of the Twenties Freud produced many significant works, such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *The Ego and the Id* (1923), and the *Autobiography* (1925). Furthermore his interest in religion and culture was manifested in his works *The Future of an Illusion* (1928), and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). These original works were followed by the publication of seven further lectures on psychoanalysis, which incorporated the additions that Freud had made to psychoanalytic theory since the end of the war. One major concept which is reflected in his works of the twenties is that of "metapsychology". The term "metapsychology" refers to the entirety of the theoretical assumptions on which a psychoanalytic system can be founded. David Rapaport attempted, in several papers, to classify the structure of the psychoanalytic theory, as follows: There are three types of mental processes. These are dynamic, economic and topographical points of view. The dynamic point of view is the way in which a mental

⁴¹ Cf. Costigan, 204-214.

process functions by the use of psychic forces. The economic point of view describes the sources of energy at their disposal, and finally the topographic point of view refers to the location of psychic processes in the structural elements of the topographic model of the Systems Cs., Pcs., and Ucs.. In one of his last papers Rapaport and Gill (1959) argued for a renaming of the topographic point of view into the structural point of view, due to the fact that the topographic model was Freud's system of the pre-war years, and his later theories were built upon his structural model of id, ego and superego.⁴²

In 1923, Freud published *The Ego and the Id*, which was a short essay in which he, for the first time, suggested the structural model of the psyche. The human mind, according to Freud, is built up out of three components: the id, the ego and the super-ego. The id stands for undifferentiated primal energy and derives from the basic instincts of life and death. The object of the id is blind self-fulfilment in accordance with the pleasure principle.⁴³ The id is not a region in the mind, but a process made up of drives which are always operative, constantly pushing for satisfaction, and also constantly being pushed back (regression), diverted into cultural achievements (sublimation), acted out (temporary satisfaction), or discharged in other ways, for instance dreams and faulty actions. Our id-drives usually remain repressed, finding expression only in short-lived and apparently unconnected actions. The true nature of this part of the personality remains in the dark and Freud described the id as being unconscious.⁴⁴

The superego originates in childhood and comprises the norms, values and ideals that upbringing and education have instilled in us. It contains many elements that we are no longer aware of and that are not relevant or appropriate to our current lives. It replaces the Oedipus complex in the normal development of childhood, and instead of hostile feelings towards the father the child identifies himself with that which he cannot overcome. The child takes over the father's personality, or adopts the paternal super-ego. However, the resolution of the Oedipus complex is accompanied by guilt feelings in the unconscious and this unconscious part of the superego is most tyrannical to the ego. This can lead to feelings of frustration and depression and can eventually result in

⁴² Cf. Costigan, 222-223; Erwin, 337-338; Springer-Kremser, 143; Gay, 394.

⁴³ Cf. Costigan, 232.

⁴⁴ Cf. Henk de Berg, 50.

melancholia or even suicide. The superego is more socially oriented than the id, it is more benevolent and rational, and pushes for ethical perfection, in the same way the id pushes for erotic pleasure.

The ego seeks to achieve compromises. The id is, in its nature nonmoral, the ego strives to be moral, and the superego is often hypermoral. For instance, Freud pointed out that the more an individual curbs his/her aggressiveness towards others, the more aggressive the superego might become in its demands upon itself. Freud gave the example of the phenomena of “flight into illness”, which he explained as the result of an unusually harsh superego domineering over the ego “telling” it that the latter has no right to be healthy.

On the whole the id represents an unconscious pressure on us to live according to our innermost wishes. The superego represents an unconscious pressure in us to live according to the wishes of other people and institutions, and the ego tries to find a balance between our own wishes and the wishes of others. The ego thus finds itself perpetually harassed by three tyrants: the real world from without, the superego from above and the id from below. Three types of anxiety result from this triple onslaught: realistic, moral and neurotic. Freud points further out that neuroses result from the conflict between the ego and the id and psychosis are the result of the conflicts between the ego and external reality. The prime object of psychoanalysis is to strengthen the defences of the ego and provide the basis for harmony in the ego.⁴⁵

Freud’s structural model of the psyche is of great interest when dealing with farce, as in nearly every farce these three components of the human psyche are personified. Moreover, the biggest laugh is achieved when a character, who acts the part of the superego, finally, through certain coincidences breaks down, and the id takes over. Very often this is realized through the establishment of a person of high moral in a play, who coincidentally gets drunk and in turn the audience can see the real intentions of the character. In *See How They Run*, a farce by Philip King, Miss Skillon is such a character who initially represents a churchgoer of the village who watches over the moral of the vicar’s wife. In the course of the play the old woman gets drunk and finds herself in bountiful erotic joy when being confronted with a man. Several scenes, in

⁴⁵ Cf. Costigan, 232-235; Henk de Berg, 50-51.

which the drunken woman tries to seduce, for example a vicar, cause a great deal of laughter, as the id of many individuals within the audience is also appealed to in one way or another.

As mentioned above, in normal life, the ego tries to harmonize the constant pressure of the id and the superego. Humour is, according to Freud, a way of harmonizing these two parts. In a short essay titled *Humor* Freud pointed out that humour, as well as punishment, is one of the prerogatives of the superego. The effect of humour is to relieve the tension existing between the ego and the world, for instance when the ego refuses to accept any insults from reality and tries to transform them into experiences of pleasure. This attempt to transform suffering into pleasure is the essence of humour. Humour is thus a kind of triumph of the ego and of the pleasure principle over the harsh and painful reality. The superego comforts the ego and protects it against suffering by using humour. It provides this specific defence mechanism in order to help the ego to repudiate reality and to create an illusion.⁴⁶

Freud's interest in the human psyche and its relation to society was further manifested in his famous work *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In this work he stated that there was an insoluble conflict between civilization and man's instinctual needs, meaning the conflict between the desires of the individual and the claims of society. According to Freud, the individual was constantly caught between the desires of the id, seeking for more and more experiences of pleasure, and by the tyrannical claims of the superego imposed on him by his parents and by society. Civilization was additionally in opposition to sexuality, as society set itself to curb and constrain the sexual instinct. Even all the social and cultural achievements of mankind had only been made achievable by subtractions from sexual energy. However, the id longed for satisfaction and the struggle within the individual between instincts, and the demands of the superego which society imposes, can end up in neurotic behaviour and an individual sense of guilt.⁴⁷ Freud believed that human beings could count a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments and that there was a fundamental hostility of human beings to one another. Thus civilized society was constantly threatened with disintegration. For Freud it was the significant question for the human

⁴⁶ Cf. Costigan, 235; Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten / Der Humor*, 253-257.

⁴⁷ Cf. Costigan, 246-247.

race whether, and to what extent, the development of its civilization would handle it to overcome the disturbance of communal life caused by the human drive for aggression and self-destruction. His view of the future of civilization is not an optimistic one, as he had foreseen the possibility of civilization destroying itself.⁴⁸

Freud's vision was to become true within the next years. From 1933 onwards, the Austrian Nazis intervened in politics and, finally, in 1938, Freud left Vienna and immigrated to London. In his last months, Freud continued to work on *The Outline of Psychoanalysis*, which was never to be finished. On September 23, 1939, Freud died. He left behind his revolutionary, creative and critical work, and his spirit lives up to the present day.

One of Freud's most interesting fields of investigation is the field of the comic, jokes and humour. In his book *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* he provides many interesting insights into the human psyche in general, and into the psychic processes in detail, which happen when the individual deals, or is being confronted, with the comic. Many of Freud's concepts allow the reader to understand why human beings laugh, and in fact need to laugh. In the following I will concentrate on Freud's theory of the comic, including several sub-species of the comic, which are all to be found in nearly every farce. I will apply the psychoanalytic theory of the comic to the most important characteristics and devices of the genre of farce, which lead to the typically loud and unbridled laughter within the audience.

⁴⁸ Cf. Freud, *Civilization*, 71-82.

IV. Redeeming Laughter – Freud and the British Farce

1. Freud's Understanding of the Comic, Jokes and Humour

Freud was always interested in Jewish humour, and around 1897 he started to collect Jewish jokes and profound stories. Regarding the comic and humour, he was deeply influenced by Theodor Lipps, a Munich professor of philosophy, who published the book *Komik und Humor*. Lipps dealt with the relationship between the comic and the unconscious, among different theories of the comic. Freud, encouraged by Lipps, produced his own study in this area, and wrote his famous book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* which was published in 1905.⁴⁹ Related to farce, this book provides many interesting insights into the psychology of laughter, and it helps to explain why farce gained, and still holds, this prominent position in the theatrical world. The ultimate aim of farce is to provoke laughter within the audience, but why do we have this desire to laugh and why do we laugh at jokes? What is the essence of the comic, jokes and humour and how is this essence used in the British farce in order to make people laugh?

One thing might be said at the start: For Freud, jokes are fundamentally cathartic; they are a release not a stimulant.⁵⁰ Jokes, the comic and humour work as a kind of valve for the human psyche. Human beings, especially adults, are full of anxiety and guilt, and they have repressed some of their strongest wishes due to the regulations of civilization, as Freud points out in his work *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Mostly this sense of guilt and anxiety remains unconscious and manifests itself as a kind of uneasiness within an individual, as Freud states:

Hence it is quite conceivable that even the sense of guilt engendered by civilization is not recognized as such, but remains for the most part unconscious, or manifests itself as an unease, a discontent, for which other motivations are sought. (Freud, *Civilization*, 72)

⁴⁹ Cf. Erwin, 292.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bentley, 229.

Forbidden wishes are repressed and human beings are in a constant search for the “forbidden pleasure”, in order to release the inner tension or unease. What is the role of humour then in life? The aim of humour is, according to Freud, to gratify some of the forbidden wishes. However, our anxiety and guilt prevent our consciousness from getting at these forbidden wishes, and therefore tricks are needed for eluding these emotions that work as a kind of censor. The commonest and least artificial of these tricks is the sense of humour, which functions as an important source of pleasure. Through the act of telling a joke or viewing a situation with a sense of humour, inhibitions are momentarily lifted and repressed thoughts are admitted into consciousness. During these short moments the individual experiences a feeling of elation, thus humour, the comic and jokes are an essential contribution to human life.⁵¹

Therefore farce can be viewed as a vital contribution to society and to the psychological well-being of the individual, as ‘the art of farce is but joking turned theatrical – joking fully articulated as theatrical characters and scenes’ (Bentley, 234). Creating a good farce would mean to lead the audience from one outburst of laughter to the next, which provides the individual with a great deal of pleasure. According to Freud, to make jokes is to create theatre, and due to this statement, Freud’s theory of jokes as a social process can be applied to the effect of farce in relation to the audience.⁵² However, before going deeper into the field of psychological processes which take place when the audience is confronted with a piece of farce, it is necessary to take a look at Freud’s distinction between the comic, jokes, and humour.

For Freud jokes and humour are sub-species of the comic. The crucial difference between the comic and jokes is, firstly, their different psychogenesis which results in different psychological effects in the productive and the receptive person, and secondly, there is a difference in the social dimension of these two categories, meaning the number of persons who must be included in order to achieve a successful comic experience. The comic can be content with two persons: the person, who realises the comic, and the person or inanimate thing in whom or which this person finds something comic. Jokes, however, need three persons to achieve their fulfilment: the jokester, the butt of the joke and the listener. No one can be content with having made a joke for

⁵¹ Cf. Bentley, 230.

⁵² Cf. Bentley, 231.

himself alone and there exists an urge within every individual to tell the joke to someone else. This is also the prerequisite for the comic theatre. There are figures who make fun, those who are made fun about and the audience.⁵³ In the case of the comic, telling it to someone else produces enjoyment, but the demand is not peremptory. The comic can be enjoyed by oneself, 'a joke on the contrary must be told to someone else' (Freud, *Jokes*, 175).

Humour stands slightly apart from these two concepts, as Freud finds other dimensions of classification for it. For him humour is one of the highest psychical achievements, and it is in relation with the dimension of our affects. Humour completes its course within a single person; another person's participation adds nothing new to it. As the release of distressing affects is one of the greatest obstacles to the emergence of the comic, humour is a means of obtaining pleasure in spite of the distressing affects. Humour works in situations, where we would normally be embarrassed, however through this kind of the comic we gain pleasure from such conditions. The pleasure of humour is the pleasure that arises from an economy in the expenditure of an affect.⁵⁴

The comic, humour and jokes are all related to each other. All three concepts represent methods of regaining pleasure from mental activity. This pleasure expresses itself by laughter. The first important source of the comic which I will deal with in detail is the joke and its several appearances in real life and within farce. In the following I will concentrate on the psychogenesis of jokes and on the ways in which farce affects the audience.

2. Jokes – The main Ingredient of Farce

2.1. The Psychogenesis of Jokes

Jokes are, it might be said, the "Pleasure in Nonsense", which is concealed in real life to a vanishing point. There are two cases in which this pleasure becomes obviously visible. The first case is that of the learning child, and the second one is that of an intoxicated

⁵³ Cf. Bentley, 232; Freud, *Jokes*, 224.

⁵⁴ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 283-285.

adult. However, for the present examination of the evolution of jokes we will concentrate on the child.

Before the development of a joke, there is a something described as “play” or “jest”. “Play” appears in children when they are learning to handle the vocabulary of their mother tongue, and when they are learning to put thoughts together. The child puts words together without regard to the sense of these words, and it obtains pleasure from the rhyme and rhythm of the words. Children also take pleasure in repetition of what is similar, in a rediscovery of what is familiar, in similarity of sound and so on. The pleasure which children take can be explained as unsuspected economies in psychical expenditure. These pleasurable effects encourage children in the pursuit of play, and they continue it without regard for the meaning of words and thoughts. This would be the first stage of jokes: the play with words and thoughts which cause certain pleasurable effects of economy.

This play is brought to an end by the strengthening of the critical faculty, or reasonableness. As a result of criticism, and also as a result of a child’s education, the play becomes impossible, as it is now rejected as being meaningless or absurd. Now it is impossible for the child to derive pleasure from the sources of rediscovery of what is familiar etc., unless the growing individual happens to be overtaken by an enjoyable mood which lifts the critical inhibition. Moreover, as the individual does not want to wait for an enjoyable mood and as he/she does not want to renounce the pleasure that is familiar to him/her, he /she wants to make himself/herself independent from this mood. The further development of jokes is then governed by two endeavours, namely to avoid criticism and to find a substitute for the mood. With this development the second preliminary stage of jokes sets in, and out of the play with words and thoughts, which is disturbed by the harsh critical faculty, there is the development of the jest.

It is now an inner task of the individual, who wishes to enjoy pleasure, to succeed with the pleasure of the play and simultaneously to silence the objections raised by criticism, which would not allow the pleasurable feeling to overcome it. Therefore the meaningless combinations of words, or the absurd compositions of thought, must nonetheless have a meaning. Now it is time for the so-called “joke-work”, which aims at finding words and combinations of thought that fulfil this condition in one way or another. In jests already all the technical methods of jokes are employed. The difference

between a jest and a joke is, then, that in a jest the meaning of a sentence which escapes criticism needs not be valuable or even good. It must be solely permissible to say a sentence in this way, even though it is unusual or useless to say the thing in this way. In jests the main aim is to pass the criticism, pleasure is found by having made something possible which was forbidden by the critical faculty. A jest is content if what is said does not appear as senseless. But if what a jest says possesses substance and value, it turns into a joke.

The sources from which a joke provides pleasure and which are the essences of them are the techniques of jokes. The underlying intention of the construction of jokes is that the thought seeks to wrap itself in a joke, because this wrapping bribes our powers of criticism and confuses them. The joke in its position of playing with the criticism and of tricking it is then an important psychical factor possessing power. The major purposes and instincts employ the joke for their own ends in order to gain pleasure.⁵⁵

Jokes are an essential ingredient of a good farce as they provide the audience with many possibilities for laughter. As laughter is an important factor for the success of a farce with regard to the audience, and as this kind of amusement is also of great importance for the success of a good joke within our psyche in terms of getting pleasure, I will now examine the psychic dimension of laughter more closely.

2.2. Redeeming Laughter - How Farce affects the Audience

As mentioned at the beginning, the joke in its social dimension is distinguished from the comic in that it needs three persons in order to find fulfilment: the jokester, the butt of the joke and the hearer. This is also the prerequisite for the comic theatre or theatre in general. This trio is familiar on stage in the form of comedian, straight man and the audience.⁵⁶ On another level this trio can be viewed as the author of a farce as the first person, the piece of farce (where several butts of jokes are included) and the audience.

There is the urge in the individual, when dealing with jokes, to tell them to someone else, as Freud explains:

⁵⁵ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 156-163.

⁵⁶ Cf. Bentley, 232.

The psychical process of constructing a joke seems not to be completed when the joke occurs to one: something remains over which seeks, by communicating the idea, to bring the unknown process of constructing the joke to a conclusion (Freud, *Jokes*, 175).

It is an interesting phenomenon that the person who makes the joke cannot laugh at the joke by himself/herself, as it is a fact that 'the pleasure which the joke has produced is more evident in the third person than in the creator of the joke' (Freud, *Jokes*, 178). Further, the creator of the joke is concentrated on performing the joke in such a way that the third person expresses his/her pleasure with a burst of laughter. He/she would be most successful if he/she tells the joke with a serious look, as in this way the so-called Freudian "fore-pleasure" of the hearer is intensified, and the laughter would be even louder. In farce it is a point of decisive importance that the actors perform the play with seriousness, and that the effect of farce unfolds out of the plot, the dialogues and stage techniques, as Bentley remarks in his book *The Life of the Drama*:

The amateur actor misses it, and tries to act the gaiety. The professional knows he must act the gravity and trust that the author has injected gaiety into his plot and dialogue. (Bentley, 242)

The farce writer works like a technician in order to time the reactions of the audience, and in order to achieve the desired laughter. Turning again to Freud, he poses the question, whether any conclusions can be drawn about the psychical process of constructing jokes from this factor of laughing at jokes.⁵⁷ Concerning the nature of laughter Freud refers to H. Spencer, who defines laughter as a phenomenon of the discharge of mental excitation, and in laughter Spencer sees the proof that the psychical employment of this excitation has suddenly come up against an obstacle. Freud extends Spencer's view of laughter proposing that

[...] laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge. (Freud, *Jokes*, 180)

⁵⁷ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 178.

The term psychological energy as used by Freud refers to psychological processes which are unconscious in themselves and are not the content of consciousness. In laughter, according to Freud, the conditions are present under which a sum of psychological energy, which has hitherto been used for cathexis, is used for discharge. If we see that the hearer of a joke, or in the case of farce, the audience laughs, it can be assumed that in the hearer/audience a cathectic expenditure has been lifted and discharged.⁵⁸

But what about the creator of a joke, or in our case the author of a farce, who cannot laugh at his creation? According to Freud, in the first person the inhibitory cathexis must have been lifted as well, as otherwise no joke could have been created. It would have been impossible that the first person feels pleasure in the joke if there had not been this lifting of the inhibition. Although the first person cannot laugh at his/her creation, he/she feels pleasure, but there is an interference with the possibility of discharge. This interference with the possibility of discharge, which is a precondition for laughter, may arise from the liberated cathectic energy which is immediately applied to some other endopsychic use. It seems that, in the first person, another condition may be realized, leading to the same result as laughter in the third person.

In the first person of a joke the so-called “joke-work” is performed, meaning the way how a joke is created based on the formal properties the joke has at its disposal. This “joke-work” corresponds to a certain amount of new psychological expenditure. Thus the first person himself/herself produces the force which lifts the inhibition. This means that the first person enjoys pleasure through the so-called “fore-pleasure”, or pleasant anticipation, which he/she obtains by the way how a joke comes about, and which takes over the lifting of further inhibitions. However, as Freud admits to himself, his theory about why the third person laughs at a joke is more successful than his theory about why the first person does not laugh at a joke.⁵⁹

Having given a short overview of the psychoanalytic view on the determinants of laughter, and of the psychological processes in the productive and the receptive person of a joke, we will now turn to the conditions that are needed for creating a successful joke, and which are also the secret of a good farce, as they provide the basis for the development of the several sources of the comic used within farce.

⁵⁸ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 180-182.

⁵⁹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 180-184

2.3. Three Conditions for a successful Joke - The Secret of a successful Farce

2.3.1. The first condition: Every joke calls for a public of his own

The first condition of a successful joke must guarantee that the third person is the right one to hear the joke. Freud states that, ‘every joke calls for a public of his own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity’ (Freud, *Jokes*, 185). He brings the example that if a person is responsive to smut, he/she will not derive pleasure from witty jokes of exposure. The third person in theatre is the audience, and in the case of farce, or of theatre in general, the playwright and the actors are dependent on the reactions of the audience. When creating a farce the aim is to excite as much laughter within the audience as possible, so that, in Freudian terms, as much “psychical conformity” as possible can be obtained in order to guarantee the success of the play. Related to farce, Freud’s first condition of a successful joke is fulfilled by the fact that the audience has decided to watch a farce, which implies that they come with the expectation that something funny will happen on stage. Thus the audience is in a state of pleasant anticipation, willing to laugh, and so is unconsciously prepared for the lifting of the cathexis through laughter.⁶⁰

2.3.2. The second condition: Make sure that the audience must laugh

The second condition implies that it is essential that the cathectic expenditure, when liberated, finds no other psychical use than in motor discharge, meaning in laughter. Regarding this second condition it appears to be far from easy to avoid the endopsychic employment of cathexes that have become superfluous, as we are, in our thought-processes, used to displacing such cathexes from one path to another without losing any of their energy by discharge. However, there are several methods a joke makes use of with the aim of laughter in view: First of all, jokes try to keep their expression as short as possible, so that no kind of thinking can be involved by the third person. Secondly, jokes must be easy to understand, because as soon as they call for intellectual work in

⁶⁰ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 184-185.

the form of choosing between different paths of thought, the effect of the jokes would be endangered. And thirdly, jokes

[...] employ the device of distracting attention by putting forward something in the joke's form of expression which catches it, so that in the meantime the liberation of the inhibitory cathexis and its discharge may be completed without interruption (Freud, *Jokes*, 186).

An example is the omissions in the joke's wording, as they offer an encouragement to fill in the gaps, and thus the attention is withdrawn from the joking process. It is essential that the attention is caught unawares, so that the discharge of the liberated inhibitory cathexis can be completed. The distraction of the attention within the hearer/audience is a necessary feature of the psychical process in the hearer of a joke.⁶¹

Freud's second condition for a successful joke is also an essential feature for the creation of a good farce. The playwright, when creating a farce, tries, through various stage techniques and devices, to avoid giving the audience the opportunity to think too much about what is happening on stage, and to distract their attention, in order to take them on a journey from the normal world to the world of farce, with its bizarre happenings and sometimes absurd situations. It is typical of farce that, at the beginning, the audience is confronted with figures from everyday life in everyday situations, as is the strategy of most farce writers

[...] to use at least some of the trappings of realism, and to beguile an audience with the familiar and the ordinary, before introducing the extraordinary. There is the recognisable world and characters with which the farce conventionally begins; there are the detailed furnishings and everyday props of a domestic interior, set cosily in the frame of the proscenium arch. (Smith, 212)

Normality, as a starting point, is established in order to create, on the one hand, a kind of familiarity between the stage and the audience, and, on the other hand, to intensify the fore-pleasure and eager expectation of what will happen next on stage. In *See How They Run*, a brilliant war-time farce by Philip King, Act I is set in the living room of a

⁶¹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 185-189.

vicarage at the fictitious village of Merton-cum-Middlewick. King establishes the beginning as follows:

As the CURTAIN rises, a female voice is heard from upstairs. It is PENELOPE TOOP in the bathroom, doing her singing exercises. She runs up and down various scales with wild abandon, occasionally dwelling on a top note and “Ning-ning-nong-no” –ing on it. While this is going on, IDA, the maid, stands at LC, adjusting the tea-things on the tray, with askance glances towards the “singing”. IDA is a plain but likable village girl about eighteen years of age. She goes to the stairs, waiting for a lull in the scales. When the lull arrives:

IDA (shouting upstairs). Tea! (See How They Run, 1)

This first scene is the starting point for a train of events which end in a complete muddle of misunderstandings, fear and mistaken identities. However, at the beginning the audience is confronted with an afternoon in the vicarage where everything is prepared for tea. The secret of a good farce is, then, as mentioned above, to take the audience from the normality of everyday life to the exaggerated world of farce, and it is left to the playwright's ability to make them accept the impossible as possible.

In order not to lose the audience, meaning in Freudian terms, not to give the audience too much space for intellectual work, and to lead them from one laughter to the next the playwright uses the technique of episodic structure. As the Freudian joke lives from shortness, farce lives from the short funny episodes, which are traditionally linked by the so-called *lazzi*, a variety of comic routines and business using the physical skills of the actors.⁶² Many farce writers make use of Bergson's "snowball" principle, which means that a chain reaction is established within the play. The playwright organises the individual scenes in such a way that, starting from the initial premise, everything seems naturally to follow on from it. The train of events once set in motion, grows in size and speed to envelop the audience, so that nearly no time is left for reflecting upon the events happening on stage.⁶³ The audience must be persuaded by the logic of each successive step along the way, even if the final result seems supremely illogical. Masters of farce must thus be masters of technique, able to work the

⁶² Cf. Smith, 210.

⁶³ Cf. Smith, 21-22.

successive discoveries, reversals, coincidences and repetitions of farce into a completely satisfying pattern⁶⁴, as Booth refers to farce as ‘the logical presentation of a crazy world’ (Booth quoted in Smith, 12).

A stable ingredient of many farces is the chase, as it is an instrument, used by a number of playwrights, to establish the episodic structure, and to avoid that the audience examines too closely the probable improbabilities of the plot. In *See How They Run*, the chase is central and it is used as the thread to link the pieces of comic business. The first Act starts, as quoted above, with Ida the maid, preparing tea for the vicar Lionel Toop and his wife Penelope Toop. With the arrival of Miss Skillon, a churchgoer of the parish and a scold, another leading character is introduced. The first episode which provides the opportunity for laughter is given in the conversation between Ida the maid and Miss Skillon, as the following scenario illustrates:

MISS SKILLON (*as she enters*). Thank you Ida!
 IDA (*dolefully*). Don’t mention it’m!
 (MISS SKILLON *starts*. IDA *ascends the stairs*)
 I’ll tell Mrs Toop you’re here’m.
 MISS SKILLON (*crossing to below the settee RC*). You need not...
 IDA (*pausing on the stairs*). She’s in the bathroom.
 MISS SKILLON. There is no need to...
 IDA. Bathing.
 MISS SKILLON. Will you let me speak, girl? There is no need to disturb Mrs Toop. I want to see the vicar.
 IDA. Ow! He’s in the garden.
 MISS SKILLON. Well, will you...
 IDA. Gard’nin!
 MISS SKILLON (*heavily*). Tell him I’m here, will you?
 IDA (*crossing the French windows*). Okydokey! (See How They Run, 1-2)

In this opening episode one feature of the second condition for a successful Freudian joke is realised, namely the device of distracting the attention of the third person by putting something forward in the joke’s form of expression which catches it. In this conversation between Ida and Miss Skillon it is the way in which Ida completes Miss Skillon’s sentences which catches the attention of the audience, and thus withdraws the attention from the joking process itself. So the liberation of the inhibitory cathexis and

⁶⁴ Cf. Smith, 12.

its discharge can be completed without interruption. This first episode, which still displays normal life, is followed by the next episode where Miss Skillon complains of Penelope's behaviour to the vicar Lionel Toop. The climax of the episode takes place when Penelope enters the scene, and the two women start a verbal duel:

MISS SKILLON (*rising*). Mr Toop, I cannot stay here to be insulted. Mrs. Toop you have been in this village nearly a year now. During all that time, I have never done anything but try to befriend you.
 PENELOPE (*with a sigh*). Then it must be my fault. I'm sorry, Miss Skillon, but the fact remains that every time we meet, I'm seized with a wild desire to leap on the village green, tear off all my clothes, and dance the Hula-Hula!
 MISS SKILLON. If you did, we might be shocked, Mrs Toop; but I don't think we should be surprised.

[...]

LIONEL (*moving to her*). Miss Skillon, I can't say how...
 MISS SKILLON. Please! Don't think about it, Mr. Toop. I hope I can forget and forgive. (*She stoops to pick up her gloves*) I think I'm broad-minded.
 PENELOPE. I'm sure you are, Miss Skillon. (See *How They Run*, 5-7)

Through the next episodes in Act I the plot is established, which leads the whole story into the world of farce. Ida mentions that Miss Skillon hates Penelope, as the old woman thinks that she herself would be a much better wife for the vicar. Lionel and Penelope have a quarrel about Penelope's behaviour, as she should behave a little more like a vicar's wife. Thereby we learn that Penelope was an actress, and that she is the niece of a bishop.

Bergson's snowball effect is established through a telephone call from Penelope's uncle through which the bishop announces his visit to the vicarage the next day. Meanwhile Lionel has received the information that the pianist of the Glee Singers is ill and that he should deputize for his colleague. The vicar then leaves for the night and shortly after an old friend of Penelope, Lance-Corporal Clive Winton, stops by on a quick visit. Clive is stationed at an Internment Camp near the village, guarding German prisoners, and he has the evening off. Clive and Penelope want to go out that evening and see a production of "Private Lives", a play in which they had appeared together in their acting days. In order to dodge army regulations, Clive changes from his uniform

into Lionel's second best suit, complete with a clerical "dog collar". They intend to pretend that Clive is the visiting vicar Arthur Humphrey, who is due to preach the Sunday sermon the next day. Before they depart they re-enact one of their scenes from "Private Lives". While they are acting a fighting scene, Miss Skillon enters, believing that Penelope and Lionel are having a fight. As she tries to intervene, Penelope inadvertently catches Miss Skillon full in the face, and the old woman sinks to the floor unconscious. This is the point when the curtain falls. With Act I the way into the world of farce is prepared: the background and initial premises are established, and now in Act II the pace is increased and the action becomes complicated, so that the little "snowball" can grow in size and speed.

Act II opens with Lionel, who returns home and finds no one in the house except for Miss Skillon who is laid out, full length on the settee, in one hand an empty tumbler, and by her side an almost empty Sherry bottle. When Ida sees Lionel next to the drunken Miss Skillon, she believes that the vicar has made the old woman drunk. In the next episode a Sergeant from the Internment Camp calls Lionel, telling him that a German prisoner has escaped from the camp. In the following scene Lionel finds Clive's uniform in a chest, and sends Ida to close the back door. While Ida is closing the door Lionel is taken prisoner by the escaped German prisoner, who knocks him down and takes the vicar's clothes to use as a disguise.

Even more confusion is established as Penelope's uncle, the Bishop of Lax, unexpectedly shows up early. The Bishop believes that Clive is Lionel. Clive must go back to the camp and he needs his uniform, but he can't find it, as Ida has locked it away somewhere else. Chaos quickly ensues when the Bishop wants to know what is going on in the house. Clive is stressed because of his lost uniform, Penelope tries to calm the Bishop down, and Ida wants to tell Penelope about Lionel and the drunken Miss Skillon, who are locked in the cupboard.

A scream from Miss Skillon in the cupboard introduces the chase sequence, as Clive pushes the Bishop into the garden and tries to hold him there. The chase starts when Lionel wants to catch Clive, believing that he is the German prisoner, and the Bishop runs after them. Chaos dominates the stage, and the final episode culminates in a cycle of running figures. The "snowball" has grown bigger and bigger through the many

episodes, and by now the audience is caught up in the high speed action and has arrived in the world of farce.

Act III starts with the same scene only a few seconds later: four running vicars, only two of them being genuine, Penelope struggling with the helpless Miss Skillon and a ringing front-door bell. Penelope opens the door letting in Reverend Arthur Humphrey. To make the situation even more hectic, a dog is introduced who runs after the four other vicars. While the vicars are chasing each other through her drawing room, Penelope tries to persuade Reverend Humphrey that everything in the house is normal:

HUMPHREY (*desperately*). Mr Toop – could I see him?

PENELOPE. Mr. Toop? Oh, certainly...He's round and about!

HUMPHREY (*to below the settee*). "Round and about." (*Turning to her*) Mrs Toop...You are Mrs Toop, are you not?

PENELOPE (*moving up to the window; vaguely*). More or less.

HUMPHREY. Is something troubling you, Mrs Toop?

PENELOPE. Not a thing.

(*there is a crash and shouts off*)

Not a thing.

HUMPHREY. But these – er - persons I saw running round the garden and dashing through the house...?

PENELOPE. Oh! (*To down C*) You mustn't take any notice of that. That's just the –er- *Harvest Capers*.

HUMPHREY. Harvest Capers?

PENELOPE. Yes. It's a sort of game they play at harvest-time. Great fun. Would you care to join them?

HUMPHREY. No, thank you, no. I never caper. (*See How They Run, 46*)

Penelope asks Humphrey to recite to her, and while he does so, she dashes out through the window into the garden. Humphrey opens the cupboard and the drunken Miss Skillon falls right into his arms. She tries to seduce the Reverend, when Penelope rushes in, offers him a drink and disappears again. Clive rushes in, believing that Humphrey is Lionel, and Humphrey believes Clive to be Lionel. They introduce each other as Humphrey. The whole action comes to its climax when the German prisoner, still disguised as a vicar, produces a revolver and tells Penelope that she should pretend that he is her husband. Meanwhile, Penelope's uncle, the Bishop of Lax, has informed the police and enters with a Sergeant, who carries out a farcical interrogation in order to discover who is genuinely who among the several assorted clerics:

SERGEANT. Now which of you lot is the vicar 'ere?

LIONEL. I am.

BISHOP (*pointing to the Man*). He is.

MAN. Me.

HUMPHREY (*pointing to Clive*). This gentleman.

(All these answers come more or less simultaneously) There is a slight pause, then:)

SERGEANT (*heavily*). I shall repeat my question. (*He pauses*) Which of you – if any – is the vicar 'ere?

(They all repeat their answers, this time together)

Blimey! (*He moves down R, looking at them from side to side*) I shall repeat my question just once more. (*In a sinister, low voice*) Which of you is the vicar 'ere?

(There is complete silence) (See *How They Run*, 64)

In the end, when the Sergeant is about to arrest all of them, the German prisoner reveals himself when he spontaneously makes the Nazi salute on hearing the bells:

MAN (*crossing quickly to the French windows and levelling his revolver at the others*). Invasion! Heil Hitler!

(They all turn to the Man)

Mein Führer, he has kept his word! At last, at last! English swine! Soon you will be crushed under the German heel. Soon the British bulldog...the British Empire ... the British ...

CLIVE (*moving up to L of him*). ...Gas Light and Coke Company!

MAN. ...Gas Light and Coke Company ... All ... All shall perish. (*With a flourishing gesture*) This is ...

CLIVE. "Der Tag."

MAN. "Der Tag!"

CLIVE. Heil Hitler!

MAN. Heil Hitler!

(The MAN gives the Nazi salute with the hand holding the revolver, and CLIVE tickles him under the armpit. He drops the revolver) (See *How They Run*, 66)

Finally, as with all good farce, order is re-established, misunderstandings are unravelled, and mistaken identities are resolved. In *See How They Run*, the audience is

taken from normality, via high-speed action in the form of the chase, to the world of farce, where chaos, disguise and coincidences dominate the stage. Through the many short and funny episodes the audience is led from one laughter to the next. The pace of the action guarantees that not much intellectual work is needed from the audience, whose attention is constantly distracted by either the farcical action, or a new turn within the plot. Thus, in *See How They Run*, there are many opportunities for laughter, or in Freudian terms, for the motor discharge of a sum of psychical energy which has hitherto been used for cathexis.

2.3.3. The third condition: Intensify the cathexis

Freud's third condition for a successful joke says that it would be an advantage if the cathexis which is to be liberated in the third person is intensified beforehand, in order to increase the quota which obtains discharge, and in this way intensifies the effect of the joke. However, this third condition is rather an encouragement of the process of joking than a necessary condition. The cathexis can be intensified through the auxiliary technical methods of the "joke-work". These methods increase, for the most part, the attention that is paid to the joke; however, 'they make this effect innocuous once more by simultaneously holding it and inhibiting its mobility' (Freud, *Jokes*, 189). Anything that provokes interest and bewilderment works in these two directions. For example, bewilderment calls up in the hearer a state that is called "psychical damming up" by Lipps. According to Lipps, and also to Freud, the discharge of an inhibitory cathexis is more powerful, the higher the preceding damming up was.

The techniques of jokes, as Freud states, are in general determined by two purposes: firstly by those purposes that make the construction of the joke possible in the first person ("joke-work"), and secondly by those that are intended to guarantee the success of the joke in the third person. To the first of these purposes belongs the typical character of jokes which protects their original yield of pleasure from the attacks of critical reason, and the mechanism of pleasant anticipation. To the second ones belong the two other conditions for a successful joke, as described above.

Everything in jokes that is aimed at gaining pleasure is calculated in relation to the third person, as the first person seems to be unable to laugh about his own joke.

Therefore the joke-creator needs this third person in order to complete the joking process. As mentioned previously, the conditions for discharge are lacking in the first person, and those for obtaining pleasure are only partially fulfilled. As laughter is among the highly infectious expressions of psychical states, the first person makes every effort to make the other person laugh, in order to make use of the other person's amusement to arouse their own hilarity. In relation to theatre, especially when creating a piece of farce, it is important that the author makes every effort to create jokes in order to produce a successful play. Through the process of writing he is in the position of the Freudian first person of a joke who calculates with the pleasure which is in relation to the audience. In order to get as much laughter as possible, and in turn to intensify the cathexis beforehand, the first person, or the author, makes use of several techniques of jokes, which I will investigate in the following section.⁶⁵

2.4. The Technique of Jokes – Devices of the Farcical Dialogues

Freud found out that many jokes work in the same way, and that there are various special techniques that are characteristic of good jokes. Many of these techniques, which Freud has observed, can be found in various farces, and are in fact the essence of many farcical dialogues. I will now concentrate on some of the most important joke techniques, and will in turn give examples of these techniques from selected farces.

2.4.1. Verbal jokes -The play with words

The core of the technique of verbal jokes is called condensation. Basically, in this technique, the character of the joke does not reside in the thought, but in the verbal form. Freud distinguishes three types of condensation, which are only slightly differentiated: 1) *condensation*, 2) *multiple use of the same material* and 3) *double meaning*. All three types can be found in the farcical dialogues in some way or another.

The first type, *condensation*, includes two special types of condensation, namely *condensation accompanied by the formation of a substitute* and *condensation with slight*

⁶⁵ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 189-193.

modification. Freud took his most famous example of condensation from Heine's novel *Reisebilder*, in which the figure of the lottery-agent Hirsch-Hyacinth of Hamburg, who was proud of being acquainted with Baron Rothschild, finally says:

And as true as God shall grant me all good things, Doctor, I sat beside Salomon Rothschild and he treated me quite as his equal – quite famillionairly. (Heine quoted in Freud, *Jokes*, 14)

In this example, laughter is based on the verbal structure of the joke. The technique of this joke consists firstly in a considerable abbreviation, and secondly in the creation of a substitute: if we would express fully the thought contained in the joke, we would say: 'Rothschild treated me quite as his equal, quite familiarly [...] that is so far as a millionaire can' (Freud, *Jokes*, 17). The word familiarly in the unjoking expression of the thought has been transformed into the word "famillionairly", which is a substitute from which we could reconstruct the thought behind the words. The word "famillionairly" can be described as a composite structure which is made up of the two components "familiarly" and "millionaire".⁶⁶

The second type of condensation is referred to as *condensation with slight modification*. Here, the technique consists in the formation of a substitute for what is repressed, in the form of a slight modification of a word. This modification might be done in the form of changing a letter within a word, which results in the sentence having a different meaning, or in the form of replacing a whole word within a sentence. Two famous examples from Freud illustrate this type of modification:

I drove with him tête-à-bête.
He has a great future behind him. (Freud, *Jokes*, 25, 27)

In the first example the "t" in one tête is changed into a "b", and this slight modification of the second word reveals the suppressed thought of the speaker, namely that he thinks that the person with whom he had driven was stupid. In the second example a common saying was transformed by replacing the word "before" by its contrary "behind".⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 14-19.

⁶⁷ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 25-27.

This type of condensation can be found in many farcical dialogues, and it can also be related to Freud's work the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which he wrote in 1901, four years before *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. In the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud explores the phenomenon of parapraxes in everyday life, such as slips of the tongue, misreadings, acts of forgetfulness and other mistakes, which seem to happen by accident. However, as Freud believes in the determinism of the psyche, he points out that nothing we do is without a certain motivation, consciously or unconsciously. These simple, apparently trivial events mentioned above are, as Freud explains, motivated by our unconscious and reveal what we really intend, but what we try to keep hidden.

In theatre playwrights make use of this phenomenon, and very often parapraxes are employed as a theatrical device in order to reveal the real intentions of the character. In farces parapraxes of any kind are an important source of the comic, and the skilful playwright uses them in order to create a comic effect and to make the audience laugh. The most common parapraxes in farce are speech-blunders on the linguistic level, and any kinds of mistakes on the level of action. The following examples will illustrate, on the one hand, the usage of the Freudian joke technique of condensation, and, on the other hand, I will analyse these examples in terms of the Freudian theory of parapraxes. This means that I will place an additional focus on the unconscious motivations of the character, which are expressed unintentionally through speech.

Taking Steps is a farce written by Alan Ayckbourn. It was first performed in 1979 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round. In this brilliant farce the level of language and the level of action are of equal importance as a source of the comic. The farcical dialogues are full of verbal jokes containing, very often, the technique of condensation. The plot goes as follows: The entire story is set in a large Victorian manor house that is badly in need of renovation. The farcical merry mix-ups happen in the course of one evening, and the morning after. The play starts out with Elisabeth, an aspiring dancer, who is about to leave her husband Roland. Her brother Mark is with her, and they are trying to plan her escape. However, as Mark wants to profit from Roland's wealth he tries to persuade his sister of the good life she would have with Roland. While they are talking, a solicitor named Tristram arrives to represent Roland in the purchase of the house from their landlord Leslie. Leslie also needs money, so he

tries to persuade Tristram and Roland of the good condition the house is in. Mark, for his part is desperate to win back his ex-girlfriend Kitty who was arrested on suspicion of soliciting. All characters are in the house, and the audience can see all the action in the house simultaneously. Each character is unaware of the action of the others who are on the other floors, and this kind of performing results in many comical situations.⁶⁸

Right at the beginning of the play the first example of the use of condensation is given when Elisabeth is writing a farewell-letter to Roland and wants her brother Mark to read the letter aloud to her:

ELIZABETH. You can share in these things. You're my brother. (*She sits on the bed*)

MARK. Oh. Well, all right. (*Reading without enthusiasm*) "My darling, maybe this letter will not come as that much of a surprise to you after all. Quite simply, by the time you read this, I will be gone. As you once said of me, and it's a moment I will always treasure, my darling. I am a woman who needs an endless amount of - something - feeling. An endless amount of feeling. Farming. Fencing. Ferrets.

ELIZABETH (*impatiently*). Freedom.

MARK. Ah, yes. That'll do the trick. An endless amount of freedom. "I'm - (*having difficulty in reading*) - afraid more so that - either - of us realized. This is not the easiest of letters to write, my darling" - it's not the easiest of letters to read either - "so forgive my awkwardness. I only wish I could have a cabbage ..." That can't be right ...

ELIZABETH. Courage. It's perfectly clear.

MARK. It's not clear at all. It's quite clearly a B.

Elisabeth rises and goes to Mark

ELIZABETH. No, it is not. That is a B. That is an R.

MARK. That's more like an F.

Elisabeth snatches the letter and goes to the dressing-table

ELIZABETH. All right, all right. (*Snatching up a pen*) R.A.G.E. Better? (*She goes to Mark and gives him the letter*)

MARK. Looks more like carnage now. "I only wish I could have had the carnage".

She snatches the letter

ELIZABETH (*reading very rattily*). "... courage to face you and tell you

⁶⁸ Cf. Sommer, 1-4; Hogg, 1.

personally that I love you, I always will, your memory will linger forever. Good-bye. Elizabeth. P.S. Mrs Porter has left as well. E.” How did that sound? (Taking Steps, 3)

Mark is not very enthusiastic about his sister’s wish to abandon Roland, as he himself would profit from her marriage with the wealthy man. In the dialogue above, he reveals his hidden thoughts more than once by mistakes in reading. Freud refers to the phenomenon of misreading in his *Psychopathology* as follows: ‘It is a familiar fact that in reading aloud the attention of the reader often wanders from the text and is directed toward his own thoughts’, hence there is a ‘disturbance of the attention through a strange obtruding thought’ (Freud, *Psychopathology*, 76).

Mark’s first speech-blunder is given when he tries to read the word *freedom* and instead finds the words *feeling*, *farming*, *fencing*, *ferrets*. In terms of joke techniques these are examples of condensation, as the right word is modified through the multiple changes of letters, which results in completely different words. However, these newly generated words reveal how Mark thinks about Elizabeth’s future in the case of a marriage: his sister trapped in an old house, with a man she does not really love, deprived of her liberty, maybe farming instead of dancing, fencing her husband’s advances. The use of the word *ferret*, as in this context it is nonsense, can be seen as an additional inner resistance to his real thoughts, as he wants to persuade his sister to get married, instead of helping her to escape. Instead of *courage* he reads *cabbage*, which might further reveal what he thinks of his sister’s idea. When Elizabeth corrects the word *courage*, spelling aloud the letters R, A, G, E, another comic effect is created, as *rage* is what she really feels about men, and what is now expressed through this way of spelling. When Mark tries again to read the word *courage* and misreads it as *carnage*, the farcical dialogue has reached its peak, and it can be regarded as a very successful use of Freud’s technique of condensation.

In the course of the action Roland is introduced to the audience, and with him a “master of condensation”, as the following examples will show. Roland, Tristram and Leslie are back in the living room, after their round in the house, talking about the conditions of the purchase of the building. Roland fills his guests’ glasses and, additionally, he reveals his inner conflict through the following speech-blunder:

TRISTRAM (*taking the glass*). Thank you.

ROLAND. Good health. (*Sitting in his armchair*) Right now. We're at the nitty as one of my co-directors invariably says. All that remains is for me to sign along the dotted line. Isn't that right?

LESLIE (*eagerly*). Yes, yes.

ROLAND. Mr Watson is ready and primed, no doubt.

TRISTRAM. Yes.

LESLIE. To see fair play, eh? (*He laughs*)

Tristram does not bother this time.

ROLAND (*taking a long drink*). Ah, that's better. This is the real McKay.

McCoy. Some people say McCoy. I say McKay. I don't know where my bloody wife's got to, do you? (*Taking Steps*, 28)

Both men, Roland and Leslie, have an *arrière-pensée*. Roland wants Leslie to pay as much as possible for the renovation of the house. Leslie, for his part, has debts and needs the money from the purchase of the building. The atmosphere is tense. The confusion of *McKay* and *McCoy* is interesting for a psychoanalytic reading, as the following explanation will show: *McKay* is the brand of a fine Scottish whiskey. That would be the one side of the coin. The other, reaching the unconscious, would be the similarity of the word *McKay* with the word *kayo*, meaning knockout. *McCoy* does not refer to a brand of whiskey, however, the word *coy* means *archly* or *affectedly shy*.⁶⁹

Now we could say that Roland, when he drinks his whiskey, has the inner, repressed wish to knock-out Leslie in the present negotiations. On the conscious level, he pours Tristram and Leslie one drink after the other. The mix-up of *McKay* and *McCoy* on the linguistic level in terms of condensation reveals Roland's inner conflict. On the one hand, he wants to buy the house, on the other hand, he is afraid of being cheated by Leslie and Tristram. He may be too shy to talk openly about his fears concerning the purchase of the house, and thus he is not sure whether to sign or not. *Coy* can also be interpreted in terms of *to play coyness*, which would allow another view of Roland's slip of the tongue, namely that Roland takes delight in keeping the two men dangling, waiting for him to sign. Hence he takes delight in his position of power and wants to delay the signing.

⁶⁹ Cf. Thompson, 311.

Another example of Roland's speech-blunders is given when again the three men are in the living room and noises are heard from the ceiling. Roland tries to explain the reason for these noises:

ROLAND. I'll give Mr Miller a ring – and tell Winthrop I'll be up to see him
on ... (*He looks up at the ceiling*) My God.
TRISTRAM. What – what's the ...?
ROLAND. It's my good lady doing her entrechats. Take no notice. If she drops
through the ceiling, give her a round of applause. Well, cheerio, Mr
Watson. Remember what we agreed?
TRISTRAM. Yes – yes – I'll ...
Leslie comes out of the study
LESLIE. Good-bye, Mr Watson. Thank you for your services.
TRISTRAM. Not at all. It was, er...
Elizabeth leaps heavily. A cloud of plaster descends.
LESLIE. (*looking up*). Hallo, what's that?
TRISTRAM (*carrying on*). It was – it was er ...
ROLAND. I was just explaining. It's the wife limbering, I think. Or lumbering.
TRISTRAM. Some say limbering, I say lumbering, eh? (*He laughs*)
ROLAND (*blankly*). I beg your pardon?
TRISTRAM. Nothing. (Taking Steps, 71)

Through Roland's verbal uncertainty (limbering/lumbering), his real thoughts about Elisabeth are revealed. Roland is not fond of Elisabeth's dancing, he rather thinks her to be a second class dancer however he would never tell his wife his real thoughts. In this scene, the slip of the tongue reveals how Roland really rates his wife.

The technique of condensation, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, also includes *multiple use of the same material* and *double meaning*. Both are equally present in the classical farcical dialogue in general. The category of *multiple use of the same material* contains, among other kinds, the *use of the same material as a whole and in parts*, where a name is used twice, once as a whole, and again divided into its separate syllables, which will be illustrated in the following dialogue: Mark gets to know Leslie, and they have a little talk about Elizabeth, and about the motor bike in front of the house:

MARK. I'm her brother. I've just driven her to the station. Left her in the buffet deliberating. Then spent half an hour trying to restart the car. Damp, I think. In the plugs.

LESLIE. Well, this weather.

MARK. Yes. Is that your bike out there, by any chance?

LESLIE. The Yamaha, yes.

MARK. Well, I've just hit it.

LESLIE. Hit it?

MARK. It was parked in the middle of the drive in the pitch dark.

LESLIE. Seriously?

MARK. No. A bit fell off it. But it didn't look vital. It's now more of a Yama or possibly a Maha depending on which end I hit. (Taking Steps, 37)

Double meaning as a special form of condensation, contains the *meaning as a name and as a thing, metaphorical and literal meanings, play upon words, double entendre* and *double meaning with an allusion*. All these forms of condensation are used by the playwright in order to create a comic effect. The following two examples will show how various types of condensation are used in order to make the audience laugh through language. Tristram, the solicitor, and Roland meet for the first time, talking about the purchase and Tristram's position in his office:

ROLAND (*off*). How long have you been with Winthrop?

TRISTRAM. Well, only a matter of a few weeks, actually.

ROLAND (*off*). Office clerk, or something, are you?

TRISTRAM. No, I'm a junior partner.

ROLAND (*off*). Ah-ha.

TRISTRAM. Very junior. (Taking Steps, 14)

ROLAND. Now this Bainbridge chap when he comes. He's a local builder. I don't know how he got to own this place. Didn't ask. But I did give him the impression when I wrote to him that he might be the lad to do the improvements. He seemed pretty keen. So we'll sound him out there, as well. Now. Everything clear at the legal side, is it?

TRISTRAM (*clearing his throat*). Yes. We have only to cheque the payment – of the – no – pay the cheque of the vendor – of the – sorry. Of the purchaser. Outstanding. (*He clears his throat*)

ROLAND. Pardon, I didn't quite ...

TRISTRAM. Sorry. I've got the contractual finalizations – er the finalized

contractuals – rather, contracts – ready. So there should be no obvious – er – er – er – oh – er – constructions – er – obstructions. Right. To the payments and completion. Of it all. (*Pause*) Yes.

ROLAND (*after some thought*). Yes, I see. (*He studies Tristram*) Excuse me asking, but you're going into this legal business full time, are you?

TRISTRAM. Yes.

ROLAND. Ah-ha. (*Taking Steps, 17*)

Tristram's use of language gives him a clumsy appearance at the beginning, which creates a funny effect for the audience, however finally he is to be the winner of the play, as in spite of his awkward behaviour, he is, together with Kitty, the only person true to himself. All the other characters are laden with inner conflicts, non-ethical thinking, egoism and little self-esteem. In farce these tragic psychic dispositions are transformed into comic actions and self-revealing funny dialogues. At the beginning the audience can laugh about these characters and their behaviour, however finally, due to Ayckbourn's skill of unmasking the tragic sides of human relationships, the depth of the play must be realized. It can be pointed out, according to Eric Bentley, that farce can be interpreted 'as precisely the pleasant treatment of what would otherwise have been an unpleasant subject' (Bentley, 238). In this sense I will continue with the funny sides of the genre which make the audience laugh.

As Freud states in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, the variety and number of techniques, as described by him under the heading of condensation, have a confusing effect.⁷⁰ However, the technical methods of jokes are an indispensable means for discovering the essential nature of jokes. This knowledge is also important for the playwright as it helps him/her to create a successful farce, in which he/she is able to plan the laughter of the audience through the use of such techniques. Freud, now, wants to look for the unity in this multiplicity, and he arrives at the following result:

Verbal jokes are characterized by a "tendency to economy". What we save through using a joke, is the unpleasant situation of having to express a criticism or give shape to a judgement; both are there in the newly transformed word or sentence, and additionally, they are now a source of laughter and help to relax the inner tension.⁷¹ Concerning the inner relations between joke techniques and how they appear in speech,

⁷⁰ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 46.

⁷¹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 46-48.

we might say that our unconscious seems to be motivated to let the other know what we really think or intend, thus through the technique of condensation it tries to smuggle words into our speech which are located under our threshold of consciousness, and which are not intended to be outspoken. Hence, the transformed words reveal the real thought or intention of the speaker and this fact is used as an important device in the comic theatre and in theatre in general.⁷²

2.4.2. Conceptual jokes - The play with thoughts

As condensation is the core of the technique of verbal jokes, the core of conceptual jokes is the technique of displacement. Within conceptual jokes, Freud found the following classification: Firstly there is the category of *faulty reasoning* including the techniques of *displacement*, *absurdity*, *automatism* and *sophistry*. Secondly there is the category of *unification*. And thirdly, Freud describes the category of *indirect representation*, including the techniques of *representation by the opposite*, *representation by something similar/allusion*, *representation by something small or very small* and *analogy*. Very often it is difficult to differentiate between the various techniques as they do not only appear separated from one another. They are, in fact, deviations from the techniques of condensation and displacement. Mostly, there is a mixture of several techniques, such as the combination of the technique of condensation from verbal jokes with the technique of unification from conceptual jokes.⁷³

However, in the following I will try to give a short overview of the essence of most of the techniques of conceptual jokes by illustrating their use within farce. Therefore I have again selected the farce *See How They Run* by Philip King, as the author very often uses the techniques of conceptual jokes with the aim of enhancing the action of the play on the level of language. As in chapter 2.3. of this thesis the focus, when analyzing this farce, was on the level of action, in the current analysis the focus will be on the farcical dialogues, which contain in many cases the techniques of conceptual jokes, which are dealt with in the following sections.

⁷² Cf. Freud, *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, 118-119.

⁷³ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 104-105.

Displacement, from the category of *faulty reasoning*, can be described, as mentioned above, as the core technique of conceptual jokes. Freud states that the essence of the technique of displacement 'lies in the diversion of the train of thought, the displacement of the psychical emphasis on to a topic other than the opening one' (Freud, *Jokes*, 58). Hence a displacement joke is, to a high degree, independent of words, as it resides in the thought, and so in these jokes there is a collision of two different ways of looking at the same situation. This inner collision is used in farces in order to create a comic effect and to make the audience laugh.⁷⁴

There might now be the question of what is the difference between the techniques of double meaning in the verbal joke and displacement in the conceptual joke, as both give occasions for a diversion of the train of thought from one meaning to the other. In order not to confuse these two techniques it would be necessary to keep in mind that in the case of double meaning a joke contains nothing other than a word capable of multiple interpretations, which allows the hearer to find the transition from one thought to another. The effect is dependant on the word itself. 'In the case of a displacement joke, however, the joke itself contains a train of thought in which a displacement of this kind has been accomplished' (Freud, *Jokes*, 61). Hence displacement is part of the work which has created the joke and not part of the work necessary for understanding it.⁷⁵

Turning to *See How They Run*, the dialogues between Lionel, Penelope, Miss Skillon and Ida are of special interest. Right at the beginning the audience is introduced to Miss Skillon and Penelope and they learn, in an amusing way, that these women do not have a good opinion of one another. In the following Miss Skillon gets furious about the fact that Penelope has decorated the pulpit without asking her. She wants to see the vicar, but before she can have a talk with the man, she comes across her adversary:

PENELOPE (*running down the stairs.*) Miss Skillon! (*Gaily, as she comes to the tea-table*) You must forgive this (*indicating her kimono*), Miss Skillon, but I'm straight from the bath.

MISS SKILLON. Of course, Mrs Toop. One does get so dirty decorating the church, doesn't one?

PENELOPE. Quate-quate, quate. [...] (*See How They Run*, 5)

⁷⁴ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 58-59, Frings, 12.

⁷⁵ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 61.

This example illustrates the use of displacement, and it further shows an additional facet of these kinds of jokes: It is characteristic of displacement jokes that the answer to a question or to a statement is not a direct one. Miss Skillon's statement above shows the use of displacement in this way. A direct statement would have been: "You have decorated the pulpit without asking me, I am really furious, and additionally you are facing me in a kimono which is not adequate behaviour for a vicar's wife". However, Miss Skillon tries to hide her fury about Penelope's behaviour behind an indirect remark which becomes funny in the situation through the use of displacement on the level of language. At this point it would be of additional interest to have a look at the difference between cynicism and displacement, as one might be tempted to confuse these two concepts considering that they look very similar.

Cynicism is apparent if the answer to a question or a statement is a direct one, hence this would not be a joke. In displacement, however, a cynicism is concealed, the answer is not a direct one and it appears, through the use of this technique, as a joke.⁷⁶ In the following example the two women cannot restrain their real feelings for each other, but now Penelope attacks with cynicism:

PENELOPE. Well, darling, we ran rather short of chrysanthemums. I'm afraid the pulpit is mostly decorated with turnips and leeks!

(Lionel looks uneasily towards Miss Skillon)

(She notices this and rises) Now Miss Skillon, more tea.

MISS SKILLON. I do not wish any tea, thank you!

PENELOPE. Oh!

(There is a strained silence)

What have I done wrong now?

LIONEL. Penelope!

PENELOPE. It's no use pretending that I haven't erred and strayed! The air is simply charged with righteous indignation. So, Lionel, will you run away like a good boy, then Miss Skillon and I can both let our back hair down and scratch each other's eyes out.

MISS SKILLON. I did not call to see you Mrs Toop. I merely wished to have a little talk with the vicar. (See *How They Run*, 6)

⁷⁶ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 59.

Penelope's emotional outburst is a direct one. It would be unimaginable that the two women have a physical fight, as the conventions of society would not allow for women to behave in such a way in a vicar's house, however, Penelope speaks out in a direct way about how she sees her relationship with Miss Skillon.

The following situation shows another example of displacement, where a statement is an indirect one, and where the joke resides in the train of thought; Penelope wants to be alone with Clive and tries to get rid of Ida:

PENELOPE (*intending to get rid of Ida*). Oh, Ida! ... I ... This is an old friend of mine. We used to be on the stage together.

IDA (*moving towards the kitchen*). S'alright'm. You don't have to use a sledge hammer to get rid of *me*. (*Crossing to the door: smiling sweetly at them both*) "Live an'let live," that's what I say. (See *How They Run*, 12)

Here Ida uses an indirect statement in order to get Penelope to understand that she knows that they want to be alone, and through the use of the technique of displacement a comic effect is created. The technique of displacement is to be found in nearly every farce and it can be used very flexibly in any situation, in order to make the audience laugh. The following techniques from the category of *faulty reasoning*, however, are prominently found combined with slapstick on the level of action.

Absurdity would be the first of these techniques. In most cases the absurdity of the situation on stage is reflected, on the level of language, through the use of the technique of absurdity in speech. Jokes using absurdity undisguised exhibit a piece of nonsense or stupidity. But how is nonsense turned into a joke? The answer is that there is always sense behind joking nonsense, and this sense transforms the nonsense into a joke. The technique of nonsensical jokes, thus, consists in the presentation of something stupid and nonsensical, the sense of which lies in the revelation and demonstration of something else that is stupid and nonsensical.⁷⁷ In farce, in this case, action and language are closely related and refer to each other. The following scene will illustrate the play with absurdity on both levels, language and action: The Bishop, Clive and

⁷⁷ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 64-67.

Penelope are in the living room, when suddenly they hear a scream from Miss Skillon from inside the cupboard:

BISHOP. [...]
(There is a blood-curdling scream from MISS SKILLON in the cupboard.)
 PENELOPE *(rushes to the cupboard door and stands with her back to it)*.
 Merciful heavens! What was that?
 PENELOPE. I-I think it was an owl!
 BISHOP. An owl?
 CLIVE. Owl my –
 BISHOP. Sir!
 CLIVE. – foot. *(He crosses C behind the settee)* Anyway, it wasn't an owl.
 BISHOP. It sounded to me like a woman in distress. Was it someone in the house?
 [...]
(There is another scream)
 There it is again.
 CLIVE *(suddenly)*. I know! The lily-pond!
 PENELOPE. What?
 CLIVE. The lily-pond. Someone must have fallen in the lily-pond.
 PENELOPE. But we haven't got a lily-pond.
 CLIVE. Of course we've got a lily-pond. Everybody's got a lily-pond. We must have a lily-pond. Come on, Bishop, we'll investigate.
 BISHOP. But I'm not dressed for the lily-pond.
 CLIVE. Lily won't mind. *(He pushes the Bishop through the curtains)*
 (See *How They Run*, 40-41)

This scene clearly shows how slapstick and absurdity in language are mutually enriching. The absurdity of the situation, as it is rather unlikely that a person cannot make out where a woman's scream in the same room comes from, is reflected in the dialogue, which creates a double comic effect for the audience.

As absurdity in speech is used to enhance the absurdity of the situation, *automatism* in speech is used in order to keep the audience in suspense. The technique is characterised by a so-called psychic automatism, meaning that a person who has reacted in the same way several times in succession repeats this mode of expression during the next occasion, when it is unsuitable and defeats his/her own intentions.⁷⁸ Freud points out: 'He neglects to adapt himself to the needs of the situation, by giving

⁷⁸ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 75.

away to the automatic action of habit' (Freud, *Jokes*, 75). The technique of psychic automatism also has the effect of uncovering the real character of a person, or of uncovering the real motives for certain actions. In this sense, this technique is related to the comic, just as any kind of revelation and self-betrayal. However, the relation between jokes and the comic will be dealt with later in this thesis. In the present analysis, we will look at automatism on the level of language. In the subsequent episode, Penelope has fainted and Clive and the Bishop want her to come round, whereby the Bishop believes Clive to be Lionel. Clive tries to play the game, as two little automatisms come across his lips:

CLIVE. [...] Come along, darling. Have a little dinkey-winkey. She'll be all right in a moment. (*As he turns away to say this to the Bishop, Penelope's head rolls over so that he replaces the glass in the wrong place*) Come along, darling ... I say, have you got a straw or something? Or perhaps a stirrup-pump would do.

BISHOP (*expostulating*). My dear Toop!

CLIVE (*quickly*). What did you say?

BISHOP (*baffled*). What?

CLIVE. I said, "What did you say?"

BISHOP. I – I – er – said nothing except "My dear Toop"!

CLIVE (*groaning*). Oooh! (*He swallows the brandy quickly*)

BISHOP (*furiously*). What have you done that for?

(*The glass shakes in CLIVE'S hand*)

(*Quickly*) You're not going to faint, are you?

CLIVE (*miserably*). No such luck. (*He hands the glass back to the Bishop, whose hand shakes too. He points this out*)

BISHOP (*grumbling*). Now I shall have to get some more.

CLIVE (*thirstily*). Yes, get some more!

BISHOP. For Penelope!

CLIVE. Who? Oh, yes! (See *How They Run*, 33)

The first automatism is given when Clive, realising the misunderstanding on the Bishop's side, answers to the Bishop's question as to whether he was going to faint too, with "No such luck". The next automatism follows directly, when Clive would be fond of having a glass for himself. In this scene we can see again that language and action enrich each other in terms of doubling the comic effect. Automatism on the level of language is often employed in situations where misunderstandings, or a disguise on the

level of action, have reached their climax, and are intended, through slapstick, to make the audience laugh. Similarly it is used when the audience should be kept in suspense, in the sense of a psychic damming up, which in turn leads to an even greater outburst of laughter, as discussed in chapter 2.3. of this thesis. Thus the technique of automatism on the level of language is used to intensify the cathexis which should be liberated in the audience beforehand, in order to intensify the effect of the joke and accordingly of slapstick.

Sophistical jokes also enrich any form of slapstick. Sophistry is given when the appearance of logic, which is characteristic of a piece of sophistry, is intended to conceal the faulty reasoning. A typical method of sophistical jokes is the omission of something essential in order to fool the hearer however often these kinds of feint are so absurd, that through this absurdity they become funny. Such a kind of joking makes again an ideal device for the farcical dialogue. An example, taken from Freud, will show how sophistry works:⁷⁹

The bridegroom was most disagreeably surprised when the bride was introduced to him, and drew the broker on one side and whispered his remonstrances: "Why have you brought me here?" he asked reproachfully. "She's ugly and old, she squints and has bad teeth and bleary eyes..." – "You needn't lower your voice", interrupted the broker, "she's deaf as well." (Freud, *Jokes*, 74-75)

Another category of conceptual jokes is called *unification*. The essence of this technique is the making of an unsuspected connection, meaning that new and unexpected unities are set up as well as relations and ideas to one another. In unification, definitions are made mutually or by reference to a common third element. Unification is analogous to condensation in verbal jokes. In conceptual jokes we talk of a condensation on the level of thoughts. In this technique very often a similarity of relations corresponds to a similarity of the words used in this context, which may be reminiscent of the technique of use of the same material in the verbal joke.⁸⁰ The following example from *See How They Run* will show a typical use of the technique of unification within farce: Ida and

⁷⁹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 70-74.

⁸⁰ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 77-80.

the Bishop are in the living room and Ida tries to distract the Bishop's attention as the drunken Miss Skillon again starts to make noises from the cupboard:

IDA. Well, sit down, your Highness, and I'll get you some supper.

BISHOP. I want nothing to eat, thank you.

IDA (*shouting*). Sit down, anyway.

(*The BISHOP sits hastily in the settee*)

'Scuse me, but I'm a bit put out tonight.

BISHOP (*doubtfully*). You're quite well, aren't you?

IDA. Oh, yes, ever so! (*She holds out the hat and coat, etc.*) I'll – I'll just get rid of these. (*She moves to the cupboard L., and opens the door, hurling the things in wildly*)

(*There is a low groan from MISS SKILLON in the cupboard. IDA slams the door to, and turns facing the BISHOP, who, hearing the groan, jumps up*)

BISHOP. What was that?

IDA. What?

BISHOP. I thought I heard someone groan.

IDA (*hastily*). That was me – leastways, it was my neuritis.

BISHOP (*sitting*). Neuritis. You have my sympathy. I get a touch of it now and again. Mine is in the arm.

IDA. Mine is in the cupboard.

(*IDA exits down L, in a hurry*) (See How They Run, 29)

In this example the word “neuritis” is used in the sense of unification, as the play upon this word is given in the thought, where an unsuspected connection is established between the meaning of the word “neuritis” and how Ida applies it to the situation.

Indirect representation, as the last category of the conceptual joke, is also an important device in the farcical dialogue. Various techniques are to be found within this category, such as representation by the opposite, allusion, representation by something small and allegory.

Representation by the opposite serves the “joke-work” in various forms. Very often the replacement of an appropriate “no” by a “yes” or “yes” by a “no” is used as a

technical method in this kind of joking, as the following example, taken from Freud, will show:⁸¹

Duke Charles of Württemberg happened on one of his rides to come upon a dyer who was engaged on his job. Pointing to the grey horse he was riding, the Duke called out: "Can you dye him blue?" "Yes, of course, your highness," came the answer, "if he can stand boiling." (Fischer, 1889, 107 quoted in Freud, *Jokes*, 80)

The technique of representation by the opposite is used very frequently in farces and it works powerfully, as in the following scene where the Reverend Arthur Humphrey arrives at the vicarage. Penelope and Ida try again to hide the drunken Miss Skillon in the cupboard, and additionally the chase is in full swing. Penelope tries to overlay the chaos:

PENELOPE (*to Humphrey*). Forgive me. I –
 HUMPHREY (*moving down to the L end of the settee*). Not at all. It is I who must ask forgiveness. Arriving unexpectedly like this.
 PENELOPE. It is perfectly all right, I assure you.

(*There is a noise off. PENELOPE moves a little to the windows*)

HUMPHREY. But you must be...

(*CLIVE dashes in at the window, followed by a bull-terrier, does a steeplechase leap at the place where MISS SKILLON was lying on his previous run through, and exits as before. HUMPHREY watches him blankly. PENELOPE ignores him.*)

PENELOPE (*quite calmly*). You were saying?
 HUMPHREY (*coming to with a start*). What? Oh! I was merely going to say that you must be surprised to see me?
 PENELOPE (*vaguely*). Oh no!
 HUMPHREY. No?
 PENELOPE (*murmuring*). What is one among so many?
 (See *How They Run*, 45)

⁸¹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 80-86.

In the midst of running figures and Penelope's endeavour to pretend normality, the chaos takes its course and the technique of representation by the opposite works as an important instrument promoting the various kinds of slapstick in the following scenes of the play.

Representation by something similar or allusion is the technique of a fresh and particularly comprehensive group of conceptual jokes. The essence of this technique could be described as an allusion without double meaning with the essential characteristic that something is replaced by another thing that is linked to the latter in a conceptual connection. Such a conceptual link can be of more than one kind.⁸² In the following example Clive realised that his uniform is lost:

CLIVE. Well, give me the uniform, then.

PENELOPE (*opening the chest*). Here it is. (*She looks in*) No, it isn't!

CLIVE. Eh?

PENELOPE. It's gone!

CLIVE. What?

PENELOPE. Gone!

CLIVE (*diving into the chest, with a howl*). What – the stripe as well?

Sergeant, Sergeant, have mercy on me! (*He comes down stage LC with hands clasped*)

PENELOPE (*tersely*) Now then! Don't lose your head! (*She moves to the L end of the settee*)

CLIVE (*moving to L of her; wildly*) Lose my head? What does my head matter? I've lost my uniform, haven't I? (*See How They Run, 37*)

Clive's last remark plays with the prejudice against the profession of the army, and can be interpreted on the level of language as a joke making use of the technique of allusion. According to this prejudice of the army rank, uniform and sticking closely to the rules counts more than individuality and freedom of thought. Clive, an actor who is condemned, due to the war, to serve in the army, functions as an ideal character through whom the author can pass a concealed criticism of the current society in the form of a joke. According to Freud, the technique of allusion is the commonest and most easily

⁸² Cf. Freud, Jokes, 86-93.

manageable method of joking and it forms the basis of the majority of short-lived jokes which we are accustomed to weaving into our conversations.⁸³

The technique of *representation by something small or very small* is used to highlight a tiny detail in order to give expression to a whole characteristic of a person or an institution.⁸⁴ In farce this technique is very often used in order to emphasize the various characters of a play. On the level of action it is their gestures and their appearance which make their typical characteristics, and on the level of language these typical qualities of a figure can be additionally expressed by the use of this joking technique. However, this technique is also a much-liked device for creating any kind of slapstick, as given in the following scene, where Ida should bring Miss Skillon's bicycle round in the garage:

MISS SKILLON (*severly*). Ida! That will do. After you have told the vicar I am here, put my bicycle round in the garage. I think we're going to have some rain.

IDA. Yes, Miss Skillon. (*She moves to the french windows*)

MISS SKILLON. And, Ida!

(IDA *turns*)

Don't ride it, wheel it.

IDA. Yes'm.

(IDA *exits through the windows*. MISS SKILLON then "noses" round the room. The singing is still going on upstairs. MISS SKILLON does not like it. She rubs a finger on the table behind the settee, searching for dust, and finds it. She "Tut! Tuts!" loudly; then crosses to the table LC and peeps under the lid of the muffin-dish.

The REVEREND LIONEL TOOP'S voice is heard in the garden)

LIONEL (*off stage*). Oh, very well, Ida.

(MISS SKILLON *re-seats herself hastily in the settee RC*)

(*off stage*) I didn't know you could ride a bicycle, Ida!

(MISS SKILLON *rises, furious, but sees LIONEL as he enters through the french windows [...]*) (See How They Run, 2)

⁸³ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 93.

⁸⁴ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 94.

Ida's behaviour shows clearly the relationship between the two women. The little sequence above makes use of the technique of representation by something small or very small through Lionel's remark, which creates, on the one hand, a piece of classical slapstick, and, on the other hand, characterizes Ida's soul as represented in the play.

Analogy, as the last kind of indirect representation used by jokes, is a very difficult technique, as joking analogies are very seldom able to provoke the explosive laugh which signalizes a good joke. Joking analogies are according to Freud, 'analogies which contain a striking juxtaposition, often a combination that sounds absurd, or which are replaced by something of the sort as the outcome of the analogy' (Freud, *Jokes*, 99). Very often an analogy appears in the nature of a joke through the admixture of one of the joke-techniques we have mentioned so far. The following joking analogy is taken from Freud, and shows the use of an analogy combined with the joke-technique of *multiple use of the same material*:

To be sure, the man was not a great light [*Licht*], but a great candlestick [*Leuchter*] ... He was a Professor of Philosophy. (Freud, *Jokes*, 98)

In this example, the joke is determined by the fact that from the first analogy, through a slight modification, a second, new analogy is obtained. In the case above it is not the analogies themselves which make up the joke, but the way in which the second analogy comes about, namely through the use of the joke technique of *multiple use of the same material*.⁸⁵ In farces there is often the use of analogies combined with other joke techniques in order to intensify the comic effect of a farcical dialogue.

At this point I have dealt with the most important formal properties of jokes. The majority of the joke techniques mentioned above can be found in nearly every farce, as the various examples taken from *Taking Steps* and *See How They Run* have illustrated. Freud's joke techniques ought to be regarded as the most important devices of every farce, as they are used consciously by the playwright, in order to create a comic effect on the level of language, either through the play upon words or through the play with thoughts. As the aim of a good farce is to make the audience laugh, Freud's joke techniques are an indispensable tool for the playwright when creating a farce, as the

technical methods of joking possess the power of evoking a feeling of pleasure in the hearer and leading him/her to let out the loud and unbridled laughter so typically brought on by farce. However, as the techniques of jokes provide one source of pleasure for the audience, there is also another source of pleasure of equal importance which is also provided by jokes. This second source of pleasure is referred to by Freud as the purpose of jokes.

2.5. The Purpose of Jokes – Reaching the Unconscious of the Audience

2.5.1. Harmless vs. tendentious Jokes – Silent smile vs. loud laughter

Freud's most significant distinction within the category of the purposes of jokes is that between the harmless joke and the tendentious joke. It is important to note that the following categories of jokes are completely new ones which were invented by Freud. The technical methods of jokes, which are described in the section above, possess the power of evoking a feeling of pleasure in the hearer, and they are additionally an indispensable tool for the creator of a farce, helping him to calculate the laughter of the audience. In the following I will deal with the issue of *how* the technical methods of jokes are able to excite pleasure in the hearer. This means that we will now shed light on the question of what the purposes of jokes are, thereby asking *why* people laugh about certain jokes.⁸⁶

Harmless, as well as tendentious jokes can make use of any of the techniques mentioned above, as the technical species of the joke bear no relation to these two purposes. According to Freud, the harmless or innocent joke is an end in itself, meaning that it serves no particular aim. Whenever a joke serves a particular aim, it becomes tendentious. It is the tendentious jokes which can make people burst out laughing. Harmless jokes, however, scarcely ever achieve this sudden burst of laughter - what they achieve is merely a little smile. Whilst looking at the genre of farce, we can observe that most of the successful farces contain very few harmless jokes and many

⁸⁵ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 96-103.

⁸⁶ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 114.

tendentious jokes. Therefore, the focal point will be on these kinds of jokes in the following section.⁸⁷

2.5.2. Tendentious jokes – Expose and attack

Tendentious jokes contain four subcategories, namely the exposing or obscene joke, the hostile or aggressive joke, the cynical or blasphemous joke and finally the sceptical joke. My starting point is the obscene joke, or more precisely, what Freud called “smut”. A “smut” is ‘the intentional bringing into prominence of sexual facts and relations by speech’ (Freud, *Jokes*, 115). The initial aim of a “smut” is, according to Freud, to arouse sexual excitement in the hearer. Originally a smut was directed at women and may be equated with attempts of seduction. A person who is sexually excited talks “smut” to a woman, and hopes that she, upon hearing it, also becomes sexually excited. If the woman feels shame or embarrassment instead of this excitement, Freud interprets this as being only a reaction against the excitement which is, according to his theory, an admission of it.⁸⁸ Obscene joking is often used if the original situation, in most cases the act of having sex, cannot be realized due to social inhibitions, however, through talking “smut” it can be imagined. One can imagine men sitting in merry company, enjoying telling or listening to obscene jokes as a compensation for not being able to enjoy the original situation, due to whatever reasons.

For Freud, an obscene joke is like an exposure of the sexually different person to whom it is directed. The original motive of talking “smut” is the desire to see what is sexually exposed, which Freud traces back to the sexual development of human beings.⁸⁹ However, in most cases talking “smut” is only tolerated when it takes on the character of a joke, which is achieved through the techniques of jokes. The technical method which is usually employed when dealing with obscene joking is the allusion, or the replacement by something small, which, as Freud points out, ‘the hearer reconstructs in his imagination into a complete, straightforward obscenity’ (Freud, *Jokes*, 119).

⁸⁷ Cf. Bentley, 240.

⁸⁸ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 115.

⁸⁹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 115-117.

These kinds of jokes make possible the satisfaction of a lustful instinct in the face of an obstacle which stands in its way. They circumvent this obstacle, which in most cases is a certain sexual desire, and draw pleasure from a source which was up until then inaccessible. Furthermore in his theory Freud points to the fact that, through civilization, many of our drives are repressed, due to the development of cultural institutions and regulations. Because of this repressing activity of civilization, primary possibilities of enjoyment, which are now repudiated by our inner censorship, are lost to us. However, as the human psyche does not want to do without pleasure, tendentious jokes provide a means of retrieving what was lost.

Once again, the role of farce within society must be appreciated, as through this genre, new sources of pleasure, which are for the most part unreachable in everyday life, are made accessible for the individual when watching a play. Obscene joking is very often used in farce in combination with a drunken character, as in such a way it is easier to bypass the inner censor of the individual within the audience. Again, in *See How They Run*, some brilliant examples of such a way of joking are shown, as the following scene, in which Humphrey finds the drunken Miss Skillon in the cupboard, will illustrate:

HUMPHREY. [...] Good gracious, my dear lady, what has happened?
[...]
MISS SKILLON. Where is he? Where is he?
HUMPHREY. Where is who, madam?
MISS SKILLON. That man, that dreadful man!
HUMPHREY. Don't you think you had better sit down for a moment?
MISS SKILLON. No, I must get away from this house. This wicked house!
(She crosses down R to the front of the settee) [...] (weeping) And the Harvest Festival tomorrow! Oh what will the harvest be? (She collapses on to the settee)
HUMPHREY. Bountiful, we hope. Dear lady, do sit down! Oh, you are sitting.
Now tell me everything! *(He sits beside her)*
MISS SKILLON. No, not everything!
HUMPHREY. Well, go as far as you can.
MISS SKILLON. Are we alone? *(She places her hand on his knee)*
HUMPHREY. Now, now, now, now, now! *(Removing her hand)*
MISS SKILLON. *(Replacing her hand on his knee)* Are we alone?
HUMPHREY *(again removing it)* Now! now! Now, you mustn't do that. I am a reserved occupation.
MISS SKILLON. Where is Mrs. Toop? *(See How They Run, 47)*

At the beginning of the play Miss Skillon is introduced to the audience as an uptight, love-starved spinster, who tries to preach moral behaviour to Penelope Toop. Talking in Freudian terms, at the beginning Miss Skillon represents the personified super-ego living up to the cultural expectations of the time. Her rigid organisation of life is a sublimation for the lost pleasure she seems to experience, helping her to control some “dangerous” drives.⁹⁰ However, by and by in the play, with the help of some alcohol, the id takes over and Miss Skillon escapes the pressure of reality, finding herself in bountiful erotic joy.

Another example of talking “smut” is taken from *Taking Steps*, where Roland sits in the living room together with Tristram, recounting to him the legend of the house, which originally served as a brothel for the Victorian gentry:

ROLAND. That bit’s certainly true. That’s on record. Then apparently legend has it, one of her girls gets into a fight with a client and he runs her through with his swordstick. Which wasn’t very pleasant. She dies, naturally, there’s a terrific scandal and the place is closed. Now when it is eventually resold after ten years or so, there’s this wretched girl, the one who’s been murdered, still prowling around.

TRISTRAM. Goodness.

Elizabeth sits on the bed

ROLAND. And if you’re her type and she takes a fancy to you, apparently she’s even been known to climb into bed with you. Being the sort of woman she was, eh? (*He laughs*)

Tristram laughs

Only trouble is, if she does take a shine to you, you’ll be dead in the morning. (*Taking Steps*, 15)

In this example we find Roland experiencing pleasure in telling Tristram the story of the brothel. This might not be a classical example of an obscene joke, but it represents as well the essence of obscene jokes, namely the gaining of pleasure through talking about things that create erotic imagination in our minds, and thus open up this often repressed source of pleasure.

⁹⁰ Cf. Freud, *Civilization*, 14-17.

The next category of tendentious jokes which I will concentrate on is the hostile or aggressive joke. It is obvious that one of the most important characteristics of farce is the physical action taking place on stage. This physical action is mostly in the form of fighting, punching, jostling and any other forms of bodily violence. According to Freud, human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love; on the contrary, human beings have a fundamental hostility towards one another. Thus the fellow-man is not only a potential partner for a relationship, but also someone who tempts the individual to take out his/her aggression to him/her. This potential aggression of human beings, as a rule, waits for some provocation, or it creates a situation where the aggression can find a valve. However, the existence of the innate hostility which we detect in ourselves and rightly presume in others, vitiates our relation to our fellow-men and obliges civilization to go to such lengths, meaning to regulate the communal life by laws and prohibitions in order to limit man's aggressive drives. Another way of limitation of these drives within the individual is the formation of psychical reactions, like psychosis, neurosis and others.⁹¹

As mentioned above, our innate hostile impulses, as well as our sexual urges, are subject to the same restrictions and the same progressive repression due to the development of civilization. In the course of our education we have been obliged to renounce the expression of hostility by deeds, instead we have developed a new technique of invective, which aims at enlisting a third person against our enemy; a third person who laughs at our rival, and in such a way satisfies our own hostile impulses, by making our opponent small and inferior. A joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy, which we couldn't have said openly or consciously, on account of obstacles in the way. The hostile joke aims at escaping restrictions and at opening sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible to us. The techniques of jokes are the ideal medium to create a valve for an aggressive impulse without making it visible for the fellow-man.

Tendentious jokes are particularly favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions, who claim to exercise authority, as well as against cultural institutions, such as dogmas of morality, religion, marriage

⁹¹ Cf. Freud, *Civilization*, 48-51.

and so on. In such cases the joke represents a rebellion against that authority and can be regarded as a liberation from its pressure. There is much value in including in farce some authority figure, be he magistrate, policeman, government inspector, a rich person, priest or any other person within a society who claims to possess authority.⁹²

In *Charley's Aunt* it is Mr. Spettigue who controls the destiny of the two young ladies, whom Charley and Jack are in love with. In *See How They Run* Miss Skillon is made fun of, a woman who, in the era the play was written, could be taken as a shining example of someone living according to the moral norms of the time. In this play the running vicars can also be interpreted as a critique of the church, due to a loss of faith caused by the horrors of the war. *Taking Steps* can be regarded as an entire social critique, whereby power, money and possessions count more than emotional relationships and authenticity.

The tendentious joke always has a façade. As it is a joke, it has a comic one, in the contemplation of which one person is satisfied, whilst someone else will try to peer behind it. Farcical situations are, undeniably, very often tragic situations back to front, or they are tragic situations viewed in a bizarre light. The several scenes in *Taking Steps*, where Elizabeth tries to escape from her life with Roland are very good examples of the dramatist using painful material to make a comment or to achieve a cathartic release through laughter. Farce, therefore, has also got a different dimension to offer from that of clowning on stage, namely that of the confrontation with inner hidden desires and aggressions, which are normally frustrated in society. The stage is the place where anything can happen, though, what is plausible inside the building of the theatre is not plausible outside. However, as Freud points out, there is a silent voice in each of us which rebels against the demands of morality and which does not want to be stifled. This voice finds expression through the medium of farce and its essence, namely joking in various forms.⁹³

At the beginning of the chapter I mentioned that the category of tendentious jokes also contains cynical jokes and sceptical jokes. Cynical jokes disguise cynicisms and are in the habit of attacking cultural institutions such as the army, marriage and so forth. The last category of tendentious jokes, namely sceptical jokes, do not attack a

⁹² Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 115; Smith, 15.

⁹³ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 121-137; Smith, 7; Berger, 79.

person or an institution, but the certainty of our knowledge itself, which is one of our speculative possessions. The serious substance of these kinds of jokes is the problem of what determines the truth. These jokes are prominently found in abstract farces.

By now we have detected two most important sources of pleasure within the manifold field of jokes, namely, on the one hand, the techniques of jokes and, on the other hand, the purposes of jokes. The pleasure in the case of the tendentious joke arises from a purpose which is satisfied through the joke, and whose satisfaction would otherwise not have taken place. Within the harmless joke, where there is no fear of our judgement being disturbed by their content or purpose, the techniques of jokes are themselves the sources of pleasure. However, as farce not only lives from the jokes within the dialogues, but also from the action happening on stage, it is necessary to take a closer look at the prerequisites of the farcical action. Therefore I will now deal with the category of the comic, which will provide a great deal of insight into the basic devices of action used in farce. These basic devices of the farcical action are another important source of the comic.

3. The Comic – Basic Devices of the Farcical Action

3.1. The Essence of the Comic

In the previous chapters, when dealing with jokes, we have discovered that the joke, in its social dimension, needs three persons in order to find fulfilment: the jokester, the butt of the joke and the hearer, which in our case are: the author of a farce as the Freudian first person, the piece of farce (where several butts of jokes are included), and the audience. In a joke, as we have learned, the third person is indispensable for the completion of the pleasure-producing process. The comic, however, differs in its social dimension from jokes, in that it can be content with two persons: a first person who finds what is comic, and a second one in whom the comic is found. The third person, to whom a comic thing is told or shown, intensifies the comic process, but this person adds nothing new to it. Freud describes the essence of the comic in the following words: 'A joke is made, the comic is found – and first and foremost in people, only by a subsequent transference in things, situations and so on, as well' (Freud, Jokes, 224).

It is a characteristic of the comic that it arises in the first instance as an unintended discovery derived from human relations. It is found in people and in their movements, forms, actions and traits of character, originally, so to speak, in their physical characteristics. However, the comic is also to be found in their mental characteristics, and in the expression of those characteristics. By means of personification, animals or inanimate objects can also become comic. A further feature of the comic is that it is capable of being detached from people, in so far as we recognize the conditions under which a person seems comic. Freud refers to this sort of the comic as “situational comedy”, which allows the possibility of making a person comic at one’s will, by putting him/her in situations in which his/her actions are subject to these comic conditions. The discovery that a person has it in his/her power to make someone else comic opens the way to a large amount of comic pleasure, and might be the origin of why people started to write pieces of comedy and farce.⁹⁴

3.2. The Origin of the Comic Pleasure

According to Freud, the underlying psychological basis for the experience of the comic pleasure is in every case a comparison between contrasts through which a difference in expenditure occurs. If this difference in expenditure is not used for some other purpose within our psyche, it becomes capable of discharge, which is expressed by laughter, and may thus become a source of pleasure. In other words: If we compare a specific action done by somebody, with the effort of action we would have spent on the same action in the same situation, and this comparison results in a difference, this difference of expenditure leads to the comic pleasure within us. Hence, the comic is based on a contrast between ideas in so far that the contrast has a comic and not some other effect.

In order to gain a better understanding of the psychological dimension of the comic, it would be of great interest to examine, shortly, the psychogenesis of this category. Within the psychogenesis of jokes we have learned that jokes evolved out of the child’s play with words and thoughts, which has been frustrated by our inner critique in the course of our personal development. Thus the joke has developed some

⁹⁴ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 224, 225, 234.

techniques in order to unearth the forbidden pleasure. When dealing with the origins of the comic it is necessary to have a look at the relation between the child and the comic itself.

Children are without a feeling for the comic. This assertion simply means that the comic feeling starts at some point in the course of mental development. However, right at the beginning of our lives, we lack the feeling of the comic, which appears to be logical when we have the essence of the comic in mind, namely that the comic pleasure is a result of a comparison between contrasts within ourselves and others. Children do not have this inner reference, thus there is nothing to compare with, and there is also no difference in expenditure that can be discharged through laughter. The child understands simply by mimicry, which is supported by how we educate our children, telling them how they should do things. If a child compares his/her actions with those of others, he/she concludes that what the others do is wrong, and what he/she does is right or vice versa. If then, the child laughs about the action of others, he/she laughs at them in the feeling of his/her own superiority. The child's superior laughter is one of pure pleasure. However, the comic pleasure, as we experience it as adults, is not present in such cases.

In Freud's view, the comic is not based on a feeling of superiority, as some philosophers of the comic argue. For him, this special kind of delight experienced in childhood seems to be a source of pleasure that is lost to us adults, which is explained by the fact that according to our cultural norms, and our super-ego, it is not approved to laugh about the awkwardness of other people openly. In such situations, where a child would burst out laughing at others, adults have developed the "comic" feeling as a substitute for the lost one.

Hence, we can refer to the comic as the regained "lost laughter of childhood", a kind of inner awakening of the infantile. Thus, the adult always laughs, when there is a comparison between his/her ego and the child's ego, and so we have discovered the main characteristic of the comic, namely the preconscious link with the infantile. However, at this point it is important to note that for Freud the comic pleasure in its essence is not only recollected pleasure, as for instance Bergson defines the comic, but it is always connected with comparison. The comic difference is found either, by a comparison between another person and oneself, by a comparison only within the other person or by a comparison entirely within oneself. These various possibilities of comic

differences characterise the differences within the species of the comic, with which I will deal in the following chapters of this thesis.⁹⁵

3.3. The Species of the Comic – Delightful Moments on Stage

3.3.1. “Situational comedy”

As mentioned previously, one important characteristic of the comic is that it is capable of being detached from people, in so far that the conditions are recognized under which a person seems comic. In this way “situational comedy” comes about which offers the possibility of making another person comic by putting him/her in situations in which the comic conditions are given. When we refer to theatre, Freud’s “situational comedy” is referred to as slapstick, and as this term is more familiar in general, I will use it in the following, bearing in mind Freud’s notion of “situational comedy”.⁹⁶

In farce the principal means that is used for making other people comic is to put them in situations where the comic is a result of the human dependence on external events. In such cases the comic is extracted from the relation of human beings to the often over-powerful external world. This external world also comprises social conventions and necessities and also a person’s bodily needs. The comic in this case depends entirely on “empathy”, as “situational comedy” is mostly based on embarrassments, in which we rediscover the child’s helplessness. The comic pleasure is created through the difference in expenditure that becomes obvious by the comparison between how the character reacts in the given situation, and how I would have reacted in the same situation. We laugh even if we would have to confess that we would have done the same in that situation.⁹⁷

In slapstick personal characteristics of the individual character are a foremost concern, as it is all about his/her dependence on the external events that occur to him/her. This putting of someone in a comic situation may be realized with the help of a practical joke, for instance by sticking out a leg, so that the other person trips over it and

⁹⁵ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 235-239.

⁹⁶ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 243.

⁹⁷ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 281.

appears to be clumsy when he/she tries to regain balance, or by using speech or play in such a way that the other person is made to look stupid, for instance, by trying to convince him/her of something nonsensical. In Farce slapstick is very often combined with aggressiveness, as Eric Bentley points out that ‘farce is [...] notorious for its love of violent images’ (Bentley, 219).

In *Charley’s Aunt* for example the young men jostle against each other, beat each other and do other physical harm to one another in nearly every scene. It is the same in *Taking Steps*, and *See How They Run*, where physical violence is used in order to keep a secret, for example when Miss Skillon is locked up in the cupboard in order not to reveal what’s going on in the house, or when in the final scene in *Taking Steps* Elisabeth and Roland have a physical fight with Leslie, due to a misunderstanding.

Slapstick is an essential tool for the genre of farce, as thereby the episodic structure is given its typical characteristic, namely the stringing together of one comic situation after the other. The focus in farce is on the single situation, and each of these single episodes comprises either a misfortune, an unlucky dispensation of fate, or a new person that is introduced, which in turn leads to the following situation, which has in store the next surprise for the characters on stage and for the audience. The characters are always at the mercy of the situation. That is what makes up the essence of the structure of farce and what gives the impression of the improbability of the plot.

Slapstick provides the basis of the farcical action, and it comprises within each single situation, jokes and various other types of the comic, such as the comic of movement, and the comic that is found in someone else’s intellectual and mental characteristics, which I will look at in the following chapters.

3.3.2. The comic of movement

The comic of movement, being another important characteristic of the farcical action, comprises gestures, grimaces, and any other kinds of exaggerated use of the body. What the audience laughs about is another person’s movements which seem to them extravagant and inexpedient. The pantomime, for instance, uses this method for making people laugh. In the case of a clown, for example, the audience laughs at an expenditure that is too large. All grimaces are comic, which exaggerate the normal expression of the

emotions, even if they are produced involuntarily, for example if someone suffers from physical pain.

According to Freud, there are two types of the comic of movement, namely, the artificially constructed one, as seen, for instance in theatre, and the comic of movement which is found accidentally in real life. In both cases we laugh by making a comparison between the movement we observe in the other person, and the one we would have carried out ourselves in his/her place. The two things compared must be judged by the same standard, which is created by the stimulation of innervations in the observer. This stimulation of innervations is linked to his/her idea of the movement in both of the two cases. What the observer, who in our case is every individual within the audience, compares is, on the one hand, the psychical expenditure while having the idea of the movement, and, on the other hand, he/she compares the content of the idea. He/she has acquired the idea of a movement of a particular size by carrying out the movement by himself/herself, or by imitating it. Through this action he/she has learned a standard for this movement in his/her innervations, which from then on serves as an inner measure for any comparison.

When the observer, then, perceives a movement like this of greater, or of lesser size, in someone else, he/she tries to understand this movement by either carrying out the specific movement himself/herself or by imitating it. Through this action the observer has learned a standard for this movement in his/her innervating system. Freud points out that an impulsion to imitation is present in any perceptions of movements. However, instead of imitating the movement with his/her muscles, the observer has an idea of it through the remembering of expenditures on similar movements. He/she then compares the observed movement with the idea of one's own movement, and if the observed movement is inexpedient or exaggerated the increased expenditure which was used in order to understand the other movement is discharged by laughter.⁹⁸

Up to this point I tried to shed light on the psychological and physiological processes which characterise the comic of movement from a psychoanalytic point of view. In the following I will offer some brilliant examples of the comic of movement from a farce written by Peter Shaffer. The title of the farce is *Black Comedy*, and it was

⁹⁸ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 235-240.

first performed in 1965. *Black Comedy* is a one-act play which plays with the effects of darkness and light. The play is set in a flat in London during an electrical blackout, and it is staged under a reversed lighting scheme. This means that the play starts on a darkened stage, where only the dialogues are to be heard. Then after a few minutes “a fuse blows” and the stage lights come up. The characters perform as if they were in complete darkness. During the entire play, on the few occasions when a light is lit by one of the characters, the light on stage merely gets dimmer. When these objects, which give the light, are extinguished, the stage immediately grows brighter.

Black Comedy is about Brindsley Miller and his fiancée Carol Melkett who want to impress Carol’s father, who is coming for a visit that evening, in order to get to know the young man. Brindsley is a poor sculptor, who only possesses some pieces of shabby furniture. As Carol is afraid that her father will not accept her underprivileged, artistic lover they “borrow” the furniture from Brindsley’s neighbour, Harold Gorringer, who has an exclusive taste, and who is, at the time on holiday. On the same evening Brindsley expects the millionaire art buyer George Bamberger, to whom he wants to show his sculptures. Bamberger’s visit is also enacted in order to impress Carol’s father, and to boost Brindsley’s breakthrough as a sculptor.

When the last piece of stolen furniture is set in place, a fuse blows in the cellar and the lights go out. In a hurry, Carol and Brindsley try to find candles or torches, when the telephone starts to ring. Clea, Brindsley’s ex-girlfriend, calls to announce her visit. At the same time Miss Furnival enters the flat, as she is afraid of the dark and is in search of company. A few moments later Colonel Melkett, Carol’s father, enters the scene, and with him Harold, the neighbour who has decided to come back home earlier. From this moment on the farcical chaos takes its course. Brindsley uses the opportunity of darkness and tries to secretly remove and replace all of Harold’s stolen furniture back into his neighbour’s apartment. His blind acrobatics while he attempts to return the furniture are at the centre of the whole play, and offer a lot of delightful moments, as the following scene will illustrate: Miss Furnival and Harold are having a conversation about Bamberger’s expected visit, while Brindsley starts busily with the exchange of a chair:

HAROLD. Bamberger? Is that who is coming? George Bamberger?

MISS FURNIVAL. Yes. To see Mr Miller's work. Isn't it exciting?

HAROLD. Of course: money! Well, I never! I read an article about him last week in the Sunday paper. He's known as the mystery millionaire. He's almost completely deaf – deaf as post – and spends most of his time indoor alone with his collection. He hardly ever goes out, except to a gallery or a private studio. That's the life! If I had money that's what I'd do. Just collect all the china and porcelain I wanted.

Brindsley returns with a poor, broken-down chair of his own and sets it down in the same position as the one he has taken out. The second chair presents a harder challenge. It sits right across the room, UR. Delicately, Brindsley moves toward it – but he has difficulty finding it. We watch him walk around and around it in desperately narrowing circles till he touches it and with relief picks it up.

MISS FURNIVAL. I've never met a millionaire. I've always wondered if they feel different to us. I mean their actual skins.

COLONEL. Their skins?

MISS FURNIVAL. Yes. I've always imagined they must be softer than ours. Like the skins of ladies when I was a girl.

[...]

During the following exchange between Miss Furnival and Harold, Brindsley moves the second Regency chair across what should be Miss Furnival's field of vision, two inches from her face. Brindsley unfortunately misaims and carries the chair past the door, bumps into the wall, retreats from it, and inadvertently shuts the door softly with his back. Now he cannot get out of the room. He has to set down the chair, grope desperately for the door handle – try to find it, turn it, then open the door – then refind the chair, which he has quite lost. This takes a long and frantic time. At last he triumphs, and staggers from the room nearly exhausted. (Black Comedy, 23)

This is a brilliant piece of slapstick including the comic of movement. As a result of the darkness, Brindsley's movements appear clumsy, awkward and inexpedient, which creates the comic effect and a lot of laughter within the audience.

While Brindsley is entering and exiting with various bits of furniture, Carol serves drinks to their guests. Due to the complete darkness, the drinks get mixed up, so that Miss Furnival, who is a complete teetotaller, is mistakenly handed the Colonel's whiskey and, during the course of the play, she gets drunk. In the midst of this muddle Clea enters the scene, unseen and unsuspected by the other characters, who are talking

about her in a disgraceful way. The comic of the following scene is extracted from Clea's grimaces when hearing what Harold and the others are chatting about her:

CAROL. [...] Did you know her Mr Gorringer? [...] What was she like? [...]

Was she pretty?

HAROLD. No, not at all. In fact, I'd say the opposite. Actually she was rather plain.

BRINDSLEY. She wasn't!

HAROLD. I'm just giving my opinion.

BRINDSLEY. You've never given it before.

HAROLD (*leaning over Clea*). I was never asked! But since it's come up, I always thought she was ugly. For one thing, she had teeth like a picket fence – yellow and spiky. And for another, she had bad skin.

BRINDSLEY. She had nothing of the kind!

HAROLD. She did. I remember it perfectly. It was like a new pink wallpaper, with an old grey crumbly paper underneath.

BRINDSLEY. This is disgraceful.

HAROLD. You knew I never liked her Brindsley. She was too clever by half.

MISS FURNIVAL. And so tiresomely Bohemian.

CAROL. You mean she was as pretentious as her name?

Clea, who has been reacting to this last exchange of comments about her like a spectator at a tennis match, now reacts to Carol open-mouthed

I bet she was. That photograph I found showed her in a sort of sultry peasant blouse. She looked like The Bartered Bride done by Lloyds Bank Operatic Society.

They laugh, Brindsley hardest of all. Guided by the noise, Clea aims her hand and slaps his face. (Black Comedy, 33-34)

Following this scene, Brindsley recognizes that Clea is in the same room, and it soon becomes clear that he still loves her. Clea does not know that Brindsley has got a fiancée, and Carol does not know that Clea and Brindsley are still in love. A game of hide and seek begins, as, on the one hand, Brindsley tries to hide Clea in the dark from Carol and her father, and, on the other, he tries to hide the fact that he is engaged with Carol, from Clea. Additionally, he removes the furniture, providing scenes like the following:

Brindsley finds the lamp on the downstage table and picks it up. He walks with it around the rocking chair, on which the Colonel is now sitting again [...] The wire of the lamp has followed Brindsley around the bottom of the rocking chair. It catches. Brindsley tugs it gently. The chair moves. Surprised the Colonel is jerked forward. Brindsley tugs it again, much harder. The rocking chair is pulled over forward, spilling the Colonel out of it, again on to the floor, and then falling itself on top of him. The shade of the lamp comes off. During the ensuing dialogue, Brindsley gets to his knees and crawls right across the room following the flex of the lamp. He finds the plug, pulls it out and - still on his knees - retraces his steps, winding up the wire around his arm, and becoming helplessly entangled in it. The Colonel remains on the floor, now really alarmed. (Black Comedy, 27)

Here, the whole comic effect is again created through the use of the comic of movement. In the following scenes Schuppanzigh, a German electrician sent to repair the fuse, enters the whole scenario, and is mistaken for Bamberger. Due to this mistake all the characters on stage make misguided attempts to impress him. Clea, whom Brindsley has hidden in the bedroom, comes down into the living room and tells, in a farcical manner, the truth about her relationship to Brindsley. Finally, Harold recognizes what has happened to his furniture, Brindsley recognizes that Schuppanzigh is not Bamberger, and Carol and her father recognize that Brindsley loves Clea. Harold, Carol, and the Colonel are trying to catch Brindsley, as Bamberger enters and tumbles down the stairs into the cellar. Brindsley's doom is assured. Light is turned back on, and the curtain falls.

Black Comedy is indeed a marvellous example of a farce which is based on the comic of movement and slapstick. Peter Shaffer states about his play:

Black Comedy is almost all about gesture. You could almost put plate glass between the audience and the stage and still something comic would emerge from the acted play. (Shaffer quoted in Smith, 145)

The reversal of light and darkness gives great scope to the exaggerated use of movements and gestures, and to many delightful moments full of laughter within the audience.

Laughter is also assured when the audience is confronted with another species of the comic, namely the comic that is found in someone else's mental functions, which I will focus on in the next chapter.

3.3.3. The comic that is found in someone else's intellectual and mental characteristics

Freud states that the comic that is found in someone else's intellectual and mental abilities is also an outcome of a comparison between another person and my own self, but here it is a comparison which produces the opposite result from that of the comic of movement. In the latter, the other person had made a greater expenditure than I thought I should need. In the case of a mental function however, the comic emerges if the other person has spared himself/herself expenditure, which I would regard as indispensable, as nonsense and stupidity are regarded as inefficiencies of function. In the occurrence of the comic of movement the observer laughs because the other person has taken too much trouble, in the occurrence of the comic of mental functions he/she laughs because he/she has taken too little.⁹⁹

According to Freud, this species of the comic can be explained by the cultural development of human beings. He claims that in the course of our personal development towards a higher level of civilization there is a restriction of our muscular work and an increase in our intellectual work. Stating the proverb 'What one hasn't in one's head one must have in one's legs' (Freud, *Jokes*, 242), he points out that by raising our intellectual expenditure we can achieve the same result with a diminished expenditure on our movements. Thus when we compare another person with ourselves, this person would appear comic to us if he/she makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little in his/her mental ones. In both cases our laughter expresses an enjoyable sense of superiority which we experience in relation to the other person. However, if this relation in the two cases is reversed, meaning that the other person's physical expenditure is found too small, or his/her mental expenditure is greater than ours, then we no longer laugh, but we are full of astonishment and admiration for this person.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 241.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 242.

At this point I would like to introduce another piece of farce, with the title *The Lying Kind*, written by Anthony Neilson. The play was first performed in London in the year 2002. A basic comic element in this farce is the comic that is found in someone else's mental functions. This species of the comic is represented by the two main characters of the play, namely the constables Gobbel and Blunt. On Christmas Eve, the two inept policemen have the unpleasant task of telling Garson and Balthasar Connor, that their daughter Carol has been killed in a car accident. An initial misunderstanding leads to the couple thinking that the two men have come to tell them that their dog Miffy has died, rather than their daughter Carol. While the constables dither and delay in telling the elderly couple the truth of their visit, the stage fills with complications and eccentric characters, including a huntress of paedophiles and a vicar wearing stockings, suspenders and little, lacy panties. In this way the farcical action takes its course, and one misunderstanding leads to another.

On the whole, the play depends on the dynamic between the two constables, which is also the basis for the comic that is found in some else's mental functions. For the most part the comic is found in the frolics of the not exactly bright but charming Gobbel. In the following scene, which is taken from the beginning of the play, the two officers have a debate about who is going to ring the bell:

BLUNT. If you don't ring the bell, they won't know we're here. And if they don't know we're here, you can't tell them, now, can you? Part and Parcel.

Pause

GOBBEL. Can't you ring it?

BLUNT. I could. But it would set a dangerous precedent.

GOBBEL. Would it?

BLUNT. Certainly it would. If you say you're going to do something, I have to know you'll honor that to the letter. Remember what the sarge said – Can't trust your wife, you end up divorced. Can't trust your partner – you may well end up dead.

GOBBEL. What, from ringing a door bell?

BLUNT. Today it's a doorbell. Tomorrow it's a madman with an axe and a sawn-off shotgun.

Pause

GOBBEL. We're not working tomorrow.

BLUNT. I don't mean it literally.

GOBBEL. Tomorrow's Christmas Day. (The Lying Kind, 4)

The comic in this scene is extracted from two sources. The first one is that of slapstick, or more specifically from that kind of "situational comedy" whereby one person makes another seem comic by trying to convince him/her of something nonsensical. This is the case as Blunt tries to persuade Gobbel to ring the bell, because he is too much of a coward to do it. The second source of comical pleasure arises from the comic that is found in Gobbel's reactions and answers, which represent, in Freudian terms, too little expenditure in his intellectual and mental functions, and serve for the possibility of much laughter within the audience.

In the following episode, Gronya the huntress of paedophiles, has introduced herself to the officers with physical violence, believing that they want to hide a paedophile from her organisation PAPS. As Gronya leaves, Blunt and Gobbels are able to recover from the shock:

GRONYA *leaves*. BLUNT *stares at* GOBBEL. *Pause*.

GOBBEL. What?

BLUNT. `And you'!

Pause

GOBBEL. Just being polite...

BLUNT. I can't just feel my legs, can you?

GOBBEL. *crawls over and feels* BLUNT'S *legs*.

BLUNT. Not mine – yours!

GOBBEL *feels his own legs*.

BLUNT. Not with your hands!

GOBBEL. What else am I going to feel them with?

BLUNT *rises, painfully to his feet*.

BLUNT. If you'd rung that bell when I told you, none of that would've happened. (The Lying Kind, 20)

Here again Gobbel provides the audience with a piece of excellent comedy, based on too much expenditure on bodily functions, and too little on his mental ones. The next scene provides an example of an episode within the play that contains all three species of the comic, namely slapstick, the comic of movement and the comic that is found in someone else's mental functions. Garson, Carol's mother, believes that Blunt and Gobbel want to tell her that Miffy, her dog, is dead. After the whole agitation surrounding this message, Garson goes to the bedroom to have a little rest. While Blunt and Gobbel are having a talk to Balthasar, her husband, Garson suddenly swings open the door in a completely different condition than she was before:

The living-room door swings open to reveal GARSON standing there, wide-eyed and mad-looking, staring right at BLUNT and GOBBEL.

BLUNT. Mrs Conner!

BALTHASAR *turns and sees her. She doesn't like the look of him.*

BALTHASAR. Oh now – what are you doing up?

Pause

BLUNT. How are you feeling?

Pause. Her face softens into a charming smile.

GARSON. Why, thank you for asking, Captain, but I'm fine now. I always get a little sick approaching Gibraltar, I don't know why.

She pushes an imaginary trolley towards them.

BALTHASAR. Oh no, dear – come on now –

GARSON. Would the Viceroy care for some tea?

BALTHASAR. No, dear; the Captain's had some tea – I'm terribly sorry; she

goes a little funny sometimes, especially under stress. Come back to your cabin for now, dear –

He puts his arms at her shoulders and she turns on him.

GARSON. Get your hands off of me, you prick!

He recoils. Again, she smiles and turns to BLUNT and GOBBEL.

Will Darjeeling do?

She holds up an imaginary tea pot.

GARSON. Cups, gentlemen?

They look to Balthasar.

BALTHASAR. I'm terribly sorry but it's probably best to just...

Pause. They do so –BLUNT awkwardly, but GOBBEL, fairly naturally.

Pause. They raise imaginary cups, and she pretend pours them a cup of tea.

GARSON. Cream and sugar?

BLUNT. Um – no, that's fine for me, thank you.

GOBBEL. Just sugar for me.

She scoops out an imaginary spoonful of sugar and is about to put it in the imaginary cup when BLUNT blocks her.

BLUNT. That'll be fine as it is, thank you. We don't want the Viceroy losing all his `teeth', now do we?

GARSON (*to GOBBEL*). Ooh, he's a harsh one, that Captain, isn't he? But he's not at all rules and regulations below deck, are you sir?

GOBBEL. Isn't he?

BLUNT. Amn't I? (*The Lying Kind, 34-36*)

Having a closer look at this episode it can be observed that, first and foremost, it is an excellent piece of slapstick. However, in the given example we are presented with a special form of the Freudian "situational comedy". This kind of the comic is given if the mental activity of a person is suddenly interrupted by something else, which seems to be more powerful than the present one. It is something which is out of the control of this person, which leads to the comic effect, like an unexpected feeling of pain or any other bodily or mental surprise, or in the case above the psychotic attack Garson experiences.

The contrast which, through empathy, offers us the comic difference, is that between the mental state of the person before the interruption, and the one after the interruption has occurred. The person who offers us the comic difference becomes comic to us for his/her inferiority, but in this case, the person is inferior only in comparison with his/her earlier self, and not in comparison with us. Although we laugh about the situation the person is in, we know that the same could have happened to us and that we would also have behaved in the same way. It provides us, so to speak, with

pleasure that we consciously keep such distressing feelings, as observed on stage, away from ourselves, and can relax by watching another person handling such a situation.¹⁰¹

The other types of the comic, namely the comic of movement and that which is found in another person's mental functions are excellently represented by the performance of the imaginary tea time on board of an imaginary luxury cruiser. The comic that is found in someone else's mental activities is vividly shown through Gobbel's entire performance, which intensifies the comic effect of the entire situation.

Besides these three species of the comic, which are to be found in nearly every farce, and which provide the foundation for the farcical action, there are also other important devices which are used variably in different farces, and which are worth taking a look at.

3.3.4. Other species of the comic

The following comical devices are used within a farce to a greater or a lesser extent, depending on the type of farce and on the intention of the author, for example if he/she puts more emphasis on the level of action or on the level of language. These variable comic devices are mimicry, caricature, parody/travesty and unmasking. All these devices of the farcical action are, from a psychoanalytic point of view, directed against people and objects which claim to possess authority and respect, or are in a way sublime. Hence these kinds of farcical devices are in the service of our inner repressed aggressions, and are all used in the sense of a procedure of degradation of the other person, or of an institution.

Caricature brings about degradation by emphasizing a single trait of a certain object or person, which is in itself comic, but was bound to be overlooked so long as it was only perceivable in the general picture. By isolating this single trait, a comic effect can be created which makes the other person or institution, comic in her whole appearance.

Parody and Travesty attain the degradation of something dignified, by destroying the unity that exists between people's character's as we know them, and the behaviour

¹⁰¹ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 243.

(speeches, actions) they use to perform. There is also the possibility of replacing the exalted figures and their utterances by inferior ones, as is the case in *The Lying Kind*, where the institution of the police is represented by the two inept constables, who are meant to function as a means of degrading the institution of the police.

Unmasking is worth having a closer look at, as it is the tool of a farce that provides this genre with its often too less recognized, philosophical and psychological depth. Disguise would also fit into this category, as both unmasking and disguise serve the same purpose, namely to reveal something that is hidden behind a façade, in order to make a statement about society or the condition of humanity in general. In farce we find a constant play with the duality between mask and face. Who is real, and if a character hides behind a mask what is the reason for it? Mostly, the truth that lies behind such a disguise or social mask is a sad one, one of personal loss, or disorientation within society, or in one's own life.

Let's take Brindsley, from *Black Comedy*, as an example. He is about to marry Carol, a woman whom he does not love. Proceeding from this self-betrayal everything around him sinks into chaos. Or Roland, from *Taking Steps*, who believes that Elisabeth would love him if he bought the house. And Elisabeth on the other hand, who is not able to abandon Roland for her own reasons. What Ayckbourn deals with in this farce is the inability of mankind to live their life authentically. It is about freedom and personal choices, and of course it is about repressed desires, which are drowned in alcohol.

Disguise and unmasking are also used as a tool to personify the forbidden and repressed drives of mankind, for instance aggression and the openly sexual. Unmasking in farce applies where a person has seized dignity and authority by trickery and which have to be taken from that person in reality. And that is what happens in a farce: social and personal masks are lifted, so that finally the gloomy truth behind the fragile disguise is revealed. Unmasking can be regarded as equivalent to an admonition: this special person, who is greatly admired by society, is, after all, only human like you and me. Unmasking is also used to show, implicitly, that behind all the wealth and apparent freedom of psychical functions lies, in reality a monotonous psychical automatism, from which nobody can escape.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 246-251.

Hence the genre of farce is very often used to make a critical remark about society or humanity, as in many farces the general concept of mankind and social life is called into question. There is always this sense of the incongruity between mask and face, which creates within the audience, partly, the comic pleasure, when the several masks are lifted step by step through the use of jokes and the several devices of the comic, and, partly this comic device can be used as a possibility for the individual to reflect about the present society in a delightful way.¹⁰³

3.4. The Relation between Jokes, the Comic and Humour

It is now my final task to bring together the various categories of the comic, and to show how they are related to each other, and how they affect the audience in different ways. Jokes and humour are subcategories of the comic. When dealing with jokes, it became clear that they use specific techniques, the so-called joke techniques, in order to give free play to modes of thought which are usually to be found within the unconscious. The essential characteristic of jokes lies in the compromise effected by the “joke-work”, between the demands of reasonable criticism and the urge not to renounce the ancient pleasure in words and nonsense. What comes about in this way as a compromise, when the preconscious thought is left for a moment to unconscious revision, satisfies both claims, namely the inner censor and the ancient pleasure in nonsense. However, the joke presents itself to criticism in various forms and has to put up with a range of judgements at its hand.

Now and again a joke would be successful in the appearance of an unimportant but nevertheless acceptable assertion, at another time it would smuggle itself in as the expression of a valuable thought. However, in the marginal case of effecting a compromise, it would give up its attempts to satisfy criticism and would appear as sheer nonsense, without the fear of provoking contradictions from the harsh critical instance. In these cases the joke reckons on the hearer straightening out the disfigurement in the form of its expression by unconscious revision and so giving the joke back its meaning.

¹⁰³ Cf. Smith, 25.

The source of pleasure of the joke is to be located in the unconscious, as through the techniques of the joke, modes of thinking of the unconscious are disguised, and are brought to the conscious. The source of pleasure of the comic, however, is to be located in the preconscious. Hitherto, jokes and the comic are distinguished first and foremost in their psychical location, as Freud states: 'The joke, it might be said, is the contribution made to the comic from the realm of the unconscious.' (Freud, *Jokes*, 258) It might be helpful to exemplify this statement by relating it to farce.

Jokes and the comic appear, in most cases, together on stage. The aim of the joke is, then, to reach the audience by appealing to their unconscious, where repressed drives are located. The joke strives to provide pleasure through the release of the repressed drives within the audience, and so he uses the various techniques in order to create the desired pleasure within them. Through the farcical dialogues on stage the aim of the joke is achieved. The comic however, where the comic pleasure results from a comparison, and which is located in the preconscious, does not have to take such great advances in order to pass the strict criticism. Additionally, many jokes have a comic façade, so that if we fail to detect the joke, we are once again left with only the comic or funny story and with the various scenes including the visual comic devices.¹⁰⁴

This relation between jokes and the comic also mirrors an essential characteristic of the genre of farce, namely that such a play, on the surface, is grave and gay at the same time. But what lies beneath that surface is, in most cases, disorder, violence and unfulfilled wishes. These are the contents that appeal to our unconscious, and which are waiting for the right moment to find expression in the real world. In this sense, farce provides the opportunity of comic catharsis, as Bentley states referring to bedroom farces:

[...] shielded by delicious darkness and seated in warm security, we enjoy the privilege of being totally passive while on stage our most treasured unmentionable wishes are fulfilled before our eyes by the most violently active human beings that every sprang from the human imagination. In that application of the formula which is bedroom farce, we savor the adventure of adultery, ingeniously exaggerated in the highest degree, and all without taking the responsibility or suffering the guilt. Our wives may be with us leading the laughter. (Bentley, 229)

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 252-258.

Bentley's statement can be applied to any type of farces, as in its essence this is the way in which farce works and how audiences are appealed.¹⁰⁵

But where do we place humour then? How is this category related to the comic and jokes? Humour is, according to Freud, one of the highest psychical achievements. When dealing with the comic we have found that the release of distressing affects is the greatest obstacle to the emergence of the comic pleasure. Now humour is a means of acquiring pleasure in spite of the distressing affects, as it acts as a substitute for these affects. It puts itself in their place. The condition for the appearance of humour is given if there is a situation in which we would normally be tempted to release a distressing affect, but if motives then operate to suppress that affect at the same moment. For instance, if a person happens to have a small accident, such as he/she stumbles during a romantic walk with a lover through a park, this would normally release a distressing affect. However, for such instances, we can turn to humour. The victim of the accident might obtain humorous pleasure, while the person who is watching the accident laughs from comic pleasure. The pleasure of humour arises at the cost of a release of affect that does not occur, thus, it results from an economy in the expenditure of affect.

Humour completes its course within a single person, meaning that any other person's participation adds nothing new to my own comic experience. I can keep to myself the experience of the enjoyment of the humorous pleasure, I don't have to tell it to someone else. However through an understanding of a humorous person, we arrive at the same pleasure as the latter. The species of humour are manifold, according to the nature of the emotion which is economized in favour of the humour: pity, fury, pain, tenderness and so forth. There are two basic forms in which humour is manifested. In the first place humour may appear merged with a joke, or some other species of the comic. In such a case, it is the task of humour to get rid of a possibility implicit in the given situation, which might generate an affect, and so would interfere with the pleasurable outcome. In the second case it may stop this generating of an affect entirely or partially; here we are talking of the humour that smiles through tears.

In relation to the comic and jokes, humour is closer to the comic, with which it shares its psychical localization, namely the preconscious. However, all three types of the

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Bentley, 228-231.

comic bear one and the same mechanism, namely that in all three modes of working of our mental apparatus the pleasure is derived from an economy. The comic, jokes and humour represent methods of regaining pleasure from mental activities, a pleasure that has paradoxically been lost to us through that activity.¹⁰⁶ Freud's concluding remark, concerning the relation between these three types of the comic might be quoted in his own words:

For the euphoria which we endeavour to reach by these means is nothing other than the mood of a period of life in which we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy – the mood of our childhood, when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need of humour to make us feel happy in our life. (Freud, *Jokes*, 293)

V. Conclusion

In the present thesis I have tried to show that the genre of farce is very often underrated, as the genre for the simple mind, which aims at nothing other than producing a great deal of laughter within the audience. Farce, repeatedly, is equated with a form of clowning on stage, where stereotyped characters slide from one improbable situation to the next, and where physical violence dominates the whole performance. At the beginning of this thesis I dealt with the historical development of farce, showing that this genre has survived over the centuries with great success. Though constantly being involved in rivalry with comedy, farce made its way to being a distinct genre, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. Due to the historical developments in these periods, there was a shift in the social structure in general, which led to a shift of the requirements of the audience. In the 19th century the production of farces was at its peak, and during the 20th century there were many innovations concerning the genre. Up to the present day farces are an important part of the theatrical world, and it was the aim of this thesis to discover the secret of the success of this special genre.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Freud, *Jokes*, 276-293.

Therefore, I decided to apply the psychoanalytic approach to the study of farces, with the focus being on the sources of the comic, as according to Freud, laughter and the unconscious are closely related. Through laughing we are given the opportunity to get in touch with repressed drives, repressed desires and other sources of pleasure, which have become inaccessible to us, due to the development of culture, where rules and regulations dominate the social life, in order to maintain control over these drives. Relating Freud's theories of laughter and the comic to the genre of farce, allows a revealing insight into the mechanisms of the human psyche when being confronted with such plays. Through jokes, which are realised on the level of language within farces, inaccessible sources of pleasure, which are located in our unconscious, can be reached. Therefore jokes use various kinds of techniques, which I made out as the basic tools of the farcical dialogues. These techniques are used in order to circumvent our inner censor, and to get as much laughter as possible out of the audience. The comic, on the other hand, which is located in the preconscious, is represented in farces on the level of action. I have applied Freud's species of the comic to the farcical action, showing that these various types of the comic represent the devices that are most commonly used within different farces.

Regarding the often supposed superficiality of the genre I have tried to show that behind the gaiety of a piece of farce there often lurks a certain gravity. Very often farcical situations are tragic situations back to front, or tragic situations viewed in a strange light. What often fuels the laughter within the audience is the capacity farce has for acting out and giving expression to our wilder and more anarchic imaginings and impulses, without being confronted with the consequences that would emerge in real life. Discovering the secret of farce, I would say, in accordance with Smith, that the success of this genre is made up by its universal appeal. It is not tied to a particular set of historical circumstances. Farce, in its essence, deals with the general conflict between the ego and the id, which may take different forms in different ages. However this conflict is a permanent feature of human nature, which most farces exploit for their own humorous or subversive purposes.¹⁰⁷ As this conflict is present in every individual, there is a steady tension within all of us, which needs a valve through which it can be

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Smith, 7, 15.

released. Laughter is one such valve, and farce therefore provides an essential tool for a cathartic release through the comic, as Harpo Marx gets it to the point in the following, and for this thesis concluding quote:

People have all inhibitions and hate them. We just ignore them. Every man wants to chase a pretty girl if he sees one. He doesn't, I do. Most people at some time want to throw things around recklessly. They don't, but we do. We're sort of a safety valve through which people can blow off steam. (Harpo Marx quoted in Smith, 8)

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VII Index

- Absurdity 58, 62, 63
 allusion 58, 67, 68
 analogy 58, 69, 70
 automatism 58, 63, 64
- British drama 1, 3
- caricature 92
 comedy 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 97
 comic of movement 81, 82, 84, 86
 condensation 50, 52, 54, 56, 58
 cynicism 60, 61
- displacement 58, 59, 60, 62
 double meaning 50, 56
 droll 5
- ego 29, 30, 31, 98
- farcical dialogue 49, 98
- harmless joke 70, 71, 76
 humour 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 94, 96
- id 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 98
 indirect representation 58, 66, 69
- jest 36, 37
 joke techniques 49, 98
- mimicry 92
 modern drama 14
 multiple use of the same material 50, 56
- parody 92
 purpose of jokes 70
- representation by something small 58, 68
 representation by the opposite 58, 66
- slip of the tongue 25, 51
 snowball effect 44
 sophistry 58, 65
 stage-jig 4
 structural model 29
 super-ego 29, 30, 31, 73
- tendentious joke 71, 74, 75, 76
 theatre of the absurd 18
 topographic model 24
 transference 24
 travesty 92
- unmasking 93

VIII. APPENDIX

1. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Das Genre der britischen Farce, oder genauer gesagt der Farce im allgemeinen, wird in der Theaterwelt des Öfteren belächelt, und als oberflächliches Geblödel auf der Bühne abgetan. Dies mag auf den ersten Blick so erscheinen, wenn man eine Farce liest, oder eine Performance der gleichen auf der Bühne verfolgt. Meist einfache und stereotype Figuren dominieren die Handlung, der Ton auf der Bühne ist harsch und die Pöbeleien scheinen kein Ende zu nehmen. Im Großen und Ganzen hat man das Gefühl einer total überdrehten Welt gegenüberzustehen, in der verrückte Personen verrückte Dinge machen, die die Zuseher zum Lachen bringen sollen.

Wirft man jedoch einen genaueren Blick auf dieses Genre, kann man erkennen, dass die meisten Farcen alles andere als oberflächlich sind. Sie sind der Spiegel der Gesellschaft, sie präsentieren das Wesen der Menschheit unverhüllt, und konfrontieren den Zuseher mit Gefühlen, die im Alltag oft unbeachtet bleiben, oder unterdrückt werden, aufgrund der Konventionen die sich die Gesellschaft auferlegt hat. An diesem Punkt ergibt sich die erste Schnittstelle zwischen der psychoanalytischen Theorie und dem Genre der Farce, nämlich wenn man dieses in Verbindung zu Freuds Kulturtheorie setzt. In dieser Theorie geht Freud davon aus, dass die Menschheit einen beachtlichen Teil essentieller Triebe unterdrücken muss, um der Zivilisation standhalten zu können. Regeln und Verbote werden errichtet, um diesen Trieben Einhalt zu gebieten, und sie so gut als möglich zurück zu drängen. Da die Triebbefriedigung jedoch eines der essentiellsten Ziele des Individuums ist, um das innere psychische Gleichgewicht aufrechterhalten zu können, versuchen nun einzelne Triebe über Umwege doch noch gelebt werden zu können. Ein solcher Umweg ist das Lachen. Durch das Lachen können innere Spannungen abgeführt werden, und für einen kurzen Moment ist das Individuum davon befreit Triebe unterdrücken zu müssen.

Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es nun das Genre der Farce nach zwei Gesichtspunkten zu betrachten und zu analysieren: einerseits, Farce, als Genre, das der Gesellschaft und der Menschheit den Spiegel vorhält, und dies in einer ganz eigenen Art

und Weise, nämlich indem sie die Menschen dazu bringt zu lachen, über sich selbst und die Welt in der sie leben. Dazu werde ich die Quellen des komischen in der britischen Farce ausfindig machen, welche das Publikum zum Lachen bringen und sie in Beziehung zu Freuds Kulturtheorie setzen.

Der zweite Aspekt behandelt die Art und Weise wie in der britischen Farce vorgegangen wird um das Publikum zum Lachen zu bringen. Hierfür analysiere ich die Techniken der britischen Farce und setze sie in Verbindung zu Freuds Witztheorie. Der Fokus ist einerseits auf den formalen Aspekten, die eine Farce ausmachen, wie Sprachkomik und Handlungskomik, und andererseits auf den psychischen Prozessen, die hinter dem Lachen verborgen sind.

Inhaltlich ist die vorliegende Arbeit in 3 Bereiche gegliedert. Der erste Bereich umfasst den geschichtlichen Hintergrund des Genres. Der zweite Bereich gibt einen Überblick über die Entwicklung der Psychoanalyse, und der dritte Bereich führt die Psychoanalyse mit dem Genre der Farce zusammen. Anhand ausgewählter Farcen werden die Aspekte des Komischen illustriert, um so ein umfassendes Bild über das Wesen des Komischen in der britischen Farce aus der Sicht der Psychoanalyse gewinnen zu können.

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